
The Gospel of Judas (Michael Gleghorn)

Contributed by Michael Gleghorn

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There's absolutely no reason at all for faithful Christians to be worried about all the hype surrounding the recent release of the Gospel of Judas. Although the gospel is obviously of great interest to scholars studying the variety of religious perspectives about Jesus and early Christianity which floated around the ancient world in the second to fourth centuries A.D., nevertheless, this gospel will almost certainly not give us any new and reliable information about the real Jesus of history.

According to Wilford and Goodstein, in an article for the New York Times (April 7, 2006), "The 26-page Judas text is believed to be a copy in the Coptic language, made around A.D. 300, of the original Gospel of Judas, written in Greek the century before." If this is the same text referred to by the second century church father Irenaeus, then it probably dates to the second half of the second century. This would put it a full hundred years or so after the New Testament gospels—all of which were authored in the second half of the first century A.D.

The evidence seems to indicate that the Gospel of Judas is a Gnostic document. These documents were universally rejected by the early church fathers—and for good reasons. In the first place, unlike the New Testament documents (which date to the first century A.D.), the Gnostic texts are late, dating to the second to fourth centuries A.D. Because of this, the Gnostic documents, unlike the New Testament documents, were definitely not written by apostles or companions of the apostles. In other words, the Gospel of Judas is not an eyewitness account written by one of Jesus' original followers. Finally, the Gospel of Judas, like all Gnostic texts, contains teaching and elements which are clearly unorthodox and heretical, at least when judged by the standard of the New Testament gospels. It's for reasons such as these that the church fathers (very wisely, in my opinion) rejected these books as unfit for inclusion in the New Testament.

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This is a very quick and short response to the news announcement about this "gospel." For more in-depth analysis of why the Gnostic documents are not trustworthy accounts of the life of Jesus or His disciples, please see the Nag Hammadi section of "Redeeming The Da Vinci Code" here. My colleague Patrick Zukeran has since written a longer assessment of this document here.