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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Zach Smith and Alden Bass

[EDITOR'S NOTE: We try to devote one or two issues of *Reason & Revelation* each year to answering questions sent to us by our readers—a format that has proven to be extremely popular with long-time subscribers. This month's issue, which deals with two intriguing inquiries that arise from time to time, is authored by two of our summer interns, Zach Smith (a junior Bible major at Freed-Hardeman University), and Alden Bass (a junior religious studies major at Yale University). I believe you will be duly impressed with the diligence of their research efforts, and I am confident that you will enjoy the fruits of their labors.]

Q I have heard that there are certain “lost books” mentioned in the Bible—books to which we no longer have access. Is this true? And if so, what impact does this have on the biblical text itself, or on a Christian's faith?

A In a manner that is somewhat similar to a modern research paper, citations appear in both the Old and New Testaments. The inspired writers sometimes referred to certain works that no longer exist—a fact that has caused some people to question the accuracy and completeness of the Bible. Atheists and skeptics claim that if it was truly God's Word, then it would not lack any composition cited. Massimo Franceschini, an Italian convert to Mormonism, has suggested that the biblical text is **more than sixty-five percent incomplete**, due, in part, to the “lost books” cited within the Bible itself (Franceschini, 2002). If the Bible is, at most, thirty-five percent complete, then the Christian faith can be no more complete than that. Duane Christensen, in the October 1998 issue of *Bible Review*, listed twenty-three referenced books that have been lost in antiquity (14[5]:29),

to which we can add seven additional works mentioned in the Bible. Such compositions as the Book of Jashar (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18), the Acts of Gad the Seer (1 Chronicles 29:29), and Paul's previous Corinthian letter (see 1 Corinthians 5:9) are among the thirty cited works—twenty-eight from the Old Testament era, and two from the New Testament era—that are not included in the canon of Scripture, and that are missing from secular history. The contents of these books are known only by the fact that they are cited or quoted. Upon further examination, however, it appears that some of them actually may exist in another form.

Some scholars argue that a large number of these citations probably refer to the **same** composition. For example, the references found in 1 and 2 Kings to the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, and the Acts of Solomon, possibly denote a single work (Christensen, 14[5]:29). It is a common practice, even in modern society, to refer to one thing by several different names. For example, a person may refer to Josephus' work, *Wars of the Jews*, as “Josephus,” “Josephus' Wars,” “*Jewish Wars*,” “*Wars of the Jews*,” “Josephus' *Jewish Wars*,” etc.—all of which designate the same composition. In similar fashion, the many works cited throughout Kings and Chronicles very possibly refer to different sections of a single work. If there was a single original (one referred to by several names), it was likely a highly detailed record of the reigns of the kings in Israel and Judah. As a king lived and died, the records of his reign were added to this work by a scribe, prophet, historian, record keeper, or even by the administration of the next king, making it a composite work of many writers. The various names for this

single account might have designated certain sections that made up the composite work. The differences between Kings' and Chronicles' naming and citing of the sections of the original, can be understood by the differences that exist among modern citation styles. The style of citation, list of works cited, and information provided vary widely, for example, among such modern-day guides as the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Nevertheless, each one of these provides sufficient information to refer the reader to the original source. Similarly, the writer of Kings' style of citation, and the writer of Chronicles' style of citation, both mentioned the original, but did so in a different manner. Nevertheless, both provided the reader with enough information to locate the section referenced in the source.

The idea of a composite source makes sense when applied to Jewish oral tradition. The Talmud—a collection of Hebrew oral law and legal decisions (the Mishna), along with transcribed scholarly discussions and commentary on the Mishna (the Gemara)—holds that Jeremiah wrote Kings, and that Ezra wrote Chronicles (Rodkinson, 1918, V:45). [NOTE: There is no internal evidence for Jeremiah's authorship of Kings, but 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-4 are almost identical, which supports Talmudic tradition of Ezra's authorship of Chronicles.] One theory regarding the citation of lost books is that they were source material for the writers of Kings and Chronicles. Jeremiah possibly edited and/or condensed the original source (by inspiration

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of the Holy Spirit) into the book of Kings, sometime before or during the Babylonian exile. This new, inspired book of Kings provided a summary of the histories of Israel and Judah for the captives to carry with them—a much smaller, lighter book than the original detailed work. After returning from the Babylonian exile, Ezra composed another history of the Hebrew nation—Chronicles. According to this theory, he used the same original work as Jeremiah for his primary source, but referred to the sections by different names than the ones used by Jeremiah. To this, he added parts of Samuel, Isaiah, possibly Lamentations, and some non-extant works. Like Jeremiah's compilation, Ezra did this **by inspiration**. While the original source no longer exists, a condensed form of it survived through the inspired writings.

