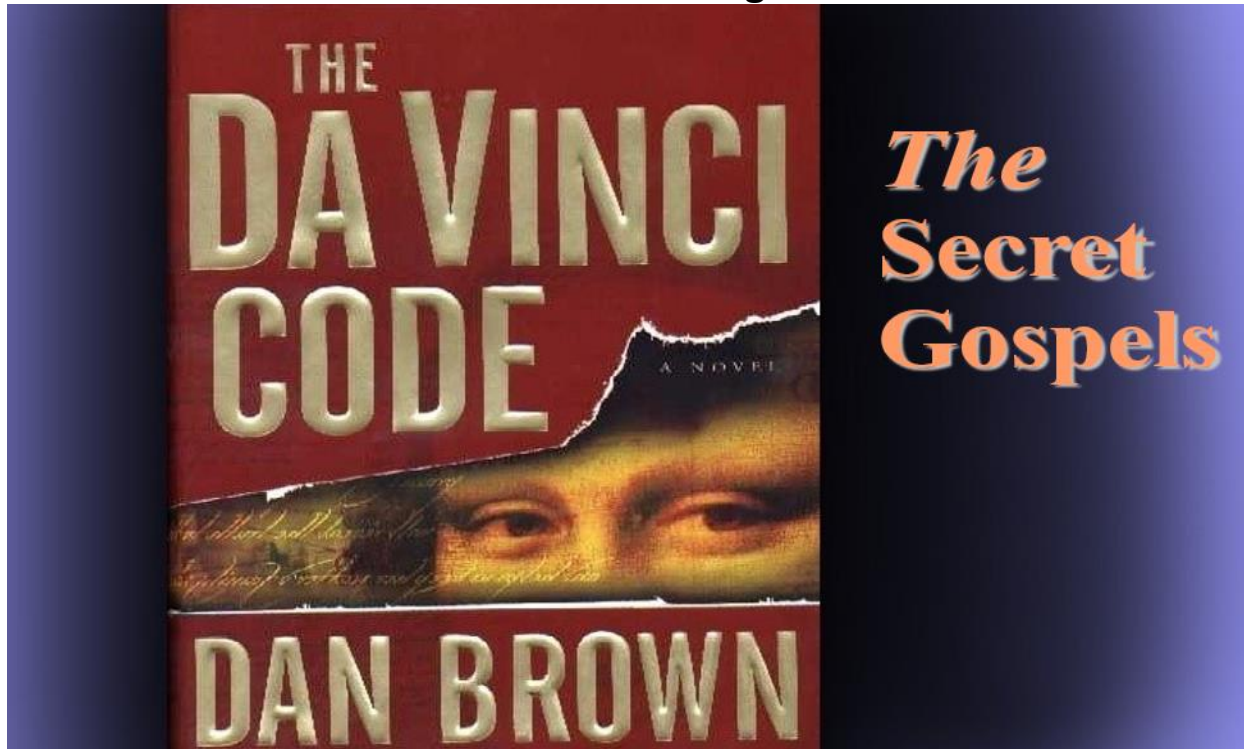
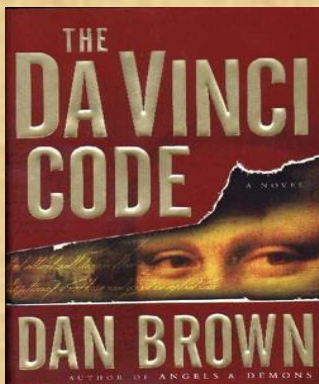


# The False Claim of Lost Gospel

By David Lee Burris



## Introducing *The Da Vinci Code*

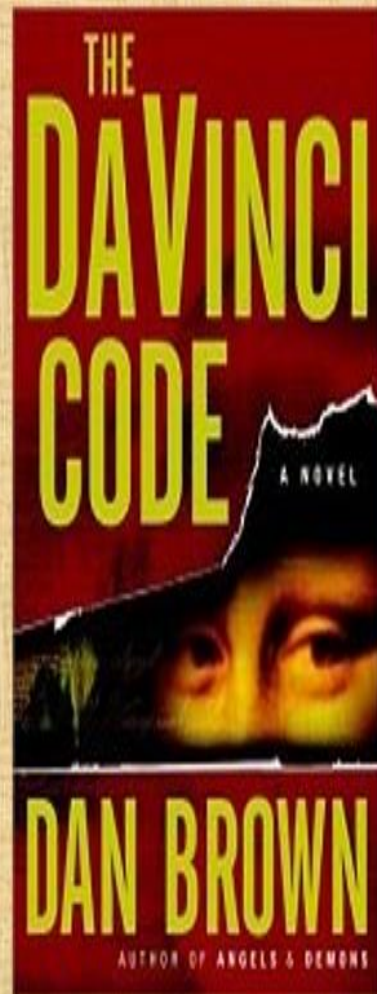


- Approximately seven million copies sold.
- Ron Howard directed the movie version.

