Abstract: Numerous noncanonical accounts of Jesus’s deeds exist. While some Latter-day Saints would like to find plain and precious things in the apocryphal accounts, few are to be found. Three types of accounts deal with Jesus as a child, his mortal ministry, or after his resurrection. The Jesus of the infancy gospels does not act like the Jesus of the real gospels. The apocryphal accounts of Jesus’s ministry usually push a particular theological agenda. The accounts of Jesus’s post-resurrection teaching often contain intriguing but bizarre information. On the whole, apocryphal accounts of Jesus’s ministry probably contain less useful information for Latter-day Saints than they might expect.

Apocrypha and Apocryphal Acts of Jesus

Jesus reserved his highest and holiest teachings for a close few, ((Matthew 13:11–16; 19:11; Mark 4:2, 33; Luke 18:34; 22:67; John 3:12; 6:60–61; 8:43; 10:27; 16:12, 18, 25; Acts 10:41. Indicative of this are the fifty-three parables of Jesus preserved in the Gospels, of which only three have interpretations, all of the interpretations being given behind closed doors to a chosen few (this was noted in ancient times in the Apocryphon of James I.8.4–10, listing some previously unknown parables as well),)) to whom he spoke most plainly after his resurrection. ((Before the resurrection Jesus spoke in parables (John 16:25), and it was after the resurrection that he spoke more plainly (Luke 24:44–48; Acts 1:2–3; 3 Nephi 15:12–20).)) Those so privileged to receive this hidden treasure of knowledge prized it most highly ((Tertullian, De Praescriptione Haereticorum 20–22.)) but shared it with few if any others. ((1 Corinthians 3:1–2; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Colossians 1:26; Hebrews 5:11; 2 John 1:12. See also Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Random House, 1979), 17–18; Hamblin, “Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., By Study and Also By Faith, 1:208–10.)) The situation is most poignantly explained by Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 110) ((Ignatius was thought to have been a disciple of John; J. B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers, 2 parts in 5 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 2.1:29–30.)) as he was led off to his death:

Could I not write you the celestial matters? But I fear lest I might set harm before you, since you are but babes; so pardon me, lest, if you are unable to make room, you be suffocated; for although I am bound and am able to comprehend the celestial matters and the angelic orders and the principal revelations, ((Greek tas systaseis tas archontikas. Though Ignatius does use the word systaxis in other senses (see Ignatius, Epistle to the Romans, 5), here it seems to be used in a more technical sense of oracular inquiry, the equivalent of the Demotic p-ntr; see Janet H. Johnson, “Loure E3229: A Demotic Magical Text,” Enchoria 7 (1977): 90–91.)) seen and unseen, nonetheless I am not yet a disciple. ((Ignatius, Epistle to the Trallians 5. Unless specified, all translations are the author’s own.)) This list of characteristics of the secret teachings makes its way into the magic tradition eventually to end up in an English fairy tale as the content of the magician’s “one big book bound in black calf and clasped with iron, and with iron corners;” see “The Master and his Pupil,” in Joseph Jacobs, coll., English Fairy Tales (London: Putnam’s Sons, 1898, repr. New York: Dover, 1967), 73–74. These matters are also the principal subject of the books of 1 Jeu and 2 Jeu as well as much of the Jewish Hekalot literature.))

These hidden things were called by the Greek word for such, apokrypha. ((For the usage of the term, as well as a similar explanation of it, see Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis I,12 (55.1–56.3); cf. Johannes Quasten, Patrology 4 vols. (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950, repr. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1990–92), 1:106: “An apocryphal book was in the beginning one too sacred and too secret to be known by everybody. It must be hidden (apocryphos) from the public at large and restricted to the initiates of the sect.”))

An object of ridicule by the Greeks and Romans, ((For the ridicule, see Lucian, De Morte Peregrini 11–12. Pliny, noting their perseverance in their secretive meetings and traditions, says that the Christians’ recalcitrance and pigheadedness deserves to be punished (“pertinaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniti”); Pliny, Epistulae X.96.3, 7–8.)) these hidden teachings were counterfeited by those ambitious to lead the Church, ((Hegesippus, quoted in Eusebius, Historiae Ecclesiasticae III.32.7; Irenaeus, Contra Haereses I.25.5; Tertullian, De Praescriptione Haereticorum 20–22, 25–27; Pagels, Gnostic Gospels, 25–27.)) causing the meaning
of apocrypha to change from hidden to “spurious, false, to be rejected.” ((Quasten, Patrology 1:106.))? In general, the motivations to alter the text of scriptures both canonical and noncanonical ((See John Gee, “The Corruption of Scripture in Early Christianity,” in Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 163–204; also Tertullian, De Praescriptione Haereticorum 38–40; other categories and examples given in Robinson, “Lying for God: The Uses of the Apocrypha,” in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 144–46.))? match those Nephi gave:

After the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, . . . there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book (1 Nephi 13:28).

Behold the gold, and the silver and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church (1 Nephi 13:8).

While not all second century Christians were consumed by these desires, some clearly were. ((1 Clement 44:1; Hegesippus, quoted in Eusebius, Historiae Ecclesiasticae III.32.7; Second Treatise of the Great Seth VII.59.19–61.24. The urge to usurp authority might have been the cause of the anonymous accusations attested in Pliny, Epistulae X.96.5.)) Another reason for the creation of pseudepigraphic literature is the desire to supplement [Page 148]the scarce sources. ((“Certain episodes in the life of Jesus were extracted from the canonical Gospels and further elaborated. This group . . . is heavily stamped with secondary legendary elements. Christians have fastened their pious interest upon the figure of Jesus and upon the persons who in the canonical Gospels are mentioned in association with Him, and fantasy has taken possession of them. Legends of every kind normally met with in folklore are transferred to Jesus and these other figures.” Thus Wilhelm Schneemelcher, in NTA 1:83; see also Robinson, “Lying for God: The Uses of the Apocrypha,” in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 143–44.)) (The desire to supplement or revise details from the canonical gospels has continued to the present with a number of recent forgeries and fictions, ((Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Imitation Gospels and Christ’s Book of Mormon Ministry,” in C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 53–75 surveys the Aquarian Gospel, the Archko Volume, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus by an Eyewitness, the Death Warrant of Jesus Christ, (yet another) Gospel of Barnabas, the Gospel of the Holy Twelve, the Essene Gospel of Peace, the letter of Benan, the Letter of Lentulus, Oahspe, the Occult Life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Sorry Tale, the Unknown Life of Jesus Christ, and the Urantia Book. See further, Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Fraudulent Archko Volume,” BYU Studies 15/1 (1974): 43–64. Forgeries of Mormon historical documents follow similar patterns with the same financial and revisionist motivations; see Richard E. Turley, Jr., Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992.).)) from accounts designed to make a quick buck ((See, for example, the financial motivations of William D. Mahan in forging the Archko Volume in Anderson, “The Fraudulent Archko Volume,” 43–45. Mark Hofmann’s financial motivations are well known; see Turley, Victims, 131–44; Edward L. Kimball, “The Artist and the Forger: Han van Meegeren and Mark Hofmann,” BYU Studies 27/4 (1987): 6–7, 12.)) or advance a position, ((See Turley, Victims, 9–23, 316, Kimball, “The Artist and the Forger,” 6–7. So also Morton Smith’s forgery of the secret Gospel of Mark; Stephen C. Carlson, The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith’s Invention of Secret Mark (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005); Peter Jeffery, The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death, and Madness in a Biblical Forgery (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.)) to honestly intended but nevertheless hypothetical and artificial scholarly constructs.) ((The most notable scholarly construct is Q. Most New Testament scholars think that the canonical gospels were not written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They posit an otherwise unattested source Q, which the authors of Matthew and Luke are conjectured to have used along with Mark in the composition of their gospels. A brief survey of the problem by Wilhelm Schneemelcher may be found in NTA 1:75–80; Thiessen, Introduction to the New Testament, 101–29; John S. Kloppenborg, Q Parallels: Synopsis Critical Notes & Concordance (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988), 204–5 provides a history of the early scholarship on Q. For reasons why the Q hypothesis need not be followed, see Austin M. Farrer, “On Dispensing with Q,” in Dennis E. Nineham, Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 55–66; John Wenham, Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991); note also the surprisingly sympathetic review by J. K. Elliot in Novum Testamentum 27/4 (1987): 6–7.))
The Apocryphal Acts of Jesus

John Gee

Testamentum 34/2 (1992): 200–1. A different approach is taken by Ronald V. Huggins. “Matthean Posteriority: A Preliminary Proposal,” Novum Testamentum 34/1 (1992): 1–22, note especially the demonstration on p. 15 that much scholarship on Q rests on circular reasoning. The Q hypotheses has been effectively satirized in Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, (New York: Basic, 1981), 48. Unlike any of the other documents discussed in this essay—outside those mentioned in the last two notes—there is no mention of Q before the nineteenth century when Weiss fabricated it, nor has a single ancient manuscript of this mythical text ever been discovered, nor do we have a complete text to work with. Acceptance of Q is a matter of belief—not scholarship. I have found no compelling reason to believe in the Q hypothesis.)