However, it also is possible that the original work to which Jeremiah and Ezra referred was not a source for their books, but was an uninspired composition of historical significance to which the reader could look for additional information. Under this theory, Jeremiah and Ezra received everything for the composition of their respective works, but also were inspired to include a reference for "extra information." God did not require every single detail to be preserved in the biblical accounts of the history of the Jewish people, so He revealed what the authors of Kings and Chronicles needed to know, while guiding them to insert a "for more information, please see..." in the text.

Both of these theories allow for verbal inspiration. The first theory suggests that God inspired Jeremiah and Ezra to look at the single historical work as a source, and then He guided them (via the Holy Spirit) to include exactly what He wanted from that source into Scripture. According to the second theory, God revealed to Jeremiah and Ezra the necessary history, and then guided them to place a citation in the biblical text in order to refer the contemporary reader to a then-extant historical book. Some of the "lost books" are references to sections of this source, and others are different names for books that are not lost, but currently reside within the canon of Scripture.

Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, and Acts of Solomon (non-extant)

These names probably refer to sections of the original, detailed source either used by Jeremiah (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to compose Kings, or mentioned by Jeremiah as a source for additional information. The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah is cited in 1 Kings 14:29; 15:7; 15:

23; 22:45; 2 Kings 8:23; 12:19; 14:18; 15:6; 15:36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17; 21:25; 23:28; and 24:5. The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel is mentioned in 1 Kings 14:19; 15:31; 16:5; 16:14; 16:20; 16:27; 22:39; 2 Kings 1:18; 10:34; 13:8; 13:12; 14:15; 14:28; 15:11; 15:15; 15:21; 15:26; and 15:31. However, the Acts of Solomon is referred to only in 1 Kings 11:41. This compilation probably contained the records of each king's reign, official decrees, judgments of the court, census reports, taxation records, etc.

Book of the Kings of Israel, Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel, Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah, Acts of the Kings of Israel, and Chronicles of King David (non-extant)

These five titles possibly were Ezra's references to sections of the same source from which Jeremiah wrote Kings. According to the two theories, either he used this single historical work (again, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to compose Chronicles, or he referenced it as additional, uninspired information. The Book of the Kings of Israel is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 9:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 20:34. The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel is cited in 2 Chronicles 16:11; 25:26; 28:26; and 32:32. The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah is referred to in 2 Chronicles 27:2; 35:27; and 36:8. Finally, the Acts of the Kings of Israel, and the Chronicles of King David, are alluded to in 2 Chronicles 33:18 and 1 Chronicles 27:24, respectively.

Acts of Samuel the Seer, Acts of Gad the Seer, and Acts of Nathan the Prophet (1 & 2 Samuel)

The only citation to these works is found in 1 Chronicles 29:29. This probably refers to 1 and 2 Samuel, which Talmudic tradition says was written by Samuel until his death (see 1 Samuel 25:1), and was finished by Gad the seer and Nathan the prophet (Rodkinson, 1918, V:45-46). With this explanation, it stands to reason that Ezra was referring to one work (Samuel) by its composite authors—Samuel, Gad, and Nathan. So these three "lost books" probably cite a single, currently existing work, known to us as 1 and 2 Samuel. [NOTE: In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book (Samuel), as were 1 and 2 Kings (Kings) and 1 and 2 Chronicles (Chronicles). Also, Nehemiah was added to the end of Ezra in the Hebrew text, and Hosea through Malachi were one book—which resulted in the Hebrew Bible being twenty-four books (Josephus combined two of those, making a total of twenty-two), instead of the thirty-nine in our present-day Old Testament.]

Book by the Prophet Isaiah and Vision of Isaiah the Prophet (Isaiah)

The two “lost books,” cited in 2 Chronicles 26:22 and 2 Chronicles 32:32, respectively, are said to have contained the records of King Uzziah and King Hezekiah. Isaiah lived during the reigns of these men (Isaiah 1:1; 6:1; 7:1; 36:1-39:8), so these citations likely refer to the book of Isaiah that exists in our current canon.

