

The Gospel of Judas
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[Note: The Gospel of Judas is referenced below as 'GJ.']

The "PR Hype"

TV Special, Sunday, April 9

3 books published Ap. 6-7, 2006:

Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, Gregor Wurst, and Bart Ehrman. *The Gospel of Judas*. Washington DC: National Geographic, 2006. [This is the important book; it contains the complete English translation of GJ along with various related discussions. Ehrman's chapter is rather over-blown and sensationalized—about par for his recent work.]

Herbert Krosney. *The Lost Gospel: The Quest for the Gospel of Judas Iscariot*. Washington DC: National Geographic, 2006. [This is a narrative account of the supposed history of the MS. Reads more like a soap opera/novel in places. Not a pretty story.]

James M. Robinson. *The Secrets of Judas*. NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006. [Some sour grapes here, and it rambles quite a bit, but it provides a larger picture of the history of Codex Tchacos and GJ—which did *not* take the world of scholarship by surprise, despite what you read in the media; its existence has been known for some time.]

Headlines/Media Claims

- *Guardian* (UK), 4/7/06: "Judas: This Is What Really Happened"
- *Boston Globe*: "Last week's bombshell release of the Gospel of Judas had many Christians wondering whether the familiar story of Good Friday needed some updating."
- *NY Times*, 4/6/06, "gives new insights into the relationship of Jesus and the disciple who betrayed him"
- National Geographic spokesman: "threaten[s] two millenniums of Christian doctrine"

Scholars

Elaine Pagels

- "explode[s] the myth of a monolithic religion"

Bart Ehrman

- "rocks the world of scholars"
- "among the greatest finds from Christian antiquity"
- "will open new vistas for understanding Jesus"

- “turns the theology of traditional Christianity on its head and reverses everything we ever thought about the nature of true Christianity”

So just what is this?

- There is a real document known as the Gospel of Judas and a copy of it has just been published.
- Irenaeus, AD 180, *Against Heresies*, 1.31.1.
- E. Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1963; ed. Schneemelcher, ET 1991, R. Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:386-87

What is new now...

- We have a copy of (much of) the actual text of GJ as found in the newly published Codex Tchacos.
Contains:
 - Letter of Peter to Philip (the text of which we have had previously)
 - First Revelation of James (the text of which we have had previously)
 - Gospel of Judas (new)
 - Book of Allogenes (new)

Date: Manuscript (Codex Tchacos) date: prob. 4th C. AD (GJ originally written mid-2d C.)

<http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/index.html>

Brief history of the MS

- Supposedly discovered in 1970s
- Offered on antiquities black market for \$3 million
- Sat in a bank vault in Hicksville, NY nearly 20 years
- Examined by Yale Univ. lib. staff, but declined to buy illegal document (2000)
- Several questionable deals followed
- Eventually sold to Maecennas Foundation in Switzerland for \$1.5 million + ½ any commercial proceeds from selling *contents*
- National Geographic: \$1 million for commercial rights

Not a surprise to scholars

- That such a MS was in circulation has been known since 1980s
- Has been announced and discussed at professional conferences, in journals, and on web
- The “news” is just media sensationalism to capitalize on TV series and recoup some of NG’s \$1 million investment

Content of GJ

- GJ is “stock” Gnosticism, very similar to the other Gnostic writings that were discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 (ca. 46 writings, 1,000 pgs./text, Coptic).
- Apocryphon of James; Gospel of Truth; Apocalypse of Adam; The Concept of Our Great Power; A Valentinian Exposition; etc.

Gnosticism

- A very diverse constellation of mystical philosophies
- Some pagan, some Jewish, some with accretions from “Christian” thought
- Gnosticism *post-dates* the NT by more than a century. There is no Gnosticism in NT; contra Bultmann; see Edwin Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (2d ed., Baker, 1983).
- Gnostic tenets:
 - Radical dualism: divine vs. created matter
 - Origin of the world resulted from ignorance and error on the part of the “god” (Saklas = “foolish” = OT god) who was so foolish as to create the material universe and humanity.
 - A hierarchy of beings extending from God down through aeons to the demiurge.
 - Man’s true nature is a spark of heavenly light imprisoned in a material body
 - “Salvation” comes by secret knowledge (γνῶσις) available only to an elite group, but this is opposed by hostile powers
- GJ exudes this philosophy throughout; it is not a “Christian” gospel in any sense, but a Gnostic one

GJ selected content

34. “The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot during a week three days before he celebrated Passover.”

35. “But [the disciples’] spirits did not dare to stand before [him; i.e., Jesus], except for Judas Iscariot. He was able to stand before him, but he could not look him in the eyes, and he turned his face away.
“Judas [said] to him, ‘I know who you are and where you have come from. You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo. And I am not worthy to utter the name of the one who has sent you.’”

44. “Judas said, ‘Master ... I have seen a great vision.... In the vision I saw myself as the twelve disciples were stoning me and [45] persecuting [me severely]....’

46. “Jesus answered and said, ‘You will become the thirteenth, and you will be cursed by the other generations—and you will come to rule over them. In the last days they will curse your ascent [47] to the holy [generation].’”

56. “Truly [I] say to you, Judas..., you will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.”

57. “Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. The star that leads the way is your star.”

“Judas lifted up his eyes and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it. Those standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud, saying...”

58. “Their high priests murmured because [he; i.e., Jesus] had gone into the guest room for his prayer. But some scribes were watching carefully in order to arrest him during the prayer, for they were afraid of the people, since he was regarded as a prophet.

“They approached Judas and said to him, ‘What are you doing here? You are Jesus’ disciple.’

“Judas answered them as they wished. And he received some money and handed him over to them.”

The Gospel of Judas

Assessment

- Details of what Judas did are very sketchy—requires a fertile imagination to make much of a story out of it.
- There is very little that is distinctively Christian here; most is stock Gnosticism (from which I spared you in not citing all the mystical speculation!)
- “When one reads most of these NH texts, one is impressed by their gibberish”!
[Fitzmeyer]

Impact?

- Very little of significance in terms of scholarship, either of 1st C. NT studies or even of 2d C. Gnosticism. It tells us nothing new of Jesus. It is 2d C. mythology, not 1st C. history.
- BUT... despite the dearth of substantive material, such media frenzies *do* have an impact on the church.
- Impact? *NY Times*, 4/6/06
 - “The discoveries of Gnostic texts have shaken up Biblical scholarship by revealing the diversity of beliefs and practices among early followers of Jesus. [sic]”
 - “As the findings have trickled down to churches and universities, they have produced a new generation of Christians who now regard the Bible not as the literal word of God, but as a product of historical and political forces that determined which texts should be included in the canon, and which edited out.
 - “For that reason, the discoveries have proved deeply troubling for many believers.”

Postmodernity's impact

- No absolute truth
- Authority is a political power grab
- Revisionist history: assume that the victors always rewrite history to make them look like the good guys
- Historical study ultimately becomes an impossible project in PM, and we are reduced to community-based preferences with a constructionist view of reality.