By the early second century, Christianity had fragmented into dozens of splinter groups ((Tertullian, Scorpiae 1; Irenaeus, Contra Haereses I.28.1, 29.1 describes them as popping up like mushrooms; more poignantly, Mµ?µ?, the bishop of Maipherqat, says that there was only one ear of wheat left in all the tares; see Mµ?µ?, Against the Canons from the Synod of 318, 5, in Arthur Vööbus, The Canons Ascribed to Mµ?µ? of Maipherqat and Related Sources, 2 vols., CSCO 439–40 (series Scriptores Syri 191–92) (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), 1:22. See also Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), 34; W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 201–3; Pagels, Gnostic Gospels, 7–8.)) with each group charging that the other possessed both forged and corrupted texts. ((Acts 20:30 (Paul prophesying the coming corruption of the teachings; cf. Kent P. Jackson, “ ‘Watch and Remember’: The New Testament and the Great Apostasy,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., By Study and Also By Faith, 1:85; 2 Peter 3:15–16 (showing that the process starting in apostolic time)); Justin Martyr, Dialogue cum Tryphone 73 (accusing the Jews); Irenaeus, Contra Haereses I.7.3, 8.1, 9.4, 18.1, 19.1, 20.1–2, 22.1–3, 26.2, 27.2, 4; V.30.1 (accusing various groups); III.2.1 (for the counter charges); Tertullian, De Baptismo 17 (discussing well-intentioned but nonetheless misguided tampering with Paul); Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem IV.2.2–5 (charging Marcion with corrupting Luke); Tertullian, De Praescriptione Haereticorum 16–19, 38–40 (the charges run both ways): Mµ?µ?, Against the Canons from the Synod of 318, 5, in Vööbus, Canons Ascribed to Mµ?µ? of Maipherqat, 1:22–23, 25–26 (with a long list of groups); Mµ?µ?, The Seventy Three Canons 1, in ibid., 1:57–58, cf. 135; The Apocalypse of Peter VII.76.24–78.31 (no specific sect specified); The Apocalypse of Adam V.77.18–82.25 lists thirteen different views of Christ, twelve of which—including the “orthodox” one—are labeled as being in error; see also NTA 1:31–34; Pagels, Gnostic Gospels, 20–21. Though from the fourth century, Epiphanius, Panarion 30.13.1, 14.1; 42.9.1–2 accuses the second century figures Ebion, Cerinthus, Carpocrates, and Marcion of corrupting the text of the Gospel of Matthew; Epiphanius, however, is not necessarily a reliable source. See also Gee, “The Corruption of Scripture in Early Christianity,” 163–204.)) Since [Page 150]the secret teachings were the least known, they were the most subject to corruption. Some of the types of changes made in the texts are clearly enumerated by the very people responsible for preserving them. For example Rufinus says of the earlier Christian texts he is copying:

Wherever, therefore, we have found in his books anything contrary to that which was piously established by him about the Trinity in other places, either we have omitted it as corrupt and interpolated, or edited it according to that pattern that we often find asserted by himself. If, however, speaking to the trained and learned, he writes obscurely because he desires to briefly pass over something, we, to make the passage plainer, have added those things that we have read on the same subject openly in his other books. . . . All who shall copy or read this . . . shall neither add anything to this writing, nor remove anything, nor insert anything, nor change anything. ((Rufinus, preface to Origen, Peri Archon, 2–4, in Patrologiae Graecae 111:113–14; cf. G. W. Butterworth, trans., Origen On First Principles (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), ixiii–lixiv. This particular work of Origen’s is preserved only through Rufinus’s Latin translation and a few fragments quoted by Greek authors. Rufinus’s unreliable translations of this and other works were known both to his contemporaries and to modern scholars as “vitiated and confused” if not “very hasty and careless” since “he frequently paraphrases and misinterprets his original,” see Quasten, Patrology, 1:61, 170; 2:37, 49, 58, 146; 3:172, 240, 315, 341, 533.))

