January always brings with it a sense of a beginning, a fresh start if you will, to a brand new collection of twelve months that we measure our time by. We can use this all too brief sense of a new year as a good time to reaffirm the meaning of what it means to be an ambassador.

Paul says you and I are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador is someone who represents the desires of his king in a foreign land. I can relate to that. Can you? This land gets more foreign every day; it seems more unlike God’s kingdom.

But then Paul adds something vital: “We are ambassadors for Christ as though God were entreating through us … .” When I thought about these words I realized that wherever you and I go, everything we do or say will be “as though God were entreating through us.”

It’s a sobering thought. I want to be the finest ambassador for Christ I can possibly be in 2011…and I know I’m not alone in this desire. It’s one I’m sure you share, too. Let’s both commit in this new year to really thinking about 2 Corinthians 5:20, and about what it personally means for you and me to represent Christ everywhere we go, “as though God were entreating through you.”

And you can count on Stand to Reason to walk with you throughout this year as we bring new resources, fresh mentoring, and effective tools that will equip you, as you become a more seasoned and faithful ambassador for Christ.

This first edition of Solid Ground confronts a popular criticism of the Bible - Are there lost books of the Bible? I think you will find solid encouragement in my handling of this supposed mystery of our canon. I hope it gives you an answer you need to be ready with as an ambassador for Christ.

STR begins a new year of work as we do every year, really starting over in our financial support. I have shared with you before that STR carries no endowment or large reserves. We depend on the monthly support of friends like you who use, trust, and count on the efforts of STR in your growth as God’s ambassador. Your gift will help us be ready to take advantage of every opportunity God is going to bring our way in this new year to train ambassadors and provide clear thinking about Christianity.

Your fellow ambassador,

Greg Koukl
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STR, building Ambassadors through dynamic content.

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No “Lost” Books

Has archaeology unearthed ancient biblical texts that cast doubt on the current canon of Scripture? Is it possible that Christians don’t have the true Bible?

Browsing through the religious section in your local bookstore, you’re likely to stumble on a handful of titles that suggest the discovery of “lost books” of the Bible. Generally, these represent works that were “politically incorrect” according to the theological notions of the time. Branded as spurious by early church leaders, they were discredited and destroyed. Luckily, a handful of copies survived. Archaeologists have rescued these previously “lost books” of the Bible. The Gospel of Thomas, unearthed in the Nag Hammadi library in Upper Egypt in 1945, would be an example.

Invariably, this sends a jolt through the system of the conscientious Christian. Could it be that archaeology has unearthed ancient biblical texts that cast doubt on the current canon of Scripture? Is it possible the Bible that Christians have is incomplete?

It may be hard to believe, but this question can be answered without ever reading any of the books in question. No research needs to be done, no ancient tomes addressed, no works of antiquity perused. Curiously, the entire issue can be answered by a close look at one word: Bible.

The Bible Divine

The whole question of alleged lost books of the Bible hinges on what one means by the word “Bible.” It can only mean one of two things, it seems to me. There is a religious understanding of the word, and there is a more secular definition.

When one asks an Evangelical Christian what the Bible is, he’s likely to say simply, “It’s God’s Word.” When pressed for a more theologically precise definition, he might add that God superintended the writing of Scripture so that the human authors, using their own style, personalities and resources, wrote down, word for word, exactly what God intended them to write in the originals. This verbal plenary inspiration is a vital part of the Christian definition of the word “Bible.”

The key concept for our discussion is the phrase “exactly what God intended them to write.” A critical element of this understanding of “Bible” is the idea that God was not limited by the fact that human authors were involved in the process.

Man’s Mistakes

A common objection to the notion of inspiration is that the Bible was only written by men, and men make mistakes. This complaint misses the mark for two reasons.

First, it does not logically follow that because humans were involved in the writing process, the Bible must necessarily be in error. Mistakes may be possible, but they’re not necessary. To assume error in all human writing is also self-defeating. The humanly derived statement, “The Bible was written by men, and men make mistakes,” would be suspect by the same standards. The fact is, human beings can and do produce writing with no errors. It happens all the time.

Further, the challenge that men make mistakes...
ignores the main issue—whether or not the Bible was written only by men. The Christian accepts that humans are limited, but denies that man’s limitations are significant in this case because inspiration implies that God’s power supersedes man’s liabilities.

A simple question—Columbo style—serves to illustrate this: “Are you saying that if God exists, He’s not capable of writing what He wants through imperfect men?” This seems hard to affirm. The notion of an omnipotent God not being able to accomplish such a simple task is ludicrous. If, on the other hand, the answer is “No, I think He is able,” then the objection vanishes. If God is capable, then man’s limitations are not a limit on God.