Lament for Josiah (Lamentations 3)

In 2 Chronicles 35:25, it is recorded that Jeremiah composed a lament at the death of Josiah, who was the last unconquered king of Judah, and wrote it “in the Laments.” The book of Lamentations was the work of Jeremiah that mourned the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred not long after the death of Josiah. It is highly likely that the lament mentioned in 2 Chronicles 35:25 is included in Lamentations. It is perhaps in chapter 3, where the tone of the lament changes. There seems to be continuity between 2:22 and 4:1. Chapter 2 talks of God’s anger toward Jerusalem and the result of it, a thought that is continued in chapter 4. Chapter 3 takes on a more personal tone, which could be indicative of the personal grief experienced by Jeremiah at the death of Josiah. It is very possible that, in lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem (Lamentations 1-2), Jeremiah’s grief at the death of Josiah came freshly to his mind, and he digressed in his lament over Jerusalem to include the sorrow of Josiah’s passing (Lamentations 3). Following this digression, his thoughts returned to Jerusalem (Lamentations 4-5).

Book of the Chronicles (1 & 2 Chronicles)

Nehemiah mentioned a record of the Levites, which was kept in the Book of the Chronicles (Nehemiah 12:23). Since Nehemiah and Ezra were contemporaries, it is probable that Nehemiah was referring to the Chronicles written by Ezra—our 1 and 2 Chronicles. It appears that Nehemiah may have been citing 1 Chronicles 9:10-22 specifically, which contains a record like the one mentioned by Nehemiah.

Book of the Covenant (The Pentateuch)

Four places in the Old Testament refer to the Book of the Covenant: Exodus 24:7; 2 Kings 23:2; 23:21; and 2 Chronicles 34:30. This is another name for the Pentateuch, which is sometimes called the Law (see Deuteronomy 30:10; 31:26; 2 Kings 17:13; et al.) or the Law of Moses (see Joshua 8:31; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; et al.).

The Book of Jashar (Non-extant)

Recently, certain scholars have written about the Book of Jashar, especially in light of its “rediscovery.” There are only two quo-

| Work Cited | Cited In |
|---|---|
| The Book of the Wars of Yahweh | Numbers 21:14 |
| The Book of Jashar | Joshua 10:12-13; 2 Samuel 1:19-27 |
| The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah | 1 Kings 14:29; et al. |
| The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel | 1 Kings 14:19; et al. |
| The Acts of Solomon | 1 Kings 11:41 |
| Book of the Kings of Israel | 1 Chronicles 9:1-2; 2 Chronicles 20:34 |
| Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel | 2 Chronicles 16:11; et al. |
| Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah | 2 Chronicles 27:7; et al. |
| Acts of the Kings of Israel | 2 Chronicles 33:18 |
| Acts of Samuel the Seer | 1 Chronicles 29:29 |
| Acts of Gad the Seer | 1 Chronicles 29:29 |
| Acts of Nathan the Prophet | 1 Chronicles 29:29 |
| History of Nathan the Prophet | 2 Chronicles 9:29 |
| Prophesy of Ahijah the Shilonite | 2 Chronicles 9:29 |
| Visions of Iddo the Seer | 2 Chronicles 9:29 |
| Acts of Shemaiah the Prophet and Iddo the Seer | 2 Chronicles 12:15 |
| Acts of Jehu Son of Hanani | 2 Chronicles 20:34 |
| Acts of the Seers | 2 Chronicles 33:19 |
| Midrash of the Prophet Iddo | 2 Chronicles 13:22 |
| Midrash on the Book of Kings | 2 Chronicles 24:27 |
| Book by the prophet Isaiah | 2 Chronicles 26:22 |
| Vision of Isaiah the prophet | 2 Chronicles 32:32 |
| Book of the Chronicles | Nehemiah 12:23 |
| Some additional writings, referenced in the Old Testament and New Testament, can be added to Christensen’s list: | |
| Book of the Covenant | Exodus 24:7; et al. |
| The Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia | Esther 10:2 |
| Book by Samuel | 1 Samuel 10:25 |
| Laments for Josiah | 2 Chronicles 35:25 |
| Chronicles of King David | 1 Chronicles 27:24 |
| Paul’s letter to the Laodiceans | Colossians 4:16 |
| Paul’s previous Corinthian letter | 1 Corinthians 5:9 |

List of the “lost books” / “lost writings” of the Bible (per Christensen, 1998, with additions)

tations from the Book of Jashar: Joshua 10:12-13 and 2 Samuel 1:18-27. From these references, it appears that the Book of Jashar was either a book of songs or poems compiled throughout the ages by the Israelite nation, or a record of upright individuals among the Israelites (see McClintock and Strong, 1968, 4:785). The word “Jashar” is commonly translated “just” or “upright,” but some scholars contend that it may be a corruption of the Hebrew word for “song” (Christensen, 1998, 14[5]:27).