[Page 151]In this Rufinus is explicitly following the example of his predecessors, ((Specifically the example of Macarius “who when he translated over seventy works of Origen, which are called homilies, and also several of his
writings on the apostle into Latin, in which are found several offensive passages, therefore he removed or cleaned all of these when he translated, so that a Latin reader would find nothing in them that disagrees with our belief. This, therefore, we follow even if we are not so eloquent, nevertheless as much as we can, by the same rules, watching to be sure not to reveal those passages in the books of Origen that disagree and contradict with himself.” Rufinus, preface to Origen, Peri Archon, 2, in PG 11:112–13, italics added.) while simultaneously and almost hypocritically pleading that others not do to him what he has done to others. Deleting, ((See Rufinus’s preface to pseudo-Clement, Recognitiones, in Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 8:75, and n. 3. “The most common scribal error (I think) is haplography, that is, reading two identical sequences of letters as one and omitting whatever intervenes;” P. Kyle McCarter, Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 17.) altering, and even adding to works have been a problem in antiquity. ((An excellent introduction to the problems involved may be found in Hugh Nibley, “The Way of the Church,” CWHN 4:209–63. An awareness of the problems of textual tampering appears very early in human history; see, for example, Ur-Nammu (2112–2095 B.C.), the first king of the Ur III Dynasty, lú mu-sar-ra-ba šu bi-ib-šar-a dUbil-ga-mes-Šu nam a-ba-da-kuŠ–e “may Gilgamesh curse whosoever alters this inscription;” Urnammu 41, in Ilmari Kärki, Die Königsinschriften der dritten Dynastie von Ur, vol. 58 of Studia Orientalia (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1986), 26; similar imprecations spanning the length of Babylonian history may be found in Hermann Hunger, Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone, vol. 2 of Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1968); for the spread of this curse formula into Hittite culture at the beginning of its written history, see O. R. Gurney, The Hittites 4th ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990), 141 (1st ed., 1952), p. 170.) in the Renaissance, ((See A. E. Housman, M. Manili Astynomicon, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 1:xiv–xxii; for an estimate of Renaissance and previous Byzantine textual work, see Alexander Hugh McDonald, “Textual Criticism,” OCD 1049.) and even in the present day. ((On the modern rewriting of Polybius, see Robert K. Ritner, “Implicit Models of Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Question of Noses, Soap and Prejudice,” in Janet H. Johnson, ed., Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond, SAOC 51 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992), 287–88. This central point in Ritner’s argument, was itself omitted in the original published version and the errata sheet must be checked. Ritner himself is not above rewriting sources; see Kerry Muhlestein, “The Book of Breathings in its Place,” FARMS Review 17/2 (2005): 482–86. Another egregious example of rewriting the sources is Morton Smith’s Jesus the Magician (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); On p. 53, Smith claims to take Pliny’s Epistulae X.96 “as it is usually taken, at face value” and then proceeds to introduce magical spells, demons, and cannibalism into a text which actually lacks all of these elements.) But other types of corruptions also affect the text. [Page 152]One is the process by which the texts are reinterpreted in a nonliteral or allegorical framework. ((See Richard Lloyd Anderson, Understanding Paul (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1983), 376–77; Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, 317. For an exhaustive analysis of the switch in interpretation in one passage of scripture, see Thomas W. Mackay, “Early Christian Millenarian Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John’s Apocalypse 11:2–13,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., By Study and Also By Faith, 1:222–331. For the use of the allegorical approach in Rabbinic Judaism, see Jacob Neusner, “The Case of Leviticus Rabbah,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., By Study and Also By Faith, 1:366–70. For a historical discussion of allegory, see C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 44–111. For recent attempts to bring about a similar switch in interpretation among the Latter-day Saints, see Louis Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Medieval Tradition” (Salt Lake City: Deseret and Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 88; John W. Welch, vol. 58 of Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson, eds., The Anti-Nicene Fathers, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 8:75, and n. 3. “The most common scribal error (I think) is haplography, that is, reading two identical sequences of letters as one and omitting whatever intervenes;” P. Kyle McCarter, Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 17.) altering, and even adding to works have been a problem in antiquity. ((An excellent introduction to the problems involved may be found in Hugh Nibley, “The Way of the Church,” CWHN 4:209–63. An awareness of the problems of textual tampering appears very early in human history; see, for example, Ur-Nammu (2112–2095 B.C.), the first king of the Ur III Dynasty, lú mu-sar-ra-ba šu bi-ib-šar-a dUbil-ga-mes-Šu nam a-ba-da-kuŠ–e “may Gilgamesh curse whosoever alters this inscription;” Urnammu 41, in Ilmari Kärki, Die Königsinschriften der dritten Dynastie von Ur, vol. 58 of Studia Orientalia (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1986), 26; similar imprecations spanning the length of Babylonian history may be found in Hermann Hunger, Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone, vol. 2 of Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1968); for the spread of this curse formula into Hittite culture at the beginning of its written history, see O. R. Gurney, The Hittites 4th ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990), 141 (1st ed., 1952), p. 170.) in the Renaissance, ((See A. E. Housman, M. Manili Astynomicon, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 1:xiv–xxii; for an estimate of Renaissance and previous Byzantine textual work, see Alexander Hugh McDonald, “Textual Criticism,” OCD 1049.) and even in the present day. ((On the modern rewriting of Polybius, see Robert K. Ritner, “Implicit Models of Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Question of Noses, Soap and Prejudice,” in Janet H. Johnson, ed., Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond, SAOC 51 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992), 287–88. This central point in Ritner’s argument, was itself omitted in the original published version and the errata sheet must be checked. Ritner himself is not above rewriting sources; see Kerry Muhlestein, “The Book of Breathings in its Place,” FARMS Review 17/2 (2005): 482–86. 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For the use of the allegorical approach in Rabbinic Judaism, see Jacob Neusner, “The Case of Leviticus Rabbah,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., By Study and Also By Faith, 1:366–70. For a historical discussion of allegory, see C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 44–111. For recent attempts to bring about a similar switch in interpretation among the Latter-day Saints, see Louis Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon,” RBBM 3 (1991): 261–311; Stephen E. Robinson, review of Dan Vogel, ed., The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture, in RBBM 3 (1991): 312–18; Daniel C. Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” RBBM 4 (1992); xl–lxxiii.) Another is the changing of the meanings of words, such as occurred during the second sophistic period. ((In general, this topic has not received the treatment it deserves. Preliminary steps in this direction are Hugh Nibley, “Evangelium Quadranginta Dierum,” CWHN 4:33 n. 61; John W. Welch, The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount (Salt Lake City: Deseret and Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 88; John W. Welch, “New Testament Word Studies,” Ensign 23/4 (April 1993): 28–30; John Gee, “The Grace of Christ,” The FARMS Review 22/1 (2010): 247–59. For analysis of some of the dynamics involved, see Hugh Nibley, “Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else,” CWHN 10:243–86. Between the time of writing the New Testament and the end of the second century, the meanings of several of the words changed. Examples included the change of the principal meanings of pistis from “collateral, guarantee” to “belief” (LSJ 1408); of homologein from “to agree, accept an agreement, promise” to “to confess” (LSJ 1226); of
myst?rion from “(initiation) rite” to “secret” (LSJ 1156). Because the New Testament is usually read with meanings of the second sophistic period and later—meanings which have often changed—the understanding of the text can be drastically changed. Unfortunately, many books by New Testament scholars will not help the average reader remove this obfuscation because the scholars who write many of the books, have read little in Greek other than the New Testament or occasionally philosophical writings and thus, by training, reflect the viewpoint after the second sophistic period.)

[Page 153]Accounts of Jesus’s life were not immune from this propensity. (As they are not in modern times; see Smith, Jesus the Magician, 42 where he changes planos from “deceiver” to “magician” in Matthew 27:63; the admission of the legerdemain is buried in the notes on p. 177.) Thus we have both fragments and entire works purporting to tell what Jesus said and did (1) in his infancy, ((See Appendix I.)) (2) in his ministry, ((See Appendix II.)) and (3) after his resurrection. ((See Appendix III.)) Many were well-known in ancient times, but in some cases, scarcely little more than the name survives. ((The following list of apocryphal gospels is culled from lists of canonical and noncanonical books. Some, but not all, of these works duplicate those in the previous lists. The source of the listing is included in parentheses after the name of the book:

The Book about the birth of the Redeemer and about Mary or the midwife (Decretum Gelasianum)
Cento about Christ (Decretum Gelasianum)
Epistle of Jesus to Abgar (Decretum Gelasianum)
The Gospel of Andrew (Decretum Gelasianum)
The Gospel of the Apostle Peter (Decretum Gelasianum)
The Gospel of Barnabas (Decretum Gelasianum, Canon Catalogue)
The Gospel of Bartholomew (Decretum Gelasianum)
The Gospel of Eve (Epiphanius, Panarion 26.2.6, 3.1, 5.1)
The Gospel which Hesychius forged (Decretum Gelasianum)
The Gospel of James the Younger (Decretum Gelasianum)
The Gospel which Lucian forged (Decretum Gelasianum)
The Gospel of Matthias (Decretum Gelasianum, Canon Catalogue)
The Gospel of Perfection (Epiphanius, Panarion 26.2.5)
The Gospel of Thomas (Decretum Gelasianum, Nicephorus)
Translations of the Decretum Gelasianum (6th cent. A.D.), the Stichometry of Nicophorus (ca. A.D. 850), and the Catalogue of the 60 Canonical Books may be found in NTA 1:47–52. Other lists are given in Quasten, Patrology, 1:128.) How reliable these works are can best be shown by contrasting them to the canonical gospels.

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**Authenticity**

The authenticity of the canonical gospels can be seen from the writings of others telling about or quoting the gospels. ((See also the approach in Robert L. Millet, “‘As Delivered from the Beginning’: The Formation of the Canonical Gospels,” in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 204–8; and Henry Clarence Thiessen, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943), 130–33, 140–42, 150–54, 162–64.)) Most notably, all varieties of Christian sects from the first and second century—both those who would later be termed “orthodox” and those who would later be termed “heretical”—used the canonical gospels and considered them authoritative. ((One large caveat needs to be noted here. Some sects considered some of the canonical gospels authentic but jettisoned others as spurious or interpolated. Thus Marcion considered Luke authoritative, although he used a different version, but he considered Matthew, Mark and John to be spurious—as he would have all the apocrypha here considered; see Irenaeus, Contra Haeresis I.27.2, 4; Epiphanius, Panarion 42.)) What we are examining here is the general consensus that the four canonical gospels were part of the Christian scripture. For an examination of the problems with the canon in the larger Christian world, see Stephen E. Robinson, Are Mormons Christian? (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 45–56; Daniel C.
((Polycaurp, Epistula ad Philippenses 2:3 quotes Luke 6:20, 37; see also Frend, Rise of Christianity, 135.)) Justin Martyr, ((Justin’s quotations of and allusions to Luke are listed in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers 1:591; in particular, Justin Martyr, Dialogus cum Tryphone 106.1 is a clear reference to Luke 24:26–27, 44–45 and cannot derive from any of the other canonical gospels.)) and the Apocalypse of Peter, ((Apocalypse of Peter VII.76.4–8 quotes Luke 6:44.)) and is even used by Marcion. (Irenaeus, Contra Haereses I.27.2.) Irenaeus ((Irenaeus, Contra Haereses III.1.1.)) and Tertullian ((Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem IV.2.2.)) attribute this gospel to Luke. The Gospel according [Page 157]to John is quoted by Ignatius, ((Ignatius, Epistula ad Philadelphenos 7:1 quotes John 3:8; Ignatius, Epistula ad Magnesios 8:2 alludes to John 8:29; and Ignatius, Epistula ad Ephesios 17:1 alludes to John 12:3.)) Polycarp, ((Frend, Rise of Christianity, 135.)) and the Gospel of the Egyptians. ((The Gospel of the Egyptians (Nag Hammadi Version) III.49.10–12 = IV.61.12–14 quotes John 1:27.2.)) Irenaeus, (135.)) Justin 1:591; in particular, Justin Martyr, (1988), 220–21; NTA (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906), 77.)) Irenaeus, ((Ignatius, VI.14.7.)) and Tertullian ((Tertullian, III.1.1.)) and Tertullian ((Tertullian, 1:121. For the to John is quoted by Ignatius, (VI, quoted in Eusebius, 1:123–25; NTA 1:278–82.)) The Gospel of Thomas alludes to John 8:29; and Ignatius, (Eusebius of Caesarea, ((Eusebius, Historiae Ecclesiasticae VI.14.7.)) and Tertullian ((Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem IV.2.2.)) attribute this gospel to John. Thus, though the support is not unanimous, the canonical gospels were seen as authoritative by most groups of Christians in the second century.

