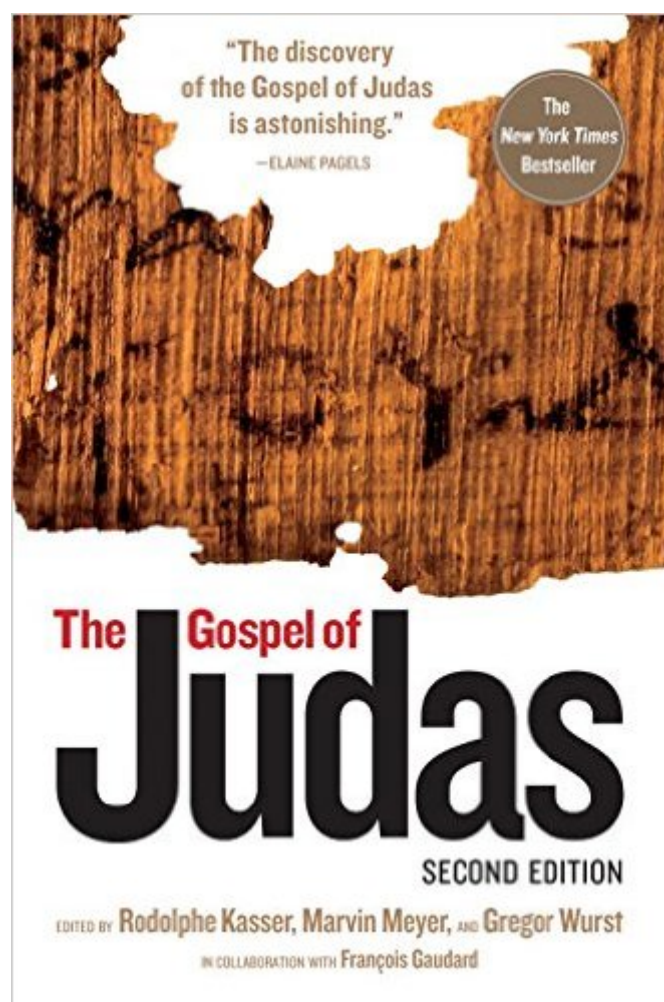


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The Gospel Of Judas, Second Edition



Synopsis

For 1,600 years its message lay hidden. When the bound papyrus pages of this lost gospel finally reached scholars who could unlock its meaning, they were astounded. Here was a gospel that had not been seen since the early days of Christianity, and which few experts had even thought existed—a gospel told from the perspective of Judas Iscariot, history’s ultimate traitor. And far from being a villain, the Judas that emerges in its pages is a hero. In this radical reinterpretation, Jesus asks Judas to betray him. In contrast to the New Testament Gospels, Judas Iscariot is presented as a role model for all those who wish to be disciples of Jesus and is the one apostle who truly understands Jesus. Discovered by farmers in the 1970s in Middle Egypt, the codex containing the gospel was bought and sold by antiquities traders, secreted away, and carried across three continents, all the while suffering damage that reduced much of it to fragments. In 2001, it finally found its way into the hands of a team of experts who would painstakingly reassemble and restore it. The Gospel of Judas has been translated from its original Coptic to clear prose, and is accompanied by commentary that explains its fascinating history in the context of the early Church, offering a whole new way of understanding the message of Jesus Christ.

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Customer Reviews

This new book by the National Geographic Society is bound to be of interest. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the outline of the lost gospel being translated and highlighted here, it still presents an intriguing look into the early mind of Christians, who were a very diverse group. There were