Currently, five works claim to be the Book of Jashar, but all are spurious or recent compositions. The most popular of these is a manuscript forged by the Rosicrucians, a secret society dating back to the seventeenth century. The original supposedly was “found” by Alcuin—an Anglo-Saxon from Northumbria—in Gazna, Persia, and translated at some point during the eighth century A.D. The translation, which is the manuscript that is extant today, was “rediscovered” in 1721 and printed in Lon-

don in 1751. This writing—which continues to be published despite the lack of evidence for its authenticity—is viewed to be a forgery produced no earlier than the eighteenth century (see Christensen, 14[5]:30; McClintock, 4:768-788).

The Book of Jashar was used as source material by Joshua, as well as by Gad and Nathan. It no longer exists in its original form, and the five different recent works are almost universally rejected as forgeries.

The Book of the Wars of Yahweh (Non-extant)

Also called the Book of the Wars of the Lord, this composition is quoted in Numbers 21:14. The quotation is in lyrical form, so it is possibly a book of poetry or a hymnal. Some have suggested that the Book of Jashar and the Book of the Wars of Yahweh are the same work (Christensen, 14[5]:30). Moses quoted it, so the date of its composition must have been prior to the completion of the Pentateuch, perhaps during the wanderings in the wilderness. Nothing else is known about it, and it survives only in Moses' quotation.

Other Old Testament Works (Non-extant)

Many of the "lost books" actually exist either in a condensed form or under another name. However, some compositions now exist as mere citations in the Old Testament. The History of Nathan the Prophet, Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and Visions of Iddo the Seer are all cited together (2 Chronicles 9:29). If this is a form similar to the 1 Chronicles 29:29 reference to Samuel (using the composite authors for the citation), then it is possible that this was a single compilation cited by mentioning its authors. The same can be said of the Acts of Shemaiah the Prophet and Iddo the Seer (2 Chronicles 12:15). Another possibility is that these, along with the Acts of Jehu Son of Hanani (2 Chronicles 20:34), are all sections in a single work titled Acts of the Seers, which is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 33:19. Since the authors were prophets or seers, their works could have been gathered into a single book of prophetic revelation, similar to the manner in which the works of the twelve minor prophets were gathered into a single book (the Twelve Prophets). It is possible that Ezra used the composite work (if they were placed together), or the individual works, as additional source material in composing Chronicles, or that he cited them in the same manner as the single historical work. So far as we know, these books no longer exist, except in name.

Two other non-extant, but cited, works are commentaries on certain books. The Midrash of the Prophet Iddo (2 Chronicles

13:22) was a commentary on a specific writing that contained the record of King Abijah of Judah. [NOTE: A midrash is a Jewish commentary, sometimes translated as "annals" or "commentary."] Perhaps the work on which Iddo wrote his commentary was the original source used by Jeremiah and Ezra to compose Kings and Chronicles, respectively. Another possibility is that it was Kings itself. The Midrash on the Book of Kings (2 Chronicles 24:27) was possibly a commentary on either Jeremiah's Kings or the original source for Kings and Chronicles. These midrashim could have been a single work, with the two citations referring to different parts of it. Ezra used these midrashim either as sources for his inspired composition of Chronicles, or as places to look if the reader wanted more information—but the originals have been lost.

Two remaining Old Testament-era books no longer exist except through citations: the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia, and a book by Samuel. The Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia is mentioned in Esther 10:2. This is not considered a "lost book" of the Bible, because it was the official record of the Persian Empire, not an inspired source. It seems to be referenced in Esther 2:23 and 6:1, where the King of Persia is shown placing records in the book and reading from it. The Book of Esther mentions this contemporary Gentile source in order to point the early reader to further details about the Persian Empire, similar to Paul's quotations from the Cretan poet Epimenides and the Cilician poet Aratus to make his point in Acts 17:28 (Bruce, 1977, p. 44). The Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia is a lost **secular** historical record. It is not a lost **biblical** record.

Recorded in 1 Samuel 10:25 is Samuel's writing of a book concerning the "behavior of royalty." The biblical record said that he had "laid it up before the Lord," but nowhere do we find anything that bears the markings of this book. The citation possibly could be a reference to the part of Samuel composed by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1-24).