**But why has this novel caused such a stir?**

## Excerpts from *The Da Vinci Code*

“Jesus Christ was a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen.... Understandably, His life was recorded by thousands of followers across the land... More than 80 gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them.” (p. 231)



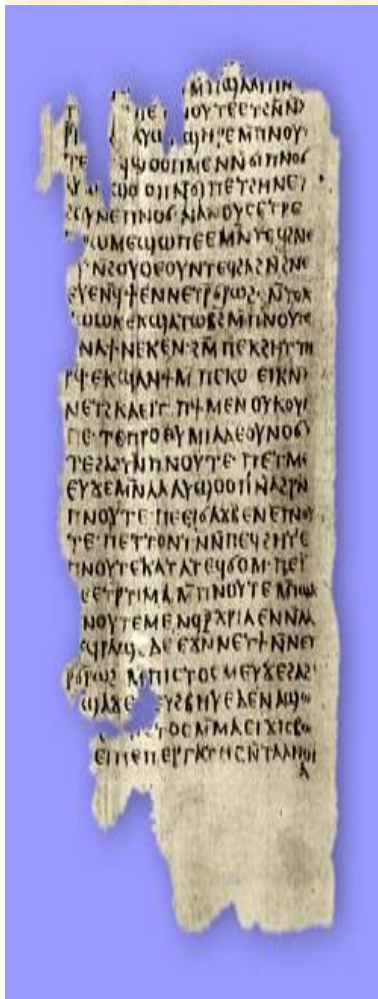


## Excerpts from *The Da Vinci Code*

**“These are photocopies of the Nag Hammadi & the Dead Sea Scrolls,... the earliest Christian records. Troublingly, they do not match up with the gospels in the Bible.”**



# What's the Evidence?



- “*The Nag Hammadi scrolls . . . tell . . . an alternative history of the time of Jesus and Mary Magdalene*” (Dan Brown)
- Teabing calls these texts “*the earliest Christian records*” (245) and the “*unaltered gospels*” (248).

# What are the Nag Hammadi Documents?

- The books included Gospels (*e.g. Thomas, Philip*), Acts (*e.g. Peter and the Twelve Apostles*), letters (*e.g. Peter to Philip*) and Apocalypses (*e.g. Paul, Peter*).
- Why aren't these books in the Bible?

## **We Know There Are Missing Uninspired Personal “Epistles”**

### **Paul’s Lost Letters – Not all was inspired**

Unless you’ve been on an extended vacation from popular culture over the last couple of years, you know there’s been a lot of recent discussion about how we got the New Testament. Dan Brown’s blockbuster novel *The Da Vinci Code* based its conspiratorial plot in part on the notion that other gospels had been eradicated by spiteful church authorities and an emperor openly partial to orthodoxy. The success of the novel prompted many churchgoers to ask whether or not all the books that should be included in the New Testament actually were.

To be sure, Dan Brown took a lot of liberties with facts in his story. But what if we’re not dealing with fiction? The New Testament itself tells us that there were books written by apostles that didn’t make it into the Bible. Let’s take a look.

#### **1 Corinthians 5:9**

In 1 Corinthians, Paul himself mentions an earlier letter he wrote to this same church: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people” (1 Cor 5:9). While some interpreters have argued that Paul was referring to the letter he was currently writing (1 Corinthians), most acknowledge that this explanation is weak. Taken at face value, 1 Corinthians 5:9 tells us that Paul had written to this church before—but that letter has not survived and thus is not part of the New Testament.

#### **Colossians 4:16**

In Paul’s letter to the church at Collosae, he says, “And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:16). What was this letter from Laodicea? What happened to it?

