

THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

Translated by Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, and Gregor Wurst, in collaboration with François Gaudard. From "The Gospel of Judas" edited by Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, and Gregor Wurst

The Gospel of Judas is a Gnostic gospel whose content consists of conversations between the Disciple Judas Iscariot and Jesus Christ. It is believed to have been written by Gnostic followers of Jesus, rather than by Judas himself, and probably dates from no earlier than the 2nd century, since it contains late 2nd century theology. In 180 A.D., Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, wrote a document in which he railed against this gospel, indicating the book was already in circulation. The only copy of the Gospel of Judas known to exist is a Coptic language text that has been carbon dated to AD 280, plus or minus 60 years. It has been suggested that the text derives from an earlier Greek version. A translation of the text was first published in early 2006 by the National Geographic Society.

In contrast to the canonical gospels which paint Judas as a betrayer of Christ who delivered him up to the authorities for crucifixion, the Gospel of Judas portrays Judas's actions as done in obedience to instructions given by Christ. The document also suggests that Christ planned the course of events which led to his death. This portrayal seems to conform to a notion current in some forms of Gnosticism, that the human form is a spiritual prison, that Judas thus served Christ by helping to release Christ's soul from its physical constraints, and that two kinds of human beings exist: the men furnished with the immortal soul which is "from the eternal realms" and "will abide there always" ("the strong and holy generation...with no ruler over it", to whom Judas belongs), and the other ones, the majority of mankind, who are mortal and therefore unable to reach the salvation. The Gospel of Judas does not claim that the other disciples knew about Jesus's true teachings. On the contrary, it asserts that they had not learned the true Gospel, which Jesus taught only to Judas Iscariot, the sole follower belonging to the "holy generation" among the disciples.

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The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot during a week three days before he celebrated Passover.

When Jesus appeared on earth, he performed miracles and great wonders for the salvation of humanity. And since some [walked] in the way of righteousness while others walked in their transgressions, the twelve disciples were called. He began to speak with them about the mysteries beyond the world and what would take place at the end. Often he did not appear to his disciples as himself, but he was found among them as a child.

One day he was with his disciples in Judea, and he found them gathered together and seated in pious observance. When he [approached] his disciples, [34] gathered together and seated and offering a prayer of thanksgiving over the bread, [he] laughed. The disciples said to [him], "Master, why are you laughing at [our] prayer of thanksgiving? We have done what is right." He answered and said to them, "I am not laughing at you. <You> are not doing this because of your own will but because it is through this that your god [will be] praised." They said, "Master, you are [...] the son of our god." Jesus said to them, "How do you know me? Truly [I] say to you, no generation of the people that are among you will know me."

When his disciples heard this, they started getting angry and infuriated and began blaspheming against him in their hearts. When Jesus observed their lack of [understanding, he said] to them, "Why has this agitation led you to anger? Your god who is within you and [...] [35] have provoked you to anger [within] your souls. [Let] any one of you who is [strong enough] among human beings bring out the perfect human and stand before my face." They all said, "We have the strength." But their spirits did not dare to stand before [him], except for Judas Iscariot. He was able to stand before him, but he could not look him in the eyes, and he turned his face away. Judas [said] to him, "I know who you are and where you have come from. You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo. And I am not worthy to utter the name of the one who has sent you." Knowing that Judas was reflecting upon something that was exalted, Jesus said to him, "Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it, but you will grieve a great deal. [36] For someone else will

replace you, in order that the twelve [disciples] may again come to completion with their

god.” Judas said to him, “When will you tell me these things, and [when] will the great day of light dawn for the generation?” But when he said this, Jesus left him.

The next morning, after this happened, Jesus [appeared] to his disciples again. They said to him, “Master, where did you go and what did you do when you left us?” Jesus said to them, “I went to another great and holy generation.” His disciples said to him, “Lord, what is the great generation that is superior to us and holier than us, that is not now in these realms?” When Jesus heard this, he laughed and said to them, “Why are you thinking in your hearts about the strong and holy generation? [37] Truly [I] say to you, no one born [of] this aeon will see that [generation], and no host of angels of the stars will rule over that generation, and no person of mortal birth can associate with it, because that generation does not come from [...] which has become [...]. The generation of people among [you] is from the generation of humanity [...] power, which [... the] other powers [...] by [which] you rule.” When [his] disciples heard this, they each were troubled in spirit. They could not say a word. Another day Jesus came up to [them]. They said to [him], “Master, we have seen you in a [vision], for we have had great [dreams ...] night [...].” [He said], “Why have [you ... when] <you> have gone into hiding?” [38]