To summarize, eight of the "missing" Old Testament books probably are referring to Samuel, Isaiah, Chronicles, the Pentateuch, and Lamentations. Eight others appear to refer to sections of a single source used by the inspired Old Testament writers, making it only one "lost" historical record. Six others were written by prophets and seers, and might have been sections in a non-extant prophetic work known as the Book of the Seers. Two more were commentaries, which also could have been a single work, and two more were books of hymns or poetry. Therefore, the original

number of Old Testament-era "lost books," twenty-eight, actually numbers only a half-dozen. However, along with the "missing" books of the Old Testament era, there are two epistles referred to in the New Testament that some consider "lost books."

Paul's Letter to the Laodiceans

Paul, in Colossians 4:16, mentioned an epistle that he sent to the church at Laodicea. Since an epistle by this name is not found in our New Testament, some have claimed that it is non-extant. While this is one option, there are other possibilities. Some scholars say that it may actually exist in the canon of the Bible, but under a different name. According to this theory, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians was written as an encyclical letter, meaning that it did not have one single destination. There is internal and external evidence to support this theory. Certain characteristics of the letter (like the omission of the phrase "in Ephesus" from Ephesians 1:1 in certain reliable manuscripts), the fact that some early Christians were not aware of the "in Ephesus" for verse 1, and a heretical reference to Ephesians as Paul's epistle to the Laodiceans, appear to support this theory (Metzger, 2000, p. 532). Yet, the possibility remains that Paul's letter to Laodicea was lost somewhere, perhaps in Asia Minor, before it could be copied (or the copies were destroyed or lost as well). [Passing mention should be made of a spurious epistle from the fourth century that claimed to be Paul's letter to Laodicea (Bruce, 1988, pp. 237-240).]

However, there is another possibility. The text never stated that the epistle was **from Paul to Laodicea**. It simply says that the Colossian church was to procure a certain letter in the possession of the Laodicean church. This would mean that the church at Laodicea probably had some canonical writing that Paul wanted the Colossian church to read, which would mean that there is no missing Laodicean letter. Of the three explanations (lost Laodicean letter, encyclical Ephesians, or canonical epistle in the possession of the Laodiceans), the latter appears to make the most sense. Most likely, the "missing" epistle to the Laodiceans was just a canonical epistle in the possession of the church in that city. Apparently, there was a section of it that Paul desired the Colossian brethren to read, and so he gave them directions for its procurement.

Paul's First Corinthian Letter

Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to Paul's missing previous Corinthian letter. Technically, the epistles of 1 and 2 Corinthians could be called more properly 2 and 3 Corinthians, because Paul actually

did write an earlier letter to the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul said: "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." While some would argue that Paul is referring to a previous section of 1 Corinthians (perhaps 5:1-8) rather than referring to a previous epistle, he then continued (in verse 10) to explain exactly what he meant by that statement, which is not what is said in 5:1-8. After explaining what the statement from the previous letter meant, Paul continued in 5:11 by showing the contrasting point, "But now I have written to you..."—explaining the difference between the statement from the previous epistle and the one from our 1 Corinthians.

What are we to say? This truly is a lost writing of the apostle Paul, and nothing is known about it except that it existed, it was sent to the Corinthian church, and it dealt with sexual immorality. With this book, and with the other "lost books," we now must ask the question...

Do We Really Need These Books?

When mentioning the "lost books" of the Bible, many people wonder, "Why do we no longer have these books?" and "Do we really need them?" First, some of the so-called "lost books" probably are references to inspired books that still exist, but by another name. Others were historical references used as sources for inspired books, such as Kings and Chronicles, and so the Jews saw no need to treat them with special reverence, nor to strive to preserve them. Some were books of poetry or song that were uninspired, but served as a record of Hebrew culture. Others were non-Hebrew

sources, making them non-biblical compositions and therefore not canonical writings. Many of these "lost books" probably are references to sections of the same work, making the actual number of non-extant books cited in the Bible less than a dozen. However, we must face the fact that some compositions cited by the Old and New Testament writers no longer exist.

