

What About the "Gospel of Judas"?

First, some facts:

(1) A copy of an ancient book titled "The Gospel of Judas" has been in the news. It is an old parchment that is cracked, dried out and there are some bits missing. It had been found in Egypt. When it was carbon dated, the scientists said it dated to about 280 AD (plus or minus 50 years). But 100 years earlier (about 180 AD) a bishop named Irenaeus wrote about it (he didn't like it at all). We would guess roughly that this book was written about 125 - 140 AD.

(2) The four gospels in the New Testament have a lot of action in them. Not so with the "Gospel of Judas." About 95% is about "cosmology" long lists of spirits (lesser gods, emanations, etc.). It is short and it ends before Jesus' suffering -- simply with the statement that Judas betrayed Jesus.

(3) This is a Gnostic book. To the Gnostics everything spiritual is good; everything physical is evil. So Gnostics said God didn't create the world, because the world is physical. According to Gnostics we need to get away from our bodies and this physical world. That is why 1 Corinthians 15, talking about physical resurrection, was very much disliked by the Gnostics.

The Gnostics were also completely wrapped up in talking about "secret knowledge", and "secret conversations." They believed that you had to know their secret knowledge to get into heaven. Everybody else was lost.

(4) There are very strange ideas in this book. But there is only one way to show this. Here are a quote: Judas says to him [Jesus], "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."

Here is another: When Soklos [one of the gods] 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. (There is a whole lot of this kind of thing.)

The book is introduced as "The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot." It is set 3 days before the Passover.

(5) In the first scene the disciples are gathered together and offer a prayer over a meal. Jesus starts laughing at the prayer. They say, "Master why are you laughing at our prayer of thanksgiving. We have done what is right." And Jesus says, "You are not doing this because of your own will but because it is through this that your god will be praised." (So their god was not his god? Oh, and besides, they are giving thanks for food which is a created thing; and created things, of course, are bad.)

In this book Jesus is never referred to as Christ or Messiah. Instead a being named, Seth, is the Christ.

(6) There were a lot of other Gnostic books. There are the so called Gospels of Thomas, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and others. If you read them you see pretty quickly why they are not in the Bible.

An Opinion:

We were talking about this last week. How ever could someone find out about a secret conversation 100 years after it happened; especially since Judas had been dead those 100 years?

If Judas could talk to us (straight from hell?) why would we want to listen to him? It would be a Very Bad idea!

But more likely the writer just made it all up. The Gnostics did those things. Since the real world was bad

anyway why worry about things like facts, truth, and actual things that happened?

A Dramatization:

So what might happen if you were walking down the street about 1,860 years ago and ran into a couple of Gnostics. We'll call them Ned and Nick the Gnostic twins (the "g" in Gnostic is silent, so it sounds like "nostik"). It might go something like this.

You: Hi, Ned and Nick, how are you doing today?

Ned: Just fine (your name here). And how are you?

You: Fine, but I've been wondering about that book everyone's talking about.

Nick: Oh, you mean the Gospel of Judas, great book.

Ned: So what are you wondering?

You: Well, I'm not sure I understand it. I know you are Gnostics. So what do you believe.

Nick: Well, it's like this. Everything created is bad, everything spiritual is good. The body is bad; the soul is good.

You: I understand that part. I don't think I agree but I understand. But what does that have to do with God.

Ned: Well, if everything created is bad then the true god could not have created anything.

You: Then how'd it get here?

Nick: Emanations! Demi-urges! Sophia!

You: Hunh?

Ned: Oh yes! It's this way. The invisible spirit sent out a luminous cloud, and out of this cloud came the "Self-generated." Four angels serve him; one of them named Adamas. Then come the 12 Aeons . . . (10 minutes pass) . . . And after the 72 Aeons comes Nebro the fallen who created 6 angels and Soklos . . . (10 more minutes pass) . . . and Soklos created Adam and Eve in the image of the fallen angels. So that's why we have to be free from our bodies!

You: Wow! How'd you come up with all that! But I still don't understand how Judas fits into all this.

Nick: Isn't it obvious? If everything created is bad, then the body is bad. So Judas is doing a good thing helping Jesus get rid of his body. Jesus wouldn't want to rise from the dead. He wanted to get rid of his body so he could go back to Barbello.

You: Barbello?

Nick: Yes, Barbello in the spiritual realm. We have divine sparks that have to be set free from the body.

[Comment: At this point it sounds a little like the cult a few years ago where they killed themselves so they could go to the spaceship hiding behind the Hale-Bop comet.] So Jesus had to have someone betray him so he could die and be free.

You: So you say, but how do you know?

Ned: We know because of those secret conversations. You have to have the secret knowledge about the secret conversations to get to the spiritual places.

You: And you are the only ones with that secret knowledge?

Nick: That's right!

You: How come the other disciples didn't say anything about it?

Ned: That's because they're secret conversations.

Nick: Really, really secret conversations.

Ned: Which part of secret don't you understand?

You: But do you have any evidence that any of this ever happened?

Nick: If there was any evidence it wouldn't be quite so secret, would it? We're talking about secret knowledge!

You: O--kay . . . That's a really . . . "interesting" . . . way of thinking.

(About this time you are shaking your head and decide it's time to leave, but before you can . . .)

Ned: Say, why don't you come to one of our meetings.

Nick: Actually why don't you come to one of ours.

You: There's a difference?

Ned: Yes. We believe that the body is evil and we renounce all physical urges and pleasures. We meditate a lot.

Nick: Our meetings are different. We renounce all laws that have to do with the flesh. We show how spiritual we are by indulging the flesh. So our meetings are a lot livelier. Much more interesting. So do you think you might come to our worship?

You: No, I really don't think so.

(You go on your way, very glad to be a Christian. That Creed you recited in Church seems so much simpler now and you are glad you don't have to memorize all those names. It's good to be saved by grace through faith in Jesus.)

Lessons learned:

(1) Don't believe everything that's written, or said. Some things are so extremely odd that they deserve to be rejected right away.

(2) The word gospel means good news. The "Gospel of Judas" really does not have "good news."

(3) There is a basic set of beliefs that Christians share. This "Gospel of Judas" is so far out that it isn't even a heresy. This is so far away that it's actually a completely different religion.

(4) Even when Christians disagree about some things, we share the beliefs: that God created the world (and He created it good); that Jesus is God; that Jesus is the Savior who died to forgive our sins; that Jesus rose from the dead; and we hope for and wait for the resurrection of the body. Even when we disagree we know one another as Christians.

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