They [said, “We have seen] a great [house with a large] altar [in it, and] twelve men—they are the priests, we would say—and a name; and a crowd of people is waiting at that altar, [until] the priests [... and receive] the offerings. [But] we kept waiting.” [Jesus said], “What are [the priests] like?” They [said, “Some ...] two weeks; [some] sacrifice their own children, others their wives, in praise [and] humility with each other; some sleep with men; some are involved in [slaughter]; some commit a multitude of sins and deeds of lawlessness. And the men who stand [before] the altar invoke your [name], [39] and in all the deeds of their deficiency, the sacrifices are brought to completion [...].” After they said this, they were quiet, for they were troubled.

Jesus said to them, “Why are you troubled? Truly I say to you, all the priests who stand before that altar invoke my name. Again I say to you, my name has been written on this [...] of the generations of the stars through the human generations. [And they] have planted trees without fruit, in my name, in a shameful manner.” Jesus said to them, “Those you have seen receiving the offerings at the altar—that is who you are. That is the god you serve, and you are those twelve men you have seen. The cattle you have seen brought for sacrifice are the many people you lead astray [40] before that altar. [...] will stand and make use of my name in this way, and generations of the pious will remain loyal to him. After hi another man will stand there from [the fornicators], and another [will] stand there from the slayers of children, and another from those who sleep with men, and those who abstain, and the rest of the people of pollution and lawlessness and error, and those who say, ‘We are like angels’; they are the stars that bring everything to its conclusion. For to the human generations it has been said, ‘Look, God has received your sacrifice from the hands of a priest’—that is, a minister of error. But it is the Lord, the Lord of the universe, who commands, ‘On the last day they will be put to shame.’” [41] Jesus said [to them], “Stop sac[rificing ...] which you have [...] over the altar, since they are over your stars and your angels and have already come to their

conclusion there. So let them be [ensnared] before you, and let them go [—about 15 lines missing—] generations [...]. A baker cannot feed all creation [42] under [heaven].

And [...] to them [...] and [...] to us and [...]. Jesus said to them, “Stop struggling with me. Each of you has his own star, and every[body—about 17 lines missing—] [43] in [...] who has come [... spring] for the tree [...] of this aeon [...] for a time [...] but he has come to water God’s paradise, and the [generation] that will last, because [he] will not defile the [walk of life of] that generation, but [...] for all eternity.”

Judas said to [him, “Rabb]i, what kind of fruit does this generation produce?” Jesus said, “The souls of every human generation will die. When these people, however, have completed the time of the kingdom and the spirit leaves them, their bodies will die but their souls will be alive, and they will be taken up.” Judas said, “And what will the rest of the human generations do?” Jesus said, “It is impossible [44] to sow seed on [rock] and harvest its fruit. [This] is also the way [...] the [defiled] generation [...] and corruptible Sophia [...] the hand that has created mortal people, so that their souls go up to the eternal realms above. [Truly] I say to you, [...] angel [...] power will be able to see that [...] these to whom [...] holy generations [...].” After Jesus said this, he departed.

Judas said, “Master, as you have listened to all of them, now also listen to me. For I have seen a great vision.” When Jesus heard this, he laughed and said to him, “You thirteenth spirit, why do you try so hard? But speak up, and I shall bear with you.” Judas said to him, “In the vision I saw myself as the twelve disciples were stoning me and [45] persecuting [me severely]. And I also came to the place where [...] after you. I saw [a house ...], and my eyes could not [comprehend] its size. Great people were surrounding it, and that house <had> a roof of greenery, and in the middle of the house was [a crowd—two lines missing—], saying, ‘Master, take me in along with these people.’” [Jesus] answered and said, “Judas, your star has led you astray.” He continued, “No person of mortal birth is worthy to enter the house you have seen, for that place is reserved for the holy. Neither the sun nor the moon will rule there, nor the day, but the holy will abide there always, in the eternal realm with the holy angels. Look, I have explained to you the mysteries of the kingdom [46] and I have taught you about the error of the stars; and [...] send it [...] on the twelve aeons.”

Judas said, “Master, could it be that my seed is under the control of the rulers?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Come, that I [—two lines missing—], but that you will grieve much when you see the kingdom and all its generation.” When he heard this, Judas said to him, “What good is it that I have received it? For you have set me apart for that generation.” Jesus answered and said, “You will become the thirteenth, and you will be cursed by the other generations—and you will come to rule over them. In the last days they will curse your ascent [47] to the holy [generation].”