While under subjugation to the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, the Jews ultimately were able to preserve only those books that were holy and inspired—everything else was destroyed or lost. While this is unfortunate, it should not affect our faith adversely. The books we have are inspired, and came from inspired men who sometimes mentioned non-inspired sources for recording historical fact, giving places to find additional information, or simply to make a point. These men, like modern researchers, felt compelled to cite their sources, but did not intend these sources to become writings on a par with Scripture. The missing books that are cited in the Old Testament apparently did not bother the Jews, who recorded in the first century A.D. that their writings consisted of only twenty-two to twenty-four works that correspond exactly to our thirty-nine, except for a difference in order and division (Josephus, 1987, *Against Apion* 1:38-40; Bruce, 1988, pp. 28-34; Rodkinson, 1918, V:44-45). Obviously, the "lost books" did not present a problem to Jesus and the apostles, who accepted the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) as all they needed. They quoted from none of these books, and the only things they quoted as Scripture were the books of the Old Testament. To accept

that God allowed the inspired writers to employ sources in composing historical books of the Bible does not negate inspiration by the Holy Spirit. If these men used sources, God still guided them by the Holy Spirit to correct, compile, and add to the uninspired source material. One of the gospel writers (Luke) apparently consulted various sources in compiling his letter (Luke 1:1-4). As was previously mentioned, Paul quoted Epimenides and Aratus in Acts 17, and quoted Epimenides again in Titus 1:12. It was not uncommon for the authors of the Bible to use or quote, by inspiration, either uninspired works or inspired works that no longer exist.

God obviously did not intend certain works to be preserved, because His hand would have guided their perpetuation, just as He guided the continuation of the canonical books. Like the lost Corinthian letter, it is likely that other inspired books were written that God intended for a particular **historical** setting, but did not intend to be preserved in the **canon** of the Bible. God has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him" (2 Peter 1:3), and our knowledge of Him is complete through the revealed Word. None of the books God intended to be in the Bible is lost, and the phrase "lost books" refers only to those books of which no record exists. Whatever these "lost books" contained is irrelevant, because we have the Word of God exactly as He wanted us to have it—nothing more, and certainly nothing less. —ZS

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Q Why did Adam not die immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, rather than several hundred years later?

And Jehovah commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof **thou shalt surely die**” (Genesis 2:16-17, emp. added).

A It was the dawn of mankind. Surrounded by all of the wonder and beauty of newly formed perfection, man enjoyed a harmonious relationship with his Father. On the sixth and final day of creation, man had been formed from the dust of the ground—a humble beginning for a being that was to be exalted and given dominion over all the other creatures. So dignified was this creature of dust, that he was given the unequivocal privilege of “walking with God in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). Jehovah had formed man in His image and after His likeness, and placed him in an earthly paradise; but Eden was not only a place of leisure—there was work to be done. Adam was given the tasks of tending and keeping the garden, and assigning names to the animals. After allowing Adam to see that none from the animal kingdom was suitable to be his companion, Jehovah created woman from Adam’s rib. Man now occupied a most perfect environment, with the perfect mate by his side. Truly, Jehovah had done everything possible to ensure His children’s comfort, and to make their lives full and complete. Adam and Eve were commanded to tend the garden paradise, and to be fruitful and multiply so that the Earth would be filled (Genesis 1:28; 2:15; cf. Isaiah 45:18).

After issuing these initial commands, the Lord delivered a single, solemn prohibition. Adam was permitted to eat of any tree in Eden he desired—save one. In the midst of the garden stood the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—a tree that was strictly forbidden, on penalty of death. The command, though ominous, was not grievous, as Jehovah demonstrated by setting it against a “background of broad permission” (Leupold, 1942, 1:127). One might question why God placed such a peculiar limitation on man, by allowing him to eat of every tree but one. Perhaps the tree was somehow dangerous to His children. Or maybe the fruit of the tree served only as a test—similar to the test Abraham was given in Genesis 22:1-19. Man, fashioned in the image of God, was given the capacity to make moral decisions, but with only “good” surrounding him, what was there to choose?

Only after a command was given, could a decision/response be made (cf. Aalders, 1981, p. 92), and the options were only too clear: man could live up to his potential as a creature made in the image of Divinity, or he could, as certain angels had in earlier times, rebel against his Holy Creator and Benefactor (2 Peter 2:4), obeying his own desires instead of sacred fiat. Good—or evil; those were his choices.

This tree, which, as it turned out, would change the course of human history forever, was planted in the midst of the garden near another tree of equal or greater significance—the Tree of Life. Seemingly, these two trees were planted side by side as a reminder to the inhabitants of the garden—as long as Jehovah’s words were heeded, the life-giving tree was readily accessible. It was this promise of ever-renewed life that Adam stood to lose, should he choose to disobey His Creator.