In contrast, many of the other “gospels” were condemned as forgeries by the fourth century. For example, the Gospel of Thomas was identified as spurious by Origen, ((Origen, Homilia in Lucam I.)) [Page 158]Eusebius of Caesarea, ((Eusebius, Historiae Ecclesiasticae III.25.6.)) and Hippolytus (d. 236)? ((Hippolytus Refutatio 5.7.20, 8.32. For the date of Hippolytus, see Quasten, Patrology, 2:164.)) and others. (For others, see NTA 1:278–79; Harold W. Attridge, “The Greek Fragments,” in Bentley Layton, ed., Nag Hammadi Codex II.2–7, 2 vols., NHS 20–21 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 103–9.) Unfortunately the situation is complicated by the existence of several different works all called the Gospel of Thomas. ((See Quasten, Patrology, 1:123–25; NTA 1:278–82.)) The Protevangelium of James is clearly an ancient forgery, (The plot comes from 1 Samuel 1; Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2. The story that Zacharias was a martyr may be a true story preserved in a very embellished form in this account; see Editor [John Taylor?], “Persecution of the Prophets,” Times and Seasons 3/21 (1 September 1842): 902; the last is the source of Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), 261. “The author is not familiar with Jewish life or usages” (James, Apocryphal New Testament, 38) and “shows an astonishing ignorance of the geography of Palestine;” Quasten, Patrology, 1:121. For the estimation of other elements in the story in the Protevangelium of James, see Hugh Nibley, “Early Accounts of Jesus’ Childhood,” in CHWN 4:6–7.)) and was identified as such in the fourth century. ((Epiphanius, Panarion 26.12.1; perhaps it is also referred to Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis VII.93.)) Another forgery identified as such in ancient times was the Sophia Jesu Christi. ((Douglas M. Parrott, “Eugnostos the Blessed (II,3 and V.1) and The Sophia of Jesus Christ (III,4 and BG 850,2,3),” in Robinson, Nag Hammadi Library (1988), 220–21; NTA 1:243–48. Gerald Jones, “Man of Holiness,” in Ludlow, ed., Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 3:852 wrongly identifies Eugnostos the Blessed as “pre-Christian;” it is not pre-Christian but rather non-Christian.)) Comparison of the Sophia Jesu Christi with the epistle of Eugnostos the Blessed reveals how Eugnostos’s pagan philosophical speculations on deity are reworked and dressed in a forty-day frame story to produce the Sophia Jesu Christi. That this instance of the dressing up of the philosophies of men as scripture was recognized in ancient times is presumably why the two tractates are placed back to back in Codex III from Nag Hammadi. The addition of forty-day window dressing can explain many documents, including the Apocryphon of John. [Page 159]Looking over the material years ago, Hugh Nibley declared, “Most of them are pretty poor stuff and all of them are copies of copies.”
Though the number of works that all parade under the same title demonstrates the existence of ancient forgers “lying for God,” (The term comes from Stephen E. Robinson, “Lying for God: The Uses of the Apocrypha,” in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 133–54.)) for the historian and layman arriving on the scene thousands of years later there would seem to be no clear way of determining which, if any, of the works parading under a given title is authentic. Authenticity can often be a very tricky question; it must be done on a case by case basis, and even in a false work there might still be an element of truth. This means that it requires some amount of discernment to separate the truth from the lies. This same discernment needs to be used in dealing with the apocryphal accounts of Jesus. (See D&C 91:1–6; 9:7–9; 46:27–30.)

For historical documents, the standard method of determining authenticity is either to assume the document is genuine [Page 160] and try to determine whether it reflects the milieu claimed for itself. (Friedrich Blass, “Hermeneutik und Kritik,” Einleitende und Hilfsdiszipline, vol. 1 of Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (Nördlingen: Beck, 1886), 268–72; ANT 38; Thomas W. Mackay, “Content and Style in Two-Pseudo-Pauline Epistles (3 Corinthians and Epistle to the Laodiceans),” Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 234–36.)) or assume that it is a forgery and allow nothing to change one’s mind. This may not be sufficient in all cases; for example, for years the treatise On Virginity was listed among the works attributed to Basil of Caesarea and said to be spurious, for although it reflected his time period (because it was really written by his contemporary Basil of Ancyra) it did not match his style. ((Quasten, Patrology, 3:203.)) Stylistic analysis, however, is notoriously difficult and subjective. Individual tests for forgery are seldom “ever sufficient to guarantee results.” ((George J. Throckmorton, “A Forensic Analysis of Twenty-One Hofmann Documents,” in Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1988), 533.)) These tests are negative tests, meaning that they can determine that a document is a forgery but cannot determine that it is genuine.

Theology? Commenting on the Book of Mormon: A Review Essay.” *RBBM* 1 (1989): 99–104; Noel B. Reynolds, “Gospel of Jesus Christ,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:556–60; Marie Kartchner Hafen, “First Principles of the Gospel.” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:514–15; Jeffrey R. Holland, “Atonement of Jesus Christ,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:82–86; John W. Welch, “Book of Mormon Religious Teachings and Practices,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:201–5; M. Gerald Bradford and Larry E. Dahl, “Doctrine: Meaning, Source, and History of Doctrine,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:393–97; William S. Bradshaw, “Remission of Sins,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1210–11; Ivan J. Barrett, “Church of the Firstborn,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:276; Gee, review of Fischer and Fischer, *Book of Mormon Guide*, n. 5; Daniel C. Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” *RBBM* 4 (1992): lxii-lxxiii.) fare in that work. ((This research method is not unique: “From the point of view of the restored gospel, Latter-day Saints can usually justify a rather straightforward method of identifying doctrines and teachings which derive not only from Jesus’ era but more notably from the earlier period of the patriarchs and prophets. This procedure consists in isolating those elements which harmonize with the basic teachings of the restored gospel. But while this method of identifying parallels between LDS beliefs and those mirrored in ancient literatures has its attractions, one must still employ considerable caution when treating the issue of what may have genuinely come from Jesus and his followers and what may not.” S. Kent Brown, “The Nag Hammadi Library: A Mormon Perspective,” *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 257.)) If we take what the secular scholars consider to be the earliest gospel and hymn as our guides, ((Using these passages in this way does not mean that I agree with the scholars’ assessments. Because Latter-day Saints need to “be ready always to give an answer [apologist, defense] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15 KJV), I give this as a way of showing why, even by the secular scholars’ standards, the first principles of the gospel can be seen as a fundamental element of the earliest Christian tradition. We tend to forget that apologetics are not only a Christian, but especially a Mormon duty (see Mosiah 18:9; D&C 123:4–15).)) we find that the emphasis on the first principles is there in the earliest Christian texts. The Gospel of Mark begins: “The first principle of the gospel of Jesus the anointed son of God . . . was John baptizing in the desert and preaching a baptism of repentance for a remission of sins” (Mark 1:1–4, [Page 162] author’s translation). In what is thought to be a quotation of the earliest Christian hymn, we learn of Jesus “who was born like men and, finding himself in the form of a man, humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even crucifixion; therefore God also exalted him and granted him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of beings celestial, terrestrial and telestial, and every tongue acknowledge to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:7–11, author’s translation). Thus if we take the first four Articles of Faith and examine how any given apocryphal work deals with these themes (God, Christ, the Holy Ghost, accountability, atonement, obedience, faith, repentance, baptism), that might give some idea about how likely one is to find “plain and precious things” in that apocryphal work. Most apocryphal works fail this test.