Jesus said, “[Come], that I may teach you about [secrets] no person [has] ever seen. For there exists a great and boundless realm, whose extent no generation of angels has seen, [in which] there is [a] great invisible [Spirit], which no eye of an angel has ever seen, no thought of the heart has ever comprehended, and it was never called by any name. “And a luminous cloud appeared there. He said, ‘Let an angel come into being as

my attendant.’ “A great angel, the enlightened divine Self-Generated, emerged from the cloud. Because of him, four other angels came into being from another cloud, and they became attendants for the angelic Self-Generated. The Self-Generated said, [48] ‘Let [...] come into being [...],’ and it came into being [...]. And he [created] the first luminary to reign over him. He said, ‘Let angels come into being to serve [him],’ and myriads without number came into being. He said, ‘[Let] an enlightened aeon come into being,’ and he came into being. He created the second luminary [to] reign over him, together

with myriads of angels without number, to offer service. That is how he created the rest of the enlightened aeons. He made them reign over them, and he created for them myriads of angels without number, to assist them.

“Adamas was in the first luminous cloud that no angel has ever seen among all those called ‘God.’ He [49] [...] that [...] the image [...] and after the likeness of [this] angel. He made the incorruptible [generation] of Seth appear [...] the twelve [...] the twentyfour [...]. He made seventy-two luminaries appear in the incorruptible generation, in accordance with the will of the Spirit. The seventy-two luminaries themselves made three hundred sixty luminaries appear in the incorruptible generation, in accordance with the will of the Spirit, that their number should be five for each. “The twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries constitute their father, with six heavens for each aeon, so that there are seventy-two heavens for the seventy-two luminaries, and for each [50] [of them five] firmaments, [for a total of] three hundred sixty [firmaments ...]. They were given authority and a [great] host of angels [without number], for glory and adoration, [and after that also] virgin spirits, for glory and [adoration] of all the aeons and the heavens and their firmaments.

“The multitude of those immortals is called the cosmos— that is, perdition—by the Father and the seventy-two luminaries who are with the Self-Generated and his seventytwo aeons. In him the first human appeared with his incorruptible powers. And the aeon that appeared with his generation, the aeon in whom are the cloud of knowledge and the angel, is called [51] El. [...] aeon [...] after that [...] said, ‘Let twelve angels come into being [to] rule over chaos and the [underworld].’ And look, from the cloud there appeared an [angel] whose face flashed with fire and whose appearance was defiled with blood. His name was Nebro, which means ‘rebel’; others call him Yaldabaoth. Another angel, Saklas, also came from the cloud. So Nebro created six angels—as well as Saklas—to be assistants, and these produced twelve angels in the heavens, with each one receiving a portion in the heavens.

“The twelve rulers spoke with the twelve angels: ‘Let each of you [52] [...] and let them [...] generation [—one line lost—] angels’: The first is [S]eth, who is called Christ. The [second] is Harmathoth, who is [...]. The [third] is Galila. The fourth is Yobel. The fifth [is] Adonaios. These are the five who ruled over the underworld, and first of all over chaos.

“Then Saklas said to his angels, ‘Let us create a human being after the likeness and after the image.’ They fashioned Adam and his wife Eve, who is called, in the cloud, Zoe. For by this name all the generations seek the man, and each of them calls the

woman by these names. Now, Sakla did not [53] com[mand ...] except [...] the gene[rations ...] this [...]. And the [ruler] said to Adam, ‘You shall live long, with your children.’”

Judas said to Jesus, “[What] is the long duration of time that the human being will live?” Jesus said, “Why are you wondering about this, that Adam, with his generation, has lived his span of life in the place where he has received his kingdom, with longevity with his ruler?” Judas said to Jesus, “Does the human spirit die?” Jesus said, “This is why God ordered Michael to give the spirits of people to them as a loan, so that they might offer service, but the Great One ordered Gabriel to grant spirits to the great generation with no ruler over it—that is, the spirit and the soul. Therefore, the [rest] of the souls [54] [—one line missing—].