Genesis 3, the chapter that outlines the events that transpired directly after the happenings discussed above, is one of the saddest chapters in the entire Bible—perhaps second only to the heart-rending record of the Lord’s crucifixion. Evil entered paradise in the form of a serpent. John informs us in the Revelation that this serpent actually was Satan, the “deceiver of the whole world” (12:9). And “deceive” is precisely what he proceeded to do. Using a clever mix of persuasive words and partial truths, the devil convinced Eve to partake of the fruit, assuring her that she would “**not** surely die.” So she ate, and passed it on to Adam, who was as guilty as she. The tree had lived up to its potential. Adam and Eve knew what evil was; they now realized the horrible burden of guilt—the pervasive shame of sin. Remembering the penalty for eating the fruit, the couple ran and hid themselves, in fear of the wrath of God.

Jehovah had pledged death to the transgressor of His law. Satan, however, accused Him of exaggeration, and guaranteed Eve the knowledge of God. Whom would she believe? The fate of the human race was bound up in the decision that Eve faced on that day, and the penalty for that decision likewise affects us all. Paul commented in Romans: “Therefore, as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (5:12). Some have suggested that the devil spoke more accurately than God, because man **did not actually die** on the day he ate the forbidden fruit (see Beatty, as quoted by Hamilton, 1990, 1:172). If this were true, the statement of Paul would be of none effect. If this theory were correct, death would **not** have passed to all men. However, this old world hardly seems to house a society of immortal humans who

possess the promised knowledge of God. The very pains we endure are a result of the fall of man in the garden; of that there can be no doubt. Paul was accurate in his epistle, yet the Genesis text does not reveal the “immediate death” of the first sinners. Death is the penalty for sin, yet Adam lived for hundreds of years after his transgression. Could there possibly be some truth to the devil’s assessment after all?

Two things must be examined in this situation. First, we must consider the words of warning that Jehovah uttered on the day He actually gave Adam access to the trees of the garden. What is the intended definition of “death”? Second, knowing that “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise” (2 Peter 3:9), we can take a retrospective look back at the events that transpired after the fall, to see in what way the promised penalty was executed.

The words of God to Adam were: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof **thou shalt surely die**” (Genesis 2:16-17). In an earlier article that appeared in *Reason & Revelation* on this subject, Garry Brantley addressed the grammatics of this phrase:

[T]he usage of the phrase “you shall surely die” (*mot tamut*) indicates that a violent, physical death is under consideration. This grammatical construction juxtaposes an infinitive absolute (*mot*), and the imperfect verb (*tamut*), which provides the emphatic nuance you will “surely, or indeed” die (Lambdin, 1971, p. 158). While it is true that the word “die” can refer to natural causes or to violent death (Smick, 1980, 1:496), the manner in which the verb is used in this phrase indicates the latter. In fact, this grammatical construction appears several times in the Hebrew Bible, and commonly denotes a physical, violent death (1995, 15:23).

Three Old Testament texts are cited in which this exact wording (“thou shalt surely die”) is used: Genesis 20:7; 1 Samuel 14:44; and 1 Kings 2:37. Each of these passages indicates a physical death. Not only does the grammar itself seem to indicate that a physical death is under discussion, but the text also appears to lack any warrant for interpreting “death” in a purely figurative manner (cf. Brantley, 1995). In the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Smick discussed the word “death” in this context.

The normative OT teaching about death is presented in Gen 3:3, where God warns Adam and Eve that death is the result of rebellion against his commands. Since God’s purpose for our first parents was never ending life, the introduction of death was an undesirable but necessary result of disobedi-

ence. The physical corruption of the human body and the consequent suffering and pain brought about by the Fall were only the obvious symptoms of death. Death is the consequence and the punishment of sin (Harris, et al., 1980, 1:497).

When Jehovah issued the penalty for eating the fruit of the tree, He used terms that Adam could comprehend, lest the penalty be of no effect. While it is possible that Adam understood the concept of spiritual death (we do know that creation in the Divine image includes knowledge, righteousness, and holiness [Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24]—cf. Barnes, 1949, 6:127), it seems more likely that Adam better understood physical death. His entire existence had been in the presence of Jehovah, surrounded only by good. It is possible that he had witnessed the extermination of some plant or animal, but the abstract idea of spiritual death surely would have been difficult for him to grasp. Biblical commentator Matthew Henry took some exegetical license, and expanded upon the words “in that day shalt thou surely die,” when he wrote:

Thou shalt become mortal and capable of dying; the grant of immortality shall be recalled, and that defence [sic] shall depart from thee; Thou shalt become obnoxious to death, like a condemned malefactor that is dead in law ... nay, the harbingers and forerunners of death shall immediately seize thee and thy life, thenceforward, shall be a dying life: and this, surely; it is a settled rule, the soul that sinneth, it shall die (1706, 1:18).