**Infancy Gospels**

Many of the Apocryphal Acts of Jesus may be found in what are called Infancy Gospels because they tend to deal exclusively with the exploits of Jesus before the end of his thirteenth year. These are first known and condemned in the second century, when knowledge of Jesus’s life appears to have been at a minimum. (Irenaeus (*Contra Haereses* II.22.6) actually maintains that Jesus could not have lived less than fifty years.) In lieu of actual accounts, interest in the exploits of Jesus’ childhood provoked a rash of accounts supplementing the gospel accounts. The Infancy Gospels tend to expand and become more and more miraculous with time and gather more and more stories. If we assume a tendency toward textual accretions, then one can construct a stemma of the various versions:
At the very time that miracles ceased from the church, ((For the loss of miracles in the second century, see Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, CWHN 3:141–42. If revelation be counted a miracle, then see also Chadwick, *Early Church*, 52–53; the loss of prophecy was noted in the Apocryphon of James I.6.21–7.10.) they swarmed among the infancy gospels, the literary accounts of the saints’ lives (called hagiographies), ((On the miracles in the hagiographies, see Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 89–91. Ritner makes a good case for some later miracle stories being borrowed from pagan miracle stories. See also Hugh Nibley, “Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” CWHN 4:108–9.) and in the apocrypha. ((Quasten, *Patrology*, 1:106, 124.) For the apocryphal baby Jesus, miracles begin at an early age: “Jesus talked when he was in the crib ((*Mahd* “crib” not *midhwad* “manger”).)) and said to Mary, his mother: I am Jesus, the son of God, the Word whom you bore [Page 164]just as Gabriel, the angel, announced to you, and my father sent me to save the world.” ((Arabic Infancy Gospel 1.))

On the trip to Egypt, Joseph, Mary and the baby encounter several serpents:

The little infant Jesus himself walked in front of them so that nothing would hurt them. But Mary and Joseph were intensely scared lest perchance the little infant would be injured by a serpent, to which Jesus said, “Don’t worry! Do not even consider me your son, for I always was and am a perfect man. Besides, it is necessary as all the beasts of the forests become tame before me.” ((Pseudo-Matthew 18:2.))

On page 166 once again, a contrast of the apocryphal gospels with the canonical gospels reveals the former for what they are. Raising the dead, comparatively rare in the gospels, ((There are only three specific instances recorded: (1) the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–18), (2) Jairus’ daughter (Matthew 9:18–19, 27–31; Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; Luke 8:41–42, 49–56), and (3) Lazarus (John 11:1–46.)) is common in the infancy gospels. ((*The (Infancy) Gospel of Thomas* A 9:3; 17:1; 18:1; B 8.3.))
was pushed by another, and plummeting to the ground he died. And when his playmates saw he fled, and Jesus alone was left standing upon the roof whence the child had been flung headlong. And when the parents learned of their child’s death, they ran weeping. And when they found the child lying dead on the ground, with Jesus standing above, they supposed that the child had been pitched down by him and glaring they blamed him. But Jesus seeing, immediately jumped down from the second story, and stood at the head of the deceased and said to him, “Zeon (the child was so called), did I throw you down? Stand and speak.” And with that command the child arose, and worshiping Jesus said: Lord, you did not throw me down, but you made me alive, who was dead. ((Infancy Gospel of Thomas B 8:1–3.))

In the canonical gospels, Jesus refused to do miracles for his own convenience; ((E.g. Matthew 4:2–4; 27:39–44; Mark 15:29–32; Luke 4:1–4; 23:35–39.)) yet in the infancy gospels no miracle is too trivial if it is for Jesus’s convenience. ((The (Infancy) Gospel of Thomas A 2:1–3:2; 4:1; 9:3; 11:1–2; 13:1; 14:2; B 2:1–3; 3:2; 10:1; 11:2; Latin version 1; 4:1–2.))

When this little child Jesus was five years old, he was playing at the ford of a rushing stream, and the flowing water gathered into pools, and with a single command he made them all clean. And after making some soft clay, he molded twelve sparrows. But it was the Sabbath when he did this, though there were many other children playing with him. And when a certain Jew saw what Jesus did while playing on the Sabbath, he went immediately and told his father Joseph, “Hey, your kid is at the brook, and he has taken some clay and made twelve sparrows and broken the Sabbath.” And when Joseph came to the place and saw, he yelled at him, saying, “Why did you do what it isn’t right to do on the Sabbath?” But Jesus clapped his hands together and cried out to the sparrows and told them, “Go!” And the sparrows fluttered and went off chirping. ((Infancy Gospel of Thomas A 2:1–4.))

The Jesus of the canonical gospels is longsuffering, enduring torture and indignity in silence or with a dignified rebuke; ((Matthew 26:55–27:50; Mark 14:48–15:37; Luke 22:47–23:47; John 18:1–19:30.)) the Jesus of the infancy gospels is a spoiled brat who calls down immediate and terrible curses for the slightest offense. ((The (Infancy) Gospel of Thomas A 3:2–3; 4:1; 8:1–2; 14:2–3; B 2:2–3; 4:1; Latin version 4:3. Cf. Quasten, Patrology, 1:124: “Some of the miracles do not show much taste. The author seems to have had a queer concept of divinity, because he pictures the boy Jesus as using his power to take revenge.”)) “Later he was going through the village, and a running child crashed into his shoulder. And Jesus being bitter said to [Page 168]him, ‘You’ll never finish your course.’ And immediately he dropped dead.” ((Infancy Gospel of Thomas A 4:1.))


This is not to suggest that everything in the infancy gospels is, of necessity, wrong. There is one detail that occurs in several of the infancy narratives that is probably correct. The accounts inform us that Mary was engaged at the age of twelve and bore Jesus somewhere between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. ((Protevangelium of James 8:2–3, 12:3; History of Joseph the Carpenter, Arabic version 3:1, Coptic version 5:1.)) This seems young to us, but was normal at the time. ((Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, The Demography of Roman Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 112. Morris Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Traditional Press, n.d.), 137–38, 922, 1350. Raphael Taubenschlag, The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri 332 B.C.-640 A.D., 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Pa’stowowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1955), 112: “As a rule Greek and Egyptian boys would marry at the age of 14 and girls at the age of 12.”))
The Apocryphal Ministry

After the Infancy Gospels, we hear nothing about Jesus as a young man in the extra-canonical books until the time of his ministry, which is both a mixed bag and a small one. The main reason for the paucity is that those accounts that do cover the mortal ministry are fragmentary: some are preserved only in fragments; others, since they were simply alterations of the canonical gospels, have only been preserved in short, often derisive, quotations. Alterations of the apocryphal ministry usually advocate specific points of view on theological or behavioral issues. For example, one apocryphal account gives thirteen different ways of looking at Jesus’s baptism, and concludes that the canonical version is wrong. At other times, strange things appear, with an emphasis on the miraculous. For example, in a fragment from the Gospel of the Hebrews, Jesus relates “suddenly, my mother, the Holy Ghost, took me by the one of my hairs and brought me up to the great mountain of Tabor.”

Another story told of Jesus concerns his response to the Syrian king Abgar who wrote to him on account of his miracles. Abgar, we are told, heard that Jesus effected his cures “without magic or drugs,” and thus decided that “either thou art God and descending from heaven thou doest these things or thou art a son of God who does these things.” So Abgar supposedly wrote Jesus a letter inviting him to come live under his protection. Jesus politely refused the invitation in the following written response:

Blessed art thou who believest in me, without having seen me. For it is written of me that those who have seen me have not believed in me, and those who have not seen me, they who should believe shall also live. Concerning coming to thee about which thou hast written me, it must needs be that I fulfill those things for which I have been sent, and after fulfilling to thus ascend to him who sent me. And because I shall ascend, I shall send thee certain of my disciples, that thy affliction might be healed and that life be provided for thee and those with thee.

