



# **The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins**

*Stephen J. Patterson*

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In this rigorously researched and thoughtful study, a leading Jesus Seminar scholar reveals the dramatic story behind the modern discovery of the earliest gospels, accounts that do not portray Jesus exclusively as a martyr but recover a lost ancient Christian tradition centered on Jesus as a teacher of wisdom.

The church has long advocated the Pauline view of Jesus as deity and martyr, emphasizing his death and resurrection. But another tradition also thrived from Christianity's beginnings, one that portrayed Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. In *The Lost Way*, Stephen Patterson, a leading New Testament scholar and former head of the Jesus Seminar, explores this lost ancient tradition and its significance to the faith.

Patterson explains how scholars have uncovered a Gospel that preceded at least three of those in the Bible, which is called Q. He painstakingly demonstrates how historical evidence points to the existence of this common source in addition to Mark—recognized as the earliest Gospel—that both Matthew and Luke used to write their accounts. Q contained a collection of Jesus's teachings without any narrative content and without accounts of the passion, though being the earliest version shared among his first followers—scripture that embodies a very different orientation to the Christian faith.

Patterson also explores other examples of this wisdom tradition, from the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas; to the emergence of Apollos, a likely teacher of Christian wisdom; to the main authority of the church in Jerusalem, Jesus's brother James. *The Lost Way* offers a profound new portrait of Jesus—one who can show us a new way to live.

## The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins Details

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# From Reader Review The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins for online ebook

## Brian Leport says

A thought provoking examination of the possible value of Q and Thomas for understanding at least one form of early Christianity. Personally, I'm still agnostic regarding Q's existence and skeptical that Thomas reflects as early a Christianity as Patterson suggests, but that doesn't detract from it's overall value in showing how certain traditions about Jesus remind us that early Christianity was quite diverse.

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## Amy Lawton says

Full disclosure: I received a copy of this book for free through the First Reads program here on Goodreads.

In one sentence: Patterson pulls off an accessible introduction to why the earliest teachings of the Christian movement have been lost to us and why we should care about recovering that wisdom.

I found this book to be a highly accessible review of what we can hypothesize about the lost gospel known as "Q" and what we know and can hypothesize about the Gospel of Thomas. Patterson, a Jesus Seminar scholar, presents history in an appealing narrative fashion. The book is an excellent resource because it contains as much of the texts of Thomas and Q as is possible (Q is obviously a reconstruction), and each chapter ends with a thorough list of resources for further study.

I also admire Patterson for presenting strong opinions and standing by those opinions. When he explains his translation of "kingdom of heaven" as "empire of God," or asserts that the apocalypse was a terrible story to begin with and is *never going to happen* (I agree!), he doesn't equivocate or apologize to the believers who would take issue. I appreciate it when authors openly state their own biases, because too many authors in this field are fearful of seeming dismissive of dearly held beliefs -- even when the book's premise is that the beliefs in question are based on ancient politics more than on what the historical Jesus would have *said*.

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## Mike Davis says

The main emphasis by the author is that early Christianity was based on the wisdom of Jesus' sayings rather than later emphasis by Paul and the subsequent church interpretations of the cross and its implications. He makes a very good case for this by looking at the "extraction" of the "Q" source of the New Testament gospels and also looking at the emphasis in the more recently discovered Gospel of Thomas, both of which pre-date Paul's letters and his emerging theological emphasis on the martyrdom of Jesus.

There is some redundancy in the text but overall it is an easy read for students of religious history and Christian theology. It takes us out of the confines of the canon and explores the origins of popular scripture. As with most non-canonical studies, this book may be a bit uncomfortable for evangelical fundamentalists, but it is an important view of what we think we know.

This book was received from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Stephen Thorsett says**

A fascinating, highly readable, and ultimately deeply personal and moving account of how modern scholarship has changed our understanding of the origins of the New Testament and the lives and beliefs of the early communities that gave birth to Christianity, by my Willamette University faculty colleague Stephen Patterson.

