

## *Who wrote the Gospel of Judas and does it fit into Christian history?*

The Gospel of Judas was found in the late 1970s in a cave near El-Minya, Egypt. This self-proclaimed gospel consists of 13 pages of a 66-page codex (book) containing other writings yet to be published. After extensive tests of the papyrus, ink, and writing style, the manuscript dates to the third century AD. It was written in ancient Coptic and, like the Nag Hammadi Library, was a translation from Greek. After its discovery, the manuscript was put on the market for around three million dollars, but no one was willing to pay such an exorbitant price. The manuscript was then placed in a safety deposit box in New York, where improper storage resulted in severe damage to the manuscript.

In April of 2006, the National Geographic Society announced the publication of the English translation of the Gospel of Judas. It was described as a dramatic and important discovery, one that would challenge the official doctrine of the church. The press claimed this gospel would give new insights into the relationship between Jesus and Judas by portraying Judas in a positive light. In reality, the gospel of Judas poses no significant challenge to historic Christianity, but underscores the reliability of Christian history.

The original gospel of Judas was likely written between 130 to 170 AD, eliminating the real Judas as a possible author. The teachings of Gnosticism are clearly present: classic spirit/body dualism, emanations, salvation by secret knowledge, and the belief that the material world is evil. The early church tells us the gospel of Judas was written by a Gnostic sect called the Cainites. This group was known for taking evil and rebellious figures from the Bible (such as Cain, Korah, Esau and the Sodomites) and recasting them in a positive light. In the gospel of Judas, Judas is portrayed as a hero, the only disciple who truly understands. For example, in this gospel, Jesus says to Judas, "But you will exceed all of them [the disciples]. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me." In other words, Judas would help release Jesus' spirit from the prison of his physical body by handing him over to be crucified. Around 180 AD, Irenaeus wrote, "They claim that the betrayer Judas was well informed of all these things, and that he, knowing the truth as none other, brought about the mystery of the betrayal. . . they produced a spurious account of this sort, which they call the Gospel of Judas." It's likely that this recent discovery is a copy of the Gnostic gospel of which Irenaeus wrote.

There will always be those who hype these discoveries. They will accuse the church of conspiracies and cover-ups. This sensationalism sells books and sows seeds of doubt concerning the historical accuracy of the Bible. A good grasp of church history will help one understand that the Gnostic writings, including the gospel of Judas, were not lost; they were rejected—and rightly so. The early church saw these writings for what they were: complete fabrications by a heretical sect.

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