This intriguing set of documents is now thought to be a forgery, because (1) the king Abgar who lived at the time of Christ was known to have been a pagan as were his descendants, (2) the Syrian Christians had never heard of this story until the days of Constantine, and (3) the earliest Christians in Edessa were not followers of Thaddeus or Addai, as the Abgar legend requires, but followers of Marcion, Bardesanes and Mani. (See NTA 1:437–40.)

The Apocryphal Passion

Since, for Latter-day Saints, the most important act in history was the Atonement of Christ, perhaps it is significant
that this act of Jesus does not usually have a central role in the apocryphal [Page 171]acts, though this does not mean that it is absent. The picture presented is not consistent, for while in one apocryphal passion, Jesus gathers his disciples together and prays with them before his agony in Gethsemane, ((Strasbourg Papyrus Coptic 5, in NTA 1:229–30.)) in others the garden is omitted entirely. ((Narration of Joseph of Arimathea 2:3–4; Apocalypse of Peter VII.80.23–81.25.)) One example of a fraudulent gospel is the Acts of Pilate. Following the narrative patterns of later fictionalized martyrdoms, the leaders of the Jews bring Jesus before Pilate and accuse him:

“We have a law not to heal anyone on the Sabbath, ((The laws against healing on the Sabbath specify that one is not to anoint with specific sorts of oil on the Sabbath: root oil (šemen ciqq?r?n) and (depending on the legal authority) rose oil (šemen wered) are prohibited but other types of oil are permitted. See Mishnah Shabbat 14:3–4. The general ruling is that healing is permitted on the Sabbath only if one does not go out of one’s way to do so. Broken bones were not allowed to be set.)) but this man has healed those lame, hunchbacked, withered, blind, paralyzed, deaf and possessed on the Sabbath by evil deeds.” Pilate said to them: “What evil deeds?” They said to him: “He is a magician, and by Beelzebul the prince of demons, he casts out demons, and all are subject to him.”

Pilate said to him: “This casting out of demons is not by unclean spirits but by the god, Asklepios.” ((Acts of Pilate 1:1. The charge of maleficium, “magic,” is a common one in the martyrdoms. See, for example, the Acts of Paul and Thecla 15, 20; The Martyrdom of Saint Serapion, in CSCO 43:76.))

As Pilate here deftly points out, magic is in the mind of the accuser. ((Magic was a capital crime among the Hittites (Gurney, Hittites, 134; Johannes Friedrich and Annelies Kammenhuber, Hethitisches Wörterbuch, 2nd ed., 10 vols. to date [Heidelberg: Winter, 1975–]. 1:64 s.v. alanzatar), and Babylonians (Codex Hamurabbi §2; CAD K 454–56), as well as the Romans, but objective definition of the term has eluded scholars; see, John Gee, “Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob,” in RBBM 7/1 (1995): 19–84; John Gee, “‘An Obstacle to Deeper Understanding,’” in FARMS Review of Books 12/2 (2000): 185–224.) As the trial goes on, all signs indicate that Jesus [Page 172]is God, and witnesses continually arise to testify of Jesus’s innocence and the perfidy of the leaders. ((Acts of Pilate 1:1–9.3.)) Some apocryphal accounts of the passion, though professing the best of intentions, (“Being an eyewitness, I write these things so that all might believe in the crucified Jesus Christ, our Lord and no longer observe the law of Moses, but believe on the signs and wonders that happened because of him, and so that believing we might inherit eternal life and be found in the kingdom of heaven.” Thus the Narration of Joseph of Arimathea 5:4.)) betray elements of fictionalization that mark them as pious (or impious) frauds, such as adding the names of the brigands crucified with Jesus, Gestas and Demas, as well as lengthy biographies wherein we learn that Gestas was thoroughly reprobate, but Demas was something of an ancient Robin Hood: “He had pirated from the rich, but he did good to the poor.” ((Narration of Joseph of Arimathea 1:2; other indications of speciousness include the translation of Demas in 4:1 and the slighting of the apostles in 5:2–3. The Narration of Joseph of Arimathea is also very anti-Semitic.))? The sobriety of the canonical accounts contrasts strikingly with the wild fantasies of the apocrypha. ((Significantly, in his discussion of the sources, Bernard Jackson does not even deign to dismiss the apocryphal versions in a footnote; Bernard S. Jackson, “The Trials of Jesus and Jeremiah,” BYUS 32/4 (1992): 63–77. There is simply no historical veracity to the accounts.))

Some of the apocryphal accounts of the passion of Jesus maintain that Jesus did not really suffer and die on the cross but only seemed to. This doctrine was common in the first and second centuries of the Christian era and is called Docetism after the Greek word for “seeming” (dokein). ((Chadwick, Early Church, 37–38; Quasten, Patrology 1:65, 114; S. Kent Brown, “Whither the Early Church?” in Robert L. Millet, Acts to Revelation, vol. 6 in Studies in Scripture (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1987), 281–82; NTA 1:401. Classic formulations of doceticism may be found in Irenaeus, Contra Haereses L.6.1, 7.2, 24.2, 4.) For example, the [Page 173]Gospel of Philip says: “Jesus took them all by fraud; ((Coptic enjoue, “stealthily”; CD 794a. The basic meaning of jioe is “theft, fraud”; CD 794a. Fitts enjoue is also used to translate the Greek kleps?sin “they might steal and eklepsan “they stole” at Matthew 27:64; 28:13 in the Mesokemic version of Matthew; see Hans-Martin Schenke, Das Matthäus-Evangelium im Mittelägyptischen Dialekt des Koptischen (Codex Scheide), TU 127 (Berlin: Akademie, 1981), 89. The Coptic word jioe is the descendant of Late Egyptian t3wt “theft”. The phrase enjoue is a descendant of Late Egyptian m-t3wt “secretly”; e.g. mky ib=i prt m t3wt “behold, my mind goes forth secretly (like a thief)” in P.

The Forty-Day Ministry

The culmination of Jesus’ ministry is his resurrection from the dead into glory. As the most important event of history, the apocryphal acts do not pass this event by. The picture presented is best seen in overview. ((The overview is taken from John Gee, “Jesus Christ: Forty-Day Ministry and Other Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus Christ,” in Ludlow, ed., Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 2:735.))

