

## A Spectator's Guide to the Gospel of Judas

by Dr. John Dickson,

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Sydney.

1. We've known of the existence of a 'Gospel of Judas' ever since Bishop Irenaeus toward the end of the second century made reference to a newly devised Gospel designed to cast Judas as the hero of the faith (and all the other apostles as ill-informed).
2. The sole manuscript copy of the Gospel of Judas was discovered in Egypt in the mid-1970s.
3. The manuscript itself dates to AD 300.
4. The document is a Coptic translation of an earlier Greek text composed in the mid-to-late second century, 100 years after Jesus (at the earliest).
5. The text, which is fragmentary, would fill about 10 pages of a modern Bible (though it is unlikely ever to appear there!).
6. The document is clearly *Gnostic*, that is, part of a lively second century movement which claimed true 'knowledge' (*gnosis*) about the spiritual realm was passed on by Jesus secretly to close confidants, in this case Judas.
7. The core claim of the Gospel of Judas is that the eleven other apostles were deluded and worshipped a lesser deity they presumed to be the true God. Jesus, however, took Judas aside a few days before his death and revealed to him the truth about the myriad of spiritual worlds and deities over which he (Judas), as the leader of true Christianity, would one day rule. Jesus is quite explicit: no one from the generation of the eleven apostles had true *gnosis*. Judas is the great priest who sacrifices the body of Jesus and so is elevated to celestial, if not historical, glory.
8. No scholar is claiming the historical Judas produced the text.
9. No scholar is claiming the text records the teaching of the historical Jesus.
10. All scholars approach this text—as they do the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, etc.—as important evidence of the variety of 'Christian' beliefs in the second and third centuries.
11. The full text (in English translation) can be downloaded at:  
[http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/\\_pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf](http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/_pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf)

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