The divine inspiration of the Bible—if we can offer good reasons the Bible was from God to begin with—automatically solves the problem of human involvement. If God insures the results, it doesn’t matter if men or monkeys do the writing, they will still write exactly what God intends. That is part of what it means for the Bible to be divinely inspired.

The important thing for our purpose here is not to defend the notion of divine inspiration, but to understand that God’s authorship and supernatural preservation are necessarily entailed in the first definition of the word “Bible.” The Bible is the 66 individual books contained under one cover that are supernaturally inspired by God, and are preserved and protected by His power. On this understanding, man’s limitations are irrelevant.

The Bible Secular

The second definition of the word “Bible” is not religious, and therefore assumes no supernatural origin for the Scripture. This view says that while Christians treated the Scriptures as divinely inspired, they were mistaken. The Bible merely represents a human consensus, a collection of books chosen by the early church to reflect its own beliefs.

No Lost Books

Start with the first meaning, the supernatural definition of the Bible. Is it possible that books could be lost from a Bible of this sort? The answer is certainly no. Remember, on this view God Himself is supernaturally preserving and protecting the integrity of His work.

Regardless of whether the Christian claim about inspiration is accurate or not, it is obvious that on this definition it is not possible God would misplace His own book. The “lost books” thesis would thus be reduced to, “Certain books that Almighty God was responsible to preserve and protect got lost.”

This is silly. The view makes God both almighty and inept at trace authorship to an Apostle or eyewitness accounts, and the theology differed from what had been handed down from the Apostles. Christianity is no different from other religions that have collections of authoritative writings. Even individual professions identify certain books—“bibles,” if you will—as official representations of their respective fields. The Bible, then, is in that category—merely a collection of books chosen by the early church leaders to represent their own beliefs.

So we have two possible meanings for the word “Bible,” a supernatural one and a natural one. Either the Bible is divinely given and divinely preserved—the conservative Christian view—or it’s merely a human document representing the beliefs of a religious group known by the label “Christianity”—the view of just about everyone else. Given either of these two definitions, could any books of the Bible be lost?

A book that didn’t make the cut was rejected for two basic reasons: Early Christians couldn’t

Development of the Canon

1000-50 BC:
The Old Testament books are written.

200 BC:
Rabbis translate the OT from Hebrew to Greek, a translation called the “Septuagint” (abbreviation: “LXX”). The LXX ultimately includes 46 books.

AD 30-100:
Christians use the LXX as their scriptures. This upsets the Jews.

AD 51-125:
The New Testament books are written, but during this same period other early Christian writings are produced—e.g., the Didache (c. AD 70), 1 Clement (c. 96), the Epistle of Barnabas (c. 100), and the 7 letters of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110).

AD 100:
So Jewish rabbis meet at the Council of Jamnia and decide to include in their canon only 39 books, since only these can be found in Hebrew.

AD 140:
Marcion, a businessman in Rome, teaches that there were two Gods: Yahweh, the cruel God of the OT, and Abba, the kind father of the NT. So Marcion eliminates the Old Testament as scriptures and, since he is anti-Semitic, keeps from the NT only 10 letters of Paul and 2/3 of Luke’s gospel (he deletes references to Jesus’ Jewishness). Marcion’s “New Testament”—the first to be compiled—forces the mainstream Church to decide on a core canon: the four gospels and letters of Paul.

AD 200:
But the periphery of the canon is not yet determined. According to one list, compiled at Rome c. AD 200 (the Muratorian Canon), the NT consists of the 4 gospels; Acts; 13 letters of Paul (Hebrews is not included); 3 of the 7 General Epistles (1-2 John and Jude); and also the Apocalypse of Peter.

AD 367:
The earliest extant list of the books of the NT, in exactly the number and order in which we presently have them, is written by Athanasius,
the same time. If the Bible is in fact the inspired Word of God, then the power of God Himself guarantees that no portion of it will ever be lost. There will always be a fully adequate testimony of His Word in every generation.

Could there be lost books given the second definition? What if Christians are wrong in attributing God’s stewardship to the Scriptures? What if the Bible ultimately turns out to be merely a product of human design? If that’s the case, then the term “Bible” refers not to the Word of God (the first definition), but to the canon of beliefs of the leaders of the early church (the second definition). Is it possible that books could be lost from a Bible of this sort?

The answer again is certainly not. The “lost books” thesis would be reduced to this: “Early church leaders rejected certain books as unrepresentative of their beliefs that they actually believed reflected their beliefs.”