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### **D. says**

Fascinating! Highly recommend it, especially for empaths & spiritual-but-not-religious persons.

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### **Sweetpea says**

I received a free copy of this book from the Goodreads First Reads program in exchange for an honest review. Although I do not consider myself religious, I still found this book to be a fascinating read. Would recommend.

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### **Chris says**

I received this book as part of GoodReads First Reads giveaway.

Interesting book. I'm not qualified to comment on the history but some of the author's conclusions seem off and maybe informed by his own religious beliefs or how he would like Christianity to be interpreted. I'll offer my own disclaimer, I'm a Roman Catholic and that's the lens I read through. I like to imagine that I'm fairly reasonable and open minded though.

The Lost Way is about the so called 'Gospel of Thomas' which was found in Egypt in the early 20th century and the Q manuscript (a hypothesized source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke alongside Mark). The author discusses how both were discovered (Thomas in the sands of Egypt and Q hiding in Luke and Matthew), discusses the content of each, their relations to the 4 canonical gospels and the context in which Q, Thomas and the 4 canonical gospels were written in.

Most interesting to me was the way that scholars are using comparisons between Thomas and Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to try and figure out the earliest beliefs of Christianity. So, if Matthew, Luke and Thomas have similar stories, then scholars can compare them and try to come up with a plausible story from which all three are descended. Admittedly, I'm suspicious of some of the conclusions presented here but that's mainly because I don't really understand the process of working backward to figure out source material. I'm sure the folks behind this are very smart and have some idea what they're doing.

But, the author begins to lose me when he interprets the results. To summarize, Thomas and the

hypothesized Q are basically lists of sayings, not much story just 'quotes' from Jesus and Mark is more focused on the story of Jesus' travels, miracles and Crucifixion. Thomas' sayings show a great Platonist influence (the physical world is an illusion and irrelevant, salvation is spiritually reuniting with the One, male and female joining together to become genderless, etc.).

So far, I'm with the author but then he decides that the Q sayings and Thomas represent the beliefs of the earliest Christians and that Jesus' original movement was a sort of peasant's revolt against the Roman empire. And he completely ignores Mark's Jesus calling for repentance or warning of the coming judgement. Now I'm not contesting that Jesus preached a radical subversive message, but the author pretty much ignores that Jesus called sinners to repentance and his warnings about the wages of sin.

Instead he spends the conclusion of the book waxing eloquent about how groovy (I'm paraphrasing, I don't think the word groovy is ever used) it would be if Christians got rid of the cross and focused on Thomas' teachings about how eternal life is gained by shedding our material bodies, male and female joining to become one, etc. Which, honestly, feels like the author is imposing his own issues with orthodox Christianity on the text (I'm just speculating though).

Warning: preachiness ahead

But he does make a very salient point about why orthodox Christianity prevailed and the eponymous 'Way' disappeared into the mists of time. The Way ultimately had nothing to differentiate it from every other esoteric sect that wandered the earth while Christianity preached a God who humbled and sacrificed Himself to save his wayward children, that poured Himself out to reconcile all mankind. Now, as I noted, I'm biased but I know which one I find more compelling.

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## **Ross Wilcox says**

Great discussion of the Gospel of Thomas and the Q source. He does an awesome job of extrapolating from the text concrete portraits of early Christian communities. Was early Christianity really a religious movement? Or was it more philosophical? Or political? Or even economic? Super interesting. Also, it has reconstructed passages from Q and the whole text of the Gospel of Thomas, which is awesome.

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## **Dan Wilkinson says**

Patterson thoughtfully and engagingly explores the origins, context, text and interpretation of the Q Gospel and the Gospel of Thomas.

Read my full review here: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/unfundam...>

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## **Roger Carrillo says**

You might think a scholarly tome would be boring and at the beginning it was a hard read. As it progressed you get a real sense of history and how lost gospels are important in understanding how Christianity developed and was captured by a very parochial point of view that justified much of the violence in the

history of the religion. The book is worth reading if you value alternatives to accepted knowledge.

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