

## **The Judas Gospel**

### **By Rev. Wing So**

#### **1. The discovery of The Judas Gospel**

- a. Hanna was a Cairo antiquities dealer. He bought this document from a village trader who made a living scouting for such materials. Exactly where and how the trader had come across this collection is not clear. He is dead now and his relatives are strangely reticent when challenged to reveal the site of the finding.
- b. Then Hanna tried to take the manuscript overseas, but before he could do it, his entire stock disappeared in a robbery. Then the stolen goods were spirited out of the country and ended up in the hands of another dealer. Later Hanna succeeded in retrieving part of the hoard, including the Judas gospel. This story is given by Hanna and nobody can verify it.
- c. In April 2000, he made a sale. The buyer was Freida Nussberger-Tachacos, an Egyptian born Greek and a Zurich antiquities dealer. She bought the gospel of Judas for around \$300,000.
- d. With the help of Rodolphe Kasser, a Swiss expert in such Coptic texts, they were able to identify the document as the Judas gospel. Tchacos turned it over to the Maecenas Foundation for Ancient Art, which restored and translated the manuscript and plans to give it to Cairo's Coptic Museum. The National Geographical Society and the Waitt Institute for Historical Discovery are funding the work, and the Society has received the right to publish the complete gospel and cover it on print and television.
- e. When Kasser reviewed the manuscript, it was in very bad shape. The manuscript was so brittle that it would crumble at the slightest touch. However, with the help of computer, they were able to reassemble more than 80% of the text in five years , and translated 26-page document into English.

#### **2. What is the Judas Gospel?**

- a. The Gospel of Judas was written by the Gnostics around ca 150. The present manuscript was circulated around ca 300. The Gnostics were condemned by the early church fathers as heresies. Many Bible Scholars believe that Gnosticism was present even in the time of the apostles.
- b. Gnosticism—Gnosticism is basically a Hellenized version of the Judeo-Christian faith. The Greek believed that there are two worlds, the visible and the invisible, the visible is bad and evil and the invisible is good. The visible is the copy of the invisible. Such philosophy is a direct contradiction of the Christian doctrine of both the creation and incarnation. Therefore these Gnostics tried to harmonize such discrepancies by

“reducing” the divinity of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is not fully God. He became God when the Spirit entered into His body in baptism, and then he returned to fully human when the spirit left Him during His crucifixion. Gnosis means “knowledge” in Greek. Every body, like Jesus, possesses this gnosis ( the Spirit ), the ultimate source of goodness, and a spark of divine power. But this power is cut off by the material world around them.

c. The Gospel of Judah is only one of the many books written by the Gnostics in the second and third century. The others are the Gospel of Thomas ca.110, the Gospel of Mary ca.100, Gospel of Truth ca.150 Secret Book of John ca150. Some have been rediscovered, such as the Gospel of Thomas. All these books were condemned by the Early Church as heresies.

d. In this Gospel of Judas, Judas was portrayed as a hero. Unlike the other disciples, he truly understands Christ’s message. The Gnostics believe that the body is the obstacle to our spirituality, and Jesus longed to be liberated by being crucified on the cross. His soul, will then, and only then, be totally liberated. Judas understands this truth and Christ’s desire. In handing Jesus over to the authorities, he is actually doing his master’s bidding, knowing full well the fate he will bring on himself. Jesus warns him: “ You will be cursed.”.

### **3. Is the document reliable?**

a. In the past, there are a lot of so called “ great discoveries” of Biblical artifacts. For, example, an empty limestone box said to have held the bones of James, brother of Jesus, attracted massive crowds when it was displayed in 2002—but soon it turned out to be an ingenious fake. Is this one too?

b. According to the National Geographical Society, tests on five separate samples from the papyrus and the leather binding date the codex to sometime between A.D.220 and 340. The ink appears to be ancient recipe. The language is Coptic—Egyptian written in Greek character which was a common language in the fourth century. It seems to me that though there may be some mystery regarding the discovery of this document, I do not have any evidences of fraud.

### **4. Does this discovery discredit the traditional Christian faith?**

a. The alleged theory—some people alleged that after Jesus’ death, early Christians shared accounts of his life and teachings. Dozens were written down, but church fathers chose only four for the New Testament. They rejected all the others. With the help of Constantine, the church was able to keep the four Gospels in the canon while all the other accounts vanished for the fear of political persecution. ( cf. Dan Brown’s theory in his book Da Vinci Code) The discovery of this document proves that this

theory is true.

b. Such theory does not stand if we understand the whole situation. Let me give some of the reasons why this is so:

. The four gospels were much earlier than these so-called gospels. Mark was dated A.D.65, Matthew A.D. 70 and Luke A.D.70 and John A.D. 80. Almost all these Gnostic Gospels are dated after 100A.D.

.Early church fathers also mentioned these so-called Gospels and condemned them as heresies. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, condemned Gospel of Judas as “ fictitious history” in ca.180.Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, condemned Gospel of Judas in ca.375. In other words these Gospels were known to the early church fathers , but they condemned them as heresies.

. The content of Gospel of Judas is inconsistent with all the other books of the New Testament. No scholars questioned the Pauline authorship of many New Testament books and the Gospel of Judas directly contradicts with the teaching of Paul.

. History tells us that the church fathers did not choose these four Gospels out of many. In fact, long before the appearance of these so-called Gospels, the four Gospels had already been accepted and circulated among all the Christian churches as if they were the Word of God. They canonized these four Gospels and the other New Testament books in the fourth century simply because they wanted to safeguard the purity of the Bible against any heresies especially the Gnostic ones. In other words, the selection of these 27 books of the New Testament is a very natural process, and not an arbitrary one.

. Finally, Gnosticism was well known as heresy even in the New Testament time. Thus, the discovery of this document only proves that our early church fathers did the right thing in condemning them as heresies.