If the Bible is a collection of books the early church leaders decided would represent their point of view, then they have the final word on what is included. Any books they rejected were never part of their Bible to begin with, so even by the second definition, “lost books” of the Bible would be a misnomer.

Consider this scenario. You decide to write a book about your personal beliefs drawing from stacks of notes containing reflections you’ve collected over the years. After recording the ones you agree with, you discard the rest. Later, someone rummaging through your trash comes upon your discarded notes. Could he claim he’d stumbled upon your lost beliefs?

“No,” you respond, “these were not lost. They were rejected. If they were really my beliefs, they’d be in the book, not in the garbage.”

It’s ironic that “lost books” advocates often point out that rediscovered texts were missing because the early Church Fathers suppressed them. It’s true; they did. Critics think this strengthens their case, but it doesn’t. Instead it destroys their position by proving that the “lost books” were not lost but discarded, rejected as not representative of Christian beliefs. Therefore, they did not belong in the Christian Bible. If they never were in the Bible in the first place they couldn’t be lost from the Bible.

**Recall Vote?**

Another approach to Scripture is worth mentioning. Some academics, like those of the Jesus Seminar, reject the idea that the Bible has supernatural origins. Since the Bible is just man’s opinion anyway, why not have a recall vote? Amend the text to fix what is now considered defective or out of step with the times.

Such a reshuffling of the biblical deck—tossing out some books and including others to reflect what the church currently believes about spiritual truth—is certainly an alternative on a naturalistic view of the Scripture. If the members of the Jesus Seminar want to include the Gospel of Thomas in their bible, they’re welcome to. Keep in mind though, they would not be restoring a “lost book” of the Bible, but merely redefining the canon to fit modern tastes.

Regardless of how you view the Scripture—as supernatural or as natural—there is no sense in which there could be lost books of the Bible. If the Bible is supernatural—if God is responsible for its writing, its transmission, and its survival—then God, being God, doesn’t fail. He doesn’t make mistakes, He doesn’t forget things, and He’s not constrained by man’s limitations. God can’t lose His lessons.

However, if the Bible is not supernatural—as many will contend, especially those who claim to have found lost books—one faces a different problem. By what standard do we claim these are bona fide lost books of the canon of the early church? If, from a human perspective, the Bible is that collection of writings reflecting the beliefs of early Christianity, then any...
writings discarded by the church fathers are not books of their Bible by very definition.

Has archaeology unearthed previously unknown ancient texts? Certainly. Are they interesting, noteworthy, and valuable? Some. Are they missing books of the Bible? The answer is no. Two thousand years later, the rediscovery of something like the Gospel of Thomas may be archaeologically significant. It might be a lost book of antiquity, a great find, even a wonderful piece of literature.

But it is not a lost book of the Bible.

Putting Your Knowledge into Action

- When you encounter someone who holds that books like the Gospel of Thomas have been “lost” from the Biblical canon, remember the two definitions of the word Bible.
- If someone advances the argument that the Bible was written by men and men make mistakes remember that the Christian view is that Biblical authors wrote exactly what God intended them to write.
- Keep in mind that if the Bible is supernaturally inspired God is fully capable of preserving and protecting His word.
- Remember the secular definition of the word Bible is that scripture is a collection of books, chosen by the early church fathers to reflect the views and tenents of Christianity. Books were not lost, they were rejected.
- Don’t forget that, by any definition, the idea that there are lost books of the Bible is nonsense.

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www.pleaseconvinceme.com

The Early Christian Church Fathers wrote about the “lost books,” including the Gospel of Judas.
**Who Chose the Gospels?, C.E. Hill, Hardcover, 295 pages (BK349) $27.95**

It is now widely said that the four Gospels rose to prominence only after a long battle within early Christianity, a battle finally won in the fourth century, after the establishment of the Church by Constantine the Great. In Who Chose the Gospels? Charles E. Hill demolishes this claim, providing a more historically accurate, alternative account of how the Church came to acknowledge four, and only four, narratives of the life of Jesus.

**TrueU: Is the Bible Reliable? DVD “NEW”, Stephen Meyer & Del Tackett, DVD Video with Discussion Guide: 250 minutes (DVD027) $35.95**

In this second installment in the popular TrueU series, Dr. Stephen Meyer examines Scripture using archeological and documentary data that supports the factual accuracy of the Bible. Do you believe the Bible is real? “The heart cannot exalt in what the mind rejects”, says Dr. Stephen Meyer. Using evidence, logic and reason, he offers truth that stands up to scrutiny, and helps viewers confidently defend Biblical truth and the reason for our hope!