originally more than four gospels, and literally hundreds of apostolic letters and manuscripts floating around the ancient world. These were of variable quality literarily and theologically, but it took hundreds of years for the Christian community to come to a consensus about what should be included and what should be excluded. Generally, Gnostic texts were excluded, and this lost gospel of Judas is most likely a Gnostic production, according to the authors. It was referenced by early church leaders such as Irenaeus, who argued strongly for the now-standard vision of four canonical gospels. What is the issue with this gospel? The central idea that places this text at odds with the canonical gospels is that it paints Judas in a very different light - Judas is no longer the villain who betrays Jesus for his own personal gain, or because of his own spiritual confusion, but rather an obedient servant who, when turning Jesus in to the authorities, is simply following Jesus' own direction as a necessary step for God's plan to come to fulfillment. Judas is portrayed as the closest of the apostles to Jesus, a leader among the apostles, and thus perhaps the object of jealousy. To be sure, these ideas are not new. Varying images of Judas and confusion about his role have been present throughout much of Christian history, with no single definitive vision of his personality nor his action superseding all others. (See the book on Judas by scholar Kim Paffenroth, published recently). The document highlighted in this text is a 31-page, fragile manuscript dated to approximately the year 300, as a copy of a story that may have originated 150 or more years earlier. The manuscript itself has a colourful history, having been bought, sold, and stolen multiple times. As this book is released, the manuscript is on display at the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C. This book promises to be of interest to historians, theologians, biblical scholars, and others who find the early days of Christianity fascinating. Even those (like me) who are not willing to lend canonical authority to this rediscovered gospel will find that it brings up ideas and questions that are worth considering. This volume goes along with a companion book, 'The Lost Gospel: The Quest for the Gospel of Judas Iscariot' by Herbert Krosney, also published by the National Geographic Society. That book details more of the story about the manuscript. This book features the manuscript itself, a new translation, and commentary by biblical scholars who can help to place it in context. Theological analyses and textual issues, as well as a discussion about the importance of the Gnostics for early Christian development are found here.

The New Testament portrays Judas as the corrupt disciple who betrayed Christ, and this negative portrait of him, with additional hateful characteristics, has prevailed for centuries. Only in recent times has the figure of Judas been seen in the context of very ancient Hellenic cults in which gods have to be killed by a 'sacred executioner' to be reborn, after which this sacred executioner is

disowned by and driven out of the community. These ideas were then incorporated into the teachings of the Gnostics, where the god becomes a Saviour figure who would descend from the Realm of Light into the Realm of Darkness to redeem mankind and then to return to the Realm of Light. Such and similar Gnostic ideas had an influence on certain groups of pre-Christian Judaism and then on early Christianity also. So far these influences have been deduced by comparing parts of the Dead Sea Scrolls and parts of St John's Gospel with Gnostic works; but the rediscovery of the Gospel of Judas gives us a text that is so explicitly Gnostic that it actually wholly subverts the message of the Gospels in the New Testament. As a result it was of course declared heretical by Bishop Irenaeus in 180 and suppressed. Its text was lost until a manuscript of it in Coptic, dating to around 300 AD, was found in Egypt in around 1978; its fragments, making up 85% of the original, were painstakingly reassembled; and the work was finally published in 2006. The book under review gives us a translation of the reconstituted text, followed by four illuminating essays of explanation and commentary. That by Bart D. Ehrman gives a lucid account of the basic teachings shared by the various Gnostic schools; and a more difficult chapter by Martin Meyer links the teaching of the Judas Gospel with other Gnostic texts, notably the Secret Book of John, in which some of the ideas of the Judas Gospel are more fully developed. The basic and most startling feature of the Judas Gospel is that Judas was the only disciple who really understood Jesus. Jesus chastizes in the most forthright terms the other disciples for worshipping a false God. This false God - the God of the Old Testament - is the Demiurge (this Gospel refers to his helpers Nebro, the 'rebel' and Saklas, the 'fool') who created this very imperfect world - an idea basic to Gnosticism. The true God is not a Creator God, but a (male) Spirit with a female emanation called Barbelo and a Self-Generated emanation who is Jesus. The Jesus emanation is pure Spirit but appears on earth in a human envelope, so that he only appears to be human (a doctrine known as docetism); but he needs to be free from this envelope, and he tells Judas that it is to be the latter's mission 'to sacrifice the man that clothes me'. It is in obedience to this command that Judas hands over Jesus to his enemies. Jesus has told Judas that humans are divided into those who also have a spark of the divine in them - and they, like Judas, will live on after death - and those, like the disciples and others who worship the false God, who lack the divine spark and will not live on after death. All this is mixed up with a complex cosmology which owes something to Plato's linking of individual souls with individual stars. Gnosticism is an interesting attempt to explain that the existence of imperfection in the created world by attributing this creation to an inferior deity. By proscribing Gnosticism (and, later, Manicheism), Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, was left with the problem of explaining how a Creator God could have created such a flawed world.

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