As these and other authors have noted, God obviously intended a **physical** death for Adam and Eve. However, this is not to deny a **spiritual** death. The moment that man chose to follow his own desires—instead of God’s will—he cut himself off from God. Isaiah reminded us that our sin and iniquity have separated us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), and James taught that death is a separation (James 2:26). Without doubt, man perished spiritually on that day, but equally certain is the fact that God’s punishment for that sin was a physical death.

But was it to be an **immediate** death, or the beginning of a long process of death? The phrases “surely” and “in that day” are matters of interest. The footnote accompanying Genesis 2:17 in the King James Version gives this alternate reading to “thou shalt surely die”: **dying thou shalt die**. The double emphasis in the Hebrew of the word “die” (*mo*), makes the marginal translation the more literal, and, together with the context, indicates the beginning of a process that eventually would terminate in Adam’s death (the immediate result of separation from the tree of life). “In that day” (the

phrase that has caused so much confusion over the centuries) does not, of necessity, mean the very day that it happens; rather, it is an indication of the certainty of the command. Notice the comments of the following scholars regarding this difficult phrase:

It is just as naïve to insist that the phrase “in the day” means that on that very day death would occur. A little knowledge of the Hebrew idiom will relieve the tension here as well. For example, in 1 Kings 2:37 King Solomon warned a seditious Shimei, “The day you leave [Jerusalem] and cross the Kidron Valley [which is immediately outside the city walls on the east side of the city], you can be sure you will die.” Neither the 1 Kings nor the Genesis text implies **immediacy of action** on that very same day; instead they point to the **certainty of the predicated consequence** that would be set in motion by the act initiated on that day. Alternate wordings include **at the time when, at that time, now when and the day [when]** (see Gen. 5:1; Ex. 6:28; 10:28; 32:34) [Kaiser, et al., 1996, p. 92, emp. in orig.].

Hamilton, too, in commenting on Genesis 2:17, concluded by stating: “The verse is underscoring the certainty of death, not its chronology” (1990, 1:172).

Scholarly commentary aside, the true meaning of Jehovah’s intended punishment can be discovered in the conclusion of the story itself. Man, shameful of his nakedness and sin, hid himself in the garden. God called out to Adam, who timidly answered. Jehovah questioned Adam and Eve as a loving Father questions his children, trying to elicit a confession of guilt. “What is this thou hast done?” Though both attempted to pass the blame to another, they eventually confessed their sin. Then the sentencing began.

Unto the woman he said, “I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy conception; in pain thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” And unto Adam he said, “Because thou hast harkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, **till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return....**” Therefore, Jehovah God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from when he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the

Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Genesis 3:16-19, 23-24, emp. added).

The consequences of the first sin were many, and its results were far-reaching. Notice this observation by Albert Barnes in his commentary on Romans (5:12, which refers back to the sin and death of Adam, and, antithetically to life in Christ): “The evident meaning is, that the word ‘death,’ as here used by the apostle, refers to the **train of evils** which have been introduced by sin. It does not mean simply temporal death, condemnation, and exposure to eternal death, which is the consequence of transgression” (1949, 5:127, emp. in orig.). The dust in which Adam toiled (and in which we today still toil), he would become. From that point on, humanity would return to the dust whence it came. And that, in fact, has been our fate ever since. On the day of Adam’s sin, he began to die.

Exile from paradise, separation from the tree of life, the initiation of aging, and a severance from the very presence of God Almighty, were all consequences of our parents’ sin. That sin would have resulted in an eternal death, had it not been for the tender mercies of God. At some point, we all stand in the place of Adam and Eve—guilty of doing the exact opposite of what God has commanded. The inevitable result of our sin is likewise death—spiritual and eternal. Thanks be to God that, although we were dead in our trespasses, we have the opportunity to be made alive through His beloved Son (Ephesians 2:1 ff.). — **AB**

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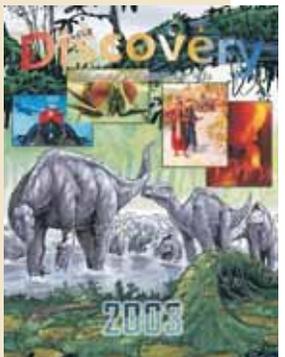
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