After rising from the dead, Jesus appears to the women gathered at the tomb and sends them to tell his disciples of his resurrection, but they will not believe the testimony of a woman. ((Epistula Apostolorum 9–10.)) So Jesus himself visits them and demonstrates the resurrection to the unbelieving eleven. ((Epistula Apostolorum 2, 11–12. Perhaps most important here is the non-canonical source cited by Ignatius of Antioch (Epistula ad Smyrnæos 3:2): “And when he [scil. Jesus] came to those around Peter, he said to them: ‘Take, touch me and see, that I am not a bodiless demon.’ And straightway they began to hold and they believed, grasping his flesh and spirit. Therefore they scorned even death, but were found superior to death.”)) providing them hope for their own resurrection as they follow their master. ((Epistula Apostolorum 19, 21; Apocryphon of James I.3.11–16.)) Jesus prepares his disciples to be his witnesses and preach repentance to the nations by expounding the scriptures to the understanding of his disciples, ((Luke 24:44–45; Acts 1:3; Papyrus Deir el-Bala`izah 52; Epistula Apostolorum 13–51; Discourse on Abbaton fol. 6a-31a; Gospel of Bartholomew 5:6, 9; Apocalypse of Peter 14.)) and responding to their questions. ((Gospel of Bartholomew 1:1–7; Apocalypse of Peter 1; 1 Jeu 1–4.)) He begins with the pre mortal life, the council in heaven, ((Discourse on Abbaton fol. 9a-13b; Apocryphon of James I.5.23–29. This theme is also dealt with in Joseph F. McConkie, “Premortal Existence, Foreordinations, and Heavenly Councils,” Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 173–98, but the treatment is almost all from canonical scriptures and Old Testament apocrypha and pseudepigrapha except pp. 183–84 dealing with the Hymn of the Pearl from the Acts of Thomas.)) the creation of the world, ((Discourse on Abbaton fol. 9a-10a; Gospel of Bartholomew 4:7–60.)) and the garden story. ((Discourse on Abbaton fol. 14b-21b; Gospel of Bartholomew 4:5.)) This life is a probationary state of choosing between good and evil so that those who choose good might return to the glory of God. ((Epistula Apostolorum 24, 39, 43–44; Apocalypse of Peter 3, 13–14; Gospel of Bartholomew 4:67–68; 5:1–8.)) Jesus’ explanation extends through the days of the apostles and on through the last days. ((Epistula Apostolorum 16–19; Discourse on Abbaton fol. 25a-30b; Apocalypse of Peter 1–6; Gospel of Bartholomew 1:23–35.)) Jesus warns the disciples to prepare for tribulation, for they will be killed and the primitive church will be perverted after one generation. ((Epistula Apostolorum 36, 44, 52; Apocryphon of James I.10.26–11.4, 12.18–30.) Besides salvation for the living, ((Epistula Apostolorum 19, 46–48; Discourse on Abbaton fol. 28b-29b.)) salvation for the dead is a major theme, ((Epistula Apostolorum 26–28; Gospel of Bartholomew 1:8–9, 20–22.)) as are the ordinances: baptism, ((Epistula Apostolorum 41–42; Discourse on Abbaton fol. 6b; Gospel of Bartholomew 5:8; Apocalypse of Peter 13; 2 Jeu 46–47.)) receiving the Holy Ghost, ((2 Jeu 47.)) the sacrament, ((Epistula Apostolorum 15; Gospel of Bartholomew 2:18–19.)) the ordination of the apostles to authority, ((Papyrus Strasbourg Coptic 6; Discourse on the Abbaton fol. 6a; Epistula Apostolorum 41–42.)) and an initiation with an emphasis on washing, ((Gospel of Bartholomew 2:17.)) anointing, ((Gospel of Bartholomew 4:65.)) garments, ((Epistula Apostolorum 21; Papyrus Strasbourg Coptic 6 verso; Discourse on Abbaton fol. 28b; Gospel of Bartholomew 4:18–22, 70; Apocalypse of Peter 13; 1 Jeu 4; 2 Jeu 47.) marriage, ((Epistula Apostolorum 43; Discourse on Abbaton fol. 27b; Gospel of Bartholomew 5:8 (definitely not the LDS concept.)) and prayer circles. ((1 Jeu 41: “He said to the twelve: Circle around...})
me all of you. They all surrounded him. He said to them: Repeat after me and give glory with me and I will give glory to my father.” See also 2 Jeu 42, 47–48. The standard work is Hugh Nibley, “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” CWHN 4:45–99; but note especially Compton, review of Welch, Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount, 322; see also now, Donald W. Parry, “Temple Worship and a Possible Reference to a Prayer Circle in Psalm 24,” BYUJ 32/4 (1992): 57–62.) These secret ((Gospel of Bartholomew 2:4–5, 14, 22; 4:10, 66–68; 1 Jeu 1; 2 Jeu 43; Apocryphon of John II.31.32–32.1; Apocryphon of James I.1.8–2.15.)) accounts are often connected somehow to the temple, ((Apocryphon of John II.1.1–2.25.)) or a mountain ((Papyrus Strasbourg Coptic Papyrus 6 recto; Gospel of Bartholomew 4:1–2, 6; Apocalypse of Peter 1, 15; Apocryphon of John II.1.17–2.25.)) that is sometimes compared to the Mount of Transfiguration, ((Epistula Apostolorum 51; Papyrus Strasbourg Coptic 6 verso; Narration of Joseph of Arimathea 5:1; Apocalypse of Peter 15–17.)) as even the apostles are transfigured and ascend to heaven ((Narration of Joseph of Arimathea 4:2–3; Epistula Apostolorum 19; Apocalypse of Peter 17; Apocalypse of Paul prologue; 1 Jeu; 2 Jeu; Pistis Sophia.))? or descend into the netherworld ((Gospel of Bartholomew 4:12–5:5.))?[Page 176] where they see marvelous things. Jesus gives his apostles the kiss of peace ((Gospel of Bartholomew 4:71.))? before he ascends into the clouds. ((Gospel of Bartholomew 5:9; Apocryphon of James I.14.19–36.))

Nevertheless, all in the apocryphal accounts is not orthodox. The overview tends to obscure the discordant points in the accounts. Some of the apocryphal expositions show traces of Docetic, ((Apocryphon of Peter VII.80.31–82.16.)) Gnostic, ((The Apocryphon of John “contains one of the most classic narrations of the gnostic myth.” Thus Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, 23.)) or Manichaean doctrine. ((E.g. the reference to the five trees of paradise in Papyrus Deir el-Bala’izah 52 41.31; Gospel of Thomas 19; cf. Samuel N. C. Lieu, Manichaism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 10–11.) In the Gospel of Bartholomew, Jesus has Satan narrate the creation, ((Gospel of Bartholomew 4:28–57. Noted in Quasten, Patrology 1:127.)) and elements are borrowed from the Egyptian Setne Khamwas cycle. ((The view of the deep like a scroll in Gospel of Bartholomew 3:1–9 parallels the view of the deep by a scroll in Setna I 3/12–15, 3/35–4/5. While in the netherworld, pounding one’s opponent into the earth up to his ears in Gospel of Bartholomew 4:22 parallels Setna I 4/27–31. The trip to the netherworld itself (Gospel of Bartholomew 3:1–5:6) has parallels in Setna II 1/25–2/27. For Setna I have used Wilhelm Spiegelberg, Die demotischen Denkmäler, 2 vols., CGC (Leipzig: Druglin, 1904–8), 2:plates 44–47; a serviceable translation may be found in Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973–80), 3:125–51; see now Sara Goldbrunner, Der verblendete Gelehrte (Somerhausen: Gisela Zauzich Verlag, 2006).)) Certain elements appear, shadowy remembrances of half-forgotten things that were supposed to have been there, ((Compare the following quote from 1 Jeu 36 with the list of secret knowledge in Ignatius, Epistula ad Trallianos 5:2 quoted at the beginning of this essay.)) yet these are not identical to what Latter-day Saints are familiar with. For example, one of the ascensions through one of the heavenly treasuries runs as follows:

Again we, I and my order which encircled me, came out to the fifty-eighth treasury of E??z?za. [There are a total of sixty of these. I said: Hearken now to the [Page 177]layout of this treasury and everything which is within it, there being six places which surround it. Whenever you come to this place, seal yourself with this seal. This is its name: Zaaiuz?az. Speak it only once having this number [or stone, ps??phos]. ((Compare John Gee, “Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts,” Ensign 22/7 (July 1992): 60.)) 70122, in your hand, and speak this name three times also: Eeeeeie?z??zaize and the guards and the orders and the veils will always withdraw themselves until you enter the place of their father and he will give his seal and his name and you will cross over the gate into his treasury. This is the layout of this treasury and all those who are within it. ((1 Jeu 36.))

While some Latter-day Saints might find some of these elements familiar, there is a bizarreness about it. Latter-day Saints, having their own authentic accounts of the teachings of the Savior after his resurrection in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 1–30) ((Possibly D&C 45:16–59 can be another forty-day account depending on how the phrase “in the flesh” is understood. The general tendency is to take this as a reference to the mortal Jesus.))? would do well to use it as a touchstone for the apocryphal accounts. ((Comparisons of the Forty-day literature with the Book of Mormon are available in Hugh Nibley, “Christ among the Ruins,” CWHN 8:407–34; and Gee, “Jesus Christ:
Conclusions

Often, when first presented with the stories from the apocryphal gospels, people’s interests become piqued and sometimes they become excited. Sooner or later, “we learn to prize the heavenly; we look for revelation, that nowhere burns more worthily or beautifully than in the New Testament.” ((Goethe, Faust 1216–19.)) Jesus’ works cannot be separated from his words. Both are eternal. But we can separate the canonical from the apocryphal accounts of Jesus’ acts and words. Reading the former helps us feel the Spirit, which we need to read the latter, for “whoso receiveth not by the Spirit cannot be benefitted” (D&C 91:6). Like cream-puffs, most apocryphal accounts of Jesus, though they look enticing, have little nourishment and are usually are not as good nor even as sweet as they look, being dusty pastry filled with imitation cream.