“[...] light [—nearly two lines missing—] around [...] let [...] spirit [that is] within you dwell

in this [flesh] among the generations of angels. But God caused knowledge to be [given] to Adam and those with him, so that the kings of chaos and the underworld might not lord it over them.” Judas said to Jesus, “So what will those generations do?” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, for all of them the stars bring matters to completion. When Saklas completes the span of time assigned for him, their first star will appear with the generations, and they will finish what they said they would do. Then they will fornicate in my name and slay their children [55] and they will [...] and [—about six and a half lines missing—] my name, and he will [...] your star over the [thir]teenth aeon.” After that Jesus [laughed]. [Judas said], “Master, [why are you laughing at us]?” [Jesus] answered [and said], “I am not laughing [at you] but at the error of the stars, because these six stars wander about with these five combatants, and they all will be destroyed along with their creatures.”

Judas said to Jesus, “Look, what will those who have been baptized in your name do?” Jesus said, “Truly I say [to you], this baptism [56] [...] my name [—about nine lines missing—] to me. Truly [I] say to you, Judas, [those who] offer sacrifices to Saklas [...] God [—three lines missing—] everything that is evil. “But you will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me. Already your horn has been raised, your wrath has been kindled, your star has shown brightly, and your heart has [...]. [57] “Truly [...] your last [...] become [—about two and a half lines missing—], grieve [—about two lines missing—] the ruler, since he will be destroyed. And then the image of the great generation of Adam will be exalted, for prior to heaven, earth, and the angels, that generation, which is from the eternal realms, exists. Look, you have been told everything. Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. The star that leads the way is your star.” Judas lifted up his eyes and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it. Those standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud, saying, [58] [...] great generation [...] ... image [...] [—about five lines missing—].

[...] Their high priests murmured because [he] had gone into the guest room for his prayer. But some scribes were there watching carefully in order to arrest him during the prayer, for they were afraid of the people, since he was regarded by all as a prophet.

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END.

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The Gospel of Judas (130-170AD)

The Gospel of Judas is a Gnostic text similar to other texts from the 2nd century and later. Like other Gnostic Gospels, it contains a conversation between Jesus and one of His disciples (in this case Judas) in which Jesus reveals secret, esoteric knowledge. It also describes the death of Jesus from Judas' perspective. The text was discovered in the 1970's near Beni Masah in Egypt, and was written in the Coptic language, similar to other Gnostic texts. Only one copy has ever been discovered and this copy is in very poor condition, missing large portions of text.

Why Isn't It Considered Reliable?

The surviving copy of the Gospel of Judas has been carbon-dated to the 4th century but scholars believe that it may be a Coptic translation of a Greek original created no earlier than the late 2nd century. The text is written in the same dialect and language as other Gnostic texts discovered at Nag Hammadi, and it was discovered as part of a larger text which included the “Letter of Peter to Philip” and the “First Apocalypse of James”, two other Gnostic documents also discovered at Nag Hammadi. The Gospel of Judas is a Gnostic text that appears far too late in history to have been written by Judas. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote “Against Heresies” (approximately 180AD) arguing against Gnosticism and mentioned the Gospel of Judas, describing it as “fictitious history”.

Epiphanius of Salamis, the bishop of Cyprus, also wrote a document called

“Heresies” in which he condemned the Gospel of Judas for its favorable treatment of Judas.

How Does It Corroborate the Life of Jesus?

The Gospel of Judas provides little new or additional information about the life of Jesus. It presumes that the canonical Gospel narratives are true and available to those who might also possess this text; it merely seeks to add an additional conversation between Jesus and Judas that supposedly occurs three days prior to the “Last Supper” recorded in the reliable Gospels. It recognizes Jesus as “the son of our God” and a miracle worker who formed a group of disciples. Jesus is seen as the reliable source of information about heaven and other spiritual matters. Like the canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Judas affirms that Judas was approached by the scribes to betray Jesus and that Judas received payment for his information about the location of Jesus.

Where (and Why) Does It Differ from the Reliable Accounts?

The Gospel of Judas reflects Sethian Gnosticism similar to the Apocryphon of James and John. Jesus reserves secret, hidden and esoteric information for Judas and the text describes Judas as someone who would be worthy of receiving such elevated knowledge. Judas is described not as a betrayer, but as a special, obedient assistant who worked with Jesus to bring about the crucifixion and the larger plan of God. The text embodies Gnostic notions about the relationship between matter and spirit: Judas assisted Jesus by releasing Christ from the constraints of his physical body. As a result, Judas helped redeem humanity by assisting in the death of Jesus’ material body. Judas is, therefore, held in very high esteem and described as part of a special group of humans who possess eternal souls. Like other Sethian documents, it equates Jesus to Seth and reflects a number of common Sethian metaphysical views.

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