How Did We Get Our Bible? The Origin and Authority of Scripture

#6: Origins of the Bible: What About the So-Called Lost Gospels?

Introduction: Discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas*

I. Our Culture's Fascination with Lost Gospels

A. Why do you think people are so enamored with alternative Gospels?

B. The study of early Christianity has been affected by the idea that no religious system/book is better than any other

- Walter Bauer's views of orthodoxy and heresy
- The fundamental belief of scholars, and our culture, is that you can't say any book is "better" than another. This forces them to look for other explanations for why some Gospels were accepted and some were not.

II. The Case for the Canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

A. The Canonical Gospels are the Earliest We Have

- All the Canonical Gospels are dated c.50-90 A.D.
- No Apocryphal Gospel is dated to the First Century

Why would this matter?

B. The Canonical Gospels Have a Credible Connection to the Apostles

- We have good reasons to connect the Canonical Gospels to the Apostles
  - Example: John. Irenaeus knew Polycarp who knew John Personally.
  - Implication: Gospels contain <u>authoritative</u>, <u>eyewitness</u> testimony
- Not a Single Apocryphal Gospel could have been written by an apostle
  - Apocryphal Gospels bear the names of Apostles for obvious reasons (Thomas, Peter, Phillip, etc.)
  - But, given their late date, none could have been written by an apostle or their companions

C. The Canonical Gospels Lack the Legendary Embellishments of Later Gospels

- The Canonical Gospels Speak in a Restrained, Manner-of-Fact Manner
    - Scholars have observed for generations that the canonical gospels are quite restrained in the way they tell their story. It is very direct, straightforward.

- Apocryphal Gospels Often have Extensive Legendary Embellishments
    - Example: Infancy Gospel of Thomas
    - Example: Gospel of Peter

D. The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Authoritative from a Very Early Date

- The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Scripture Very Early
    - Irenaeus: Four and only Four
    - Muratorian Fragment: Four and Only Four
    - Clement of Alexandria: Four and Only Four

- Most of the Apocryphal Gospels Were Expressly Condemned Or Simply Ignored
    - Not a Single manuscript with both apocryphal and canonical gospels
    - Not a single canonical list with both apocryphal and canonical gospels
    - Very few manuscripts (e.g. Thomas has total of 3, whereas canonical are upwards of 2,500).