Abbreviations

AfP Archiv für Papyrologie und Archäologie des Judentums und Christentums
ANRW Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter)
BYU Brigham Young University Studies
CA Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, 21 vols. (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 195–)
CGC Catalogue Général des Antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire
CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CWHN Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, 12 vols. to date (Salt Lake City: Deseret, and Provo, Utah: FARMS, 198–)
FARMS Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies
GCS Die Griechische Christliche Schriftstelle (Berlin: Akademie)
MIFAO Mémoires publiés par les Membres de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, Cairo.
NHS Nag Hammadi Studies (Leiden: Brill, )
PO R. Graffin and F. Nau, eds., Patrologia Orientalis (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 190–)
RBBM Review of Books on the Book of Mormon
SAOC Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization (Chicago: Oriental Institute)
TU Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
YES Yale Egyptological Studies (New Haven, CT: Yale Egyptological Seminar)

Appendix I

The text editions listed in the appendices may not be the latest or the most available; the bibliography will often give more recent editions.
The following may be counted as Infancy Gospels:

The Arabic Infancy Gospel. This seems to be an Arabic version of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, large portions of this are included in the Syriac History of the Virgin. A Latin translation of the text may be found in Constantinus von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1876), 18–209; selections translated in *NTA* 1:40–1, 40–9; bibliography in *NTAP* 21–14.


The (Infancy) Gospel of Thomas. This is not the same as the Gospel of Thomas found at Nag Hammadi and Oxyrhynchus which is a sayings gospel set among the forty-[Page 181]day literature. Text in Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 14–63; translation in *NTA* 1:39–99; bibliography in *NTAP* 40–9.


**Appendix II**

The following may be classed under the head of Christ’s ministry and passion:


The Epistles of Abgar. Translation in *NTA* 1:44–44; bibliography in *NTAP* 17–85.

The *Evan Bohan*. This is a Jewish anti-Christian tract which preserves portions of earlier material including most of the original Hebrew version of the canonical gospel of Matthew. For a discussion, see George Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text*, (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), ix.


The Gospel of the Egyptians. This is different from the version found in two versions among the Nag Hammadi codices; [Page 182]see *NTA* 1:36–62. Text in Preuschen, *Antilegomena*, –3; bibliography in *NTAP* 20–3.


The Gospel of the Hebrews. There is confusion of the fragments preserved of this work with both the Hebrew version of Matthew preserved in the *Evan Bohan* and with the Gospel of the Nazaraeans. Text in Preuschen, *Antilegomena*, –9; translation in *NTA* 1:16–65; bibliography in *NTAP* 20–11.

The Gospel of the Nazaraeans. There is much confusion of this with the Gospel of the Hebrews as well as the Hebrew version of Matthew. Translation in *NTA* 1:14–53; bibliography in *NTAP* 26–71.


Papyrus Cairensis 10,735. Translation in *NTA* 1:115.

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1224. Translation in *NTA* 1:114.

**Appendix III**

The following are examples of the Forty-Day genre:


NTA 1:44–76; bibliography in NTAP 33–43.


Apocalypse of Paul (This is a version of the Vision of Paul but is not identical with the Apocalypse of Paul among the Nag Hammadi codices). The text may be found in E. A. W. Budge, Miscellaneous Coptic Texts (Oxford, 1915); bibliography in NTAP 28–94.


127 Canons of the Apostles. This selection of Church rules attributed to the apostles assumes a forty-day authority, but is not strictly speaking a forty-day text. Arabic text and French translation in Jean Périer and Augustin Périer, “Les ‘127 Canons des Apôtres,” in PO 8:55–710.


Dialogue between John and Jesus. This work is also known as Papyrus Bala’izah 52. Text and translation in Paul E. Kahle, Bala’izah, 2 vols. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1954), 1:47–77.


Discourse on Abbaton. The text may be found in E. A. Wallis Budge, Coptic Martyrdoms etc. in the Dialect of Upper Egypt (London: British Museum, 1914); 22–49; translation in ibid., 47–96; bibliography in NTAP 156.

Epistula Apostolorum. This is the Coptic version of the Testament in Galilee. The text may be found in Carl Schmidt, Gespräche Jesus mit seinen Jüngern nach der Auferstehung: Ein katholisch-apostolisches Sendschreiben des 2. Jahrhunderts, TU 43 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1919); translation in NTA 1:19–227; bibliography in NTAP 16–71.


The Gospel of Peter (ANT); translation in NTA 1:18–87; bibliography in NTAP 32–327.


The Gospel of Thomas. This is the Coptic version found in Nag Hammadi codex II. Text and translation in Layton, nag Hammadi Codex II,–7, 1:5–93; translation also in Robinson, Nag Hammadi Library (1988), 12–38; bibliography in NTAP 37–402.


The History of Joseph the Carpenter. This is an infancy narrative set in a forty-day frame story. The Arabic text may be found in Ioannis Caroli Thilo, Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti (Leipzig: Wilhelm Vogel, 1832), –61; selections of the Coptic text may be found in Thomas O. Lambdin, Introduction to Sahidic Coptic (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 19–208; bibliography in NTAP 24–248.

[Page 185] 1 Jeu. The text and translation is most conveniently found in Carl Schmidt and Violet MacDermot, The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text from the Bruce Codex, vol. 13 of NHS (Leiden: Brill, 1978), –123; Schmidt’s reconstructed text is the standard even if it has not been checked by a codicological method, but MacDermot’s English translation is often infelicitious to the Coptic.
2 Jeu. The text and translation in Schmidt and MacDermot, *Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text from the Bruce Codex*, 12–211; the same cautions apply to 2 Jeu as to 1 Jeu.


Oxyrhynchos Logia (see under Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1 and 655).

Papyrus Bodmer X. This was cited as a forty-day text by Nibley, “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum,” 25 n. 27, 29 n. 43, 33 n. 61, 36 n. 73; and discussed by Thomas W. Mackay, “Content and Style in Two Pseudo-Pauline Epistles (3 Corinthians and the Epistle to the Laodiceans),” *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 216. The papyrus contains a Coptic version of the Acts of Paul and Thecla (Greek versions also exist), which is a martyrdom or hagiography and not really a forty-day account. Tertullian (*De Baptismo* 17) condemns it as a second-century forgery. A translation may be found in *NTA* 2:35–64.

Papyrus Deir el-Bala’izah 28. This fragment is similar to the Discourse on Abaton. Text and translation in Kahle, *Bala’izah*, 1:40–4.

Papyrus Deir el-Bala’izah 52. This is another name for the Dialogue between John and Jesus.

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1. This is one manuscript of the Greek version of the Gospel of Thomas. Text in Layton, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex* II–7, 1:11–21; translation in ibid., 1:127; bibliography in ibid., 1:10–2, 11–12.

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654. This is another manuscript of the Greek version of the Gospel of Thomas. Text in Layton, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex* II–7, 1:11–17; translation in ibid., 1:12–27; bibliography in ibid., 1:10–2, 11–12.


Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1081. This is a Greek version of the Sophia Jesu Christi.


Questions of Bartholomew (identical with the Gospel of Bartholomew)

Questions of Mary. Translation in *NTA* 1:339; bibliography in *NTAP* 26–64.

Revelation to Peter. Another name for the Apocalypse of Peter.


Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi (the Syriac version of the Epistula Apostolorum). The text may be found in Ignatius Rahmani, *Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* (Moguntiae: Kircheim, 1899); bibliography in *NTAP* 19–98.

The Vision of Paul (the Latin version of the Apocalypse of Paul). Bibliography in *NTA* 30–9.

Additional bibliography on these items may be found in David M. Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography* 194–1969, vol. 1 of *Nag Hammadi Studies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971) and in the yearly updates in *Novum Testamentum*.

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