Is the God of the Old Testament nothing but a bully, a murderer, and an oppressor? Many today—even within the church—seem to think so. How are Christians to respond to such accusations? And how are we to reconcile the seemingly disconnected natures of God portrayed in the two testaments? In this timely and readable book, apologist Paul Copan takes on some of the most vexing accusations of our time, including:

- God is arrogant and jealous
- God punishes people too harshly
- God is guilty of ethnic cleansing
- God oppresses women
- God endorses slavery
- Christianity causes violence

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**STR Speakers’ Schedules**

**Greg Koukl**

**January**
- **22-23** First Baptist Church of Montgomery, Montgomery, AL  
  Topics: Columbo, Contend Earnestly for the Faith, Credo: The Christian Story  
  Contact: (334) 834-6310

**February**
- **9** Trinity Christian Academy, Valencia, CA  
  Topic: Tactics
- **12** Hephatha Lutheran Church, Anaheim, CA  
  6 p.m. Men’s breakfast  
  Topic: TBD  
  Contact: (714) 637-0887 or www.hephatha.net
- **17** TBN 7-9 p.m.  
  Topic: Creation, Evolution, & God
- **19** Veritas Conference, Huntington Beach, CA
- **20** Simi Valley Community Church, Simi Valley, CA  
  10:30 a.m. Topic: TBD  
  Contact: (805) 526-8075 or www.simivalleycommunitychurch.org
- **26** Simi Valley Community Church, Simi Valley, CA  
  8 a.m.-3 p.m. Topic: TBD  
  Contact: (805) 526-8075 or www.simivalleycommunitychurch.org

**Brett Kunkle**

**January**
- **16** Capistrano Valley Christian School, San Juan Capistrano, CA  
  7:00 p.m.  
  Topic: The Invisible Man: Is There Proof for the Soul?  
  Contact: (949) 493-5683 or www.cvcs.org

**February**
- **3** Grace Classical Academy, Laguna Niguel, CA  
  6:30 p.m.  
  Topic: Who’s Waiting for Your Kids?  
  Contact: (949) 481-9250 or www.GraceClassicalAcademy.com
- **16-18** Wesleyan Christian Academy, High Point, NC  
  Topics: TBD  
  Contact: (336) 884-3333 or www.wesed.org
- **19-20** Lake Norman Baptist Church, Huntersville, NC  
  Topics: TBD  
  Contact: (704) 892-0143 or www.lakenormanbaptist.com
- **22-25** Capistrano Valley Christian School, Berkeley, CA  
  Topics: Berkeley Mission Trip  
  Contact: (949) 493-5683 or www.cvcs.org

**Alan Shlemon**

**January**
- **10** North Coast Church, Vista, CA  
  7:00 p.m.  
  Topic: Never Read a Bible Verse  
  Contact: (760) 724-6700 x272 or www.northcoastchurch.com/ncu
- **16** Teen Salt & Light, Rancho Santa Fe, CA  
  2:15 p.m.  
  Topic: Homosexuality: Truth and Compassion  
  (Private event)
- **22-25** Life after Fifty, North Coast Church, Vista, CA  
  11:00 a.m.  
  Topic: Do Muslims Follow the Real Jesus?  
  Contact: (760) 724-6700 x231 or www.northcoastchurch.com

**February**
- **5** Centinela State Prison, Imperial, CA  
  Topics: TBD  
  Contact: Private event
- **19** Veritology Apologetics Conference, Phoenix, AZ  
  Time: TBD  
  Topic: Tactics in Defending the Faith  
  Contact: (520) 568-5400
- **20** Teen Salt & Light, Rancho Santa Fe, CA  
  2:15 p.m.  
  Topic: Extreme Home Makeover  
  (Private event)
- **25** Life after Fifty, North Coast Church, Vista, CA  
  11:00 a.m.  
  Topic: Do Muslims Follow the Real Jesus?  
  Contact: (760) 724-6700 x231 or www.northcoastchurch.com

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Clear. An Ambassador is careful with language and will not rely on Christian lingo or gain unfair advantage by resorting to empty rhetoric.

Fair. An Ambassador is sympathetic and understanding towards others and will acknowledge the merits of contrary views.

Honest. An Ambassador is careful with the facts and will not misrepresent another’s view, overstate his own case, or understate the demands of the Gospel.

Humble. An Ambassador is provisional in his claims, knowing that his understanding of truth is fallible. He will not press a point beyond what his evidence allows.

Attractive. An Ambassador will act with grace, kindness, and good manners. He will not dishonor Christ in his conduct.

Dependent. An Ambassador knows that effectiveness requires joining his best efforts with God’s power.

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