The phrase “letter from Laodicea” is a literal translation of the Greek and suggests that the letter came *from* Laodicea. This is a bit misleading though. The phrase does not necessarily mean that this letter was written by someone in Laodicea to Paul or to the Colossians. Colossians 4:16 tells us that letters to churches were circulated, and so it may be that this Laodicean letter was written by Paul and sent to the Christians at Colossae—like the Colossian letter was to be sent to the believers in Laodicea.

Some scholars have speculated that this letter isn't actually missing. The region of Laodicea was also identified with the city of Ephesus, indicating that the letter from Laodicea may actually be the epistle to the Ephesians. Others disagree, stating that a good case can be made based on the book of Acts' chronology for the letter to the Colossians being written *before* the letter to the Ephesians. If this is the case, then the letter to Laodicea must not be the letter to the Ephesians contained in New Testament, because Colossians 4:16 directly references a letter that is supposed to already exist. If indeed the letter from Laodicea is not Ephesians, then we have another one of Paul's letters that never made it into the New Testament.

## Cause for Concern?

Are missing apostolic letters something that should cause us concern? Are we somehow driven to the conclusion that the process of collecting the inspired books of the New Testament was flawed? Some believers might be troubled at the thought, but the problem is *not* that the circumstances of history worked against God! The problem is a flawed view of inspiration that sees the act of writing Scripture as some sort of "single moment" divine encounter. If we think that inspiration is merely a string of momentary supernatural writing sessions, then it would be expected that anything "spiritual" written by an apostle or his close associate had to be preserved. If something went missing, then it looks like something went wrong, or that God's intentions were thwarted by human ineptitude.

Rather than seeing inspiration as a string of mystical encounters, we ought to understand that the apostles were normal people whose work for the Lord was in concert with the general providence of God. We know by comparing the New Testament to other literature of its day that the apostles used vocabulary, styles, and forms of expression that were quite commonplace.

**The Scripture writers were not under some sort of holy spell that meant everything they thought, spoke, or wrote had to be safeguarded. Rather, God influenced them through the circumstances of providence to write what He deemed necessary for posterity. This perspective moves the focus of inspiration from the writers to the ultimate, providential guidance of God. We owe both the writers and God a debt of gratitude for giving us the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Heiser, M. S. (2014). [\*I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible\*](#). (J. D. Barry & R. Van Noord, Eds.) (pp. 151–153). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Bible Study Magazine.



***"The claim of inspiration at the hand of God is extremely rare. Many books assert special importance, while others claim to be a kind of 'creed book.' But, as Kenny Barfield noted in his book, Why the Bible is Number 1, only seven documents exist in the whole world that openly claim divine inspiration (1997, p. 186). Misguided devotees of various religions clamor about in defending books and various writings as allegedly being 'inspired of God' when, in fact, the books themselves do not even make such a claim."***

***– Apologetics Press***



## The Inspiration of the Bible

Grant B. Caldwell  
Hilliard, Ohio

Having decided upon the basis of weighty evidences (both internal and external), that the Bible is the word of God, we must determine to what extent we believe it to be so. Modern religious liberals have advanced a somewhat deceiving statement upon those who would be taken by their tactics. It is said that the Bible is not the word of God, but that it contains the word of God. The criticism of this statement is in its interpretation. Surely, no one would say that God spoke every word in the Bible from His own mind. In Genesis three, the devil speaks. The words of the Pharisees as they confront Christ are recorded. This however, is not the usual meaning of this particular statement. The idea is that in the Bible, one will find Gods word; however, all of the Bible is not directed by God. This we deny.

The Bible makes no claims for the inspiration of any particular translation, copy, or reading. However, claims are made in regard to that which was originally written as the scriptures. It must be understood that we do not have the original manuscripts. But we are not left to doubt that what we have is indeed the same as the originals. "The amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation, is but a fraction of the whole residuary variation, and can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text" (Introduction to Greek New Testament, by Westcott and Hort).

### Plenary inspiration

We would like to notice first the biblical proofs as to the complete or plenary inspiration of the Bible. The Bible is explicit concerning the amount of scripture which is inspired.

John 10:35: Christ said, "The scripture cannot be broken." Is it not indeed breaking the scripture to say that part of it is from the mouth of God and then say another part is not? Christ is merely pressing His point and insisting that they cannot accept the portions of the word which they desire and ignore the rest. All of the scripture is authoritative.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: In one of the most convincing passages on the subject of plenary inspiration, the Apostle Paul says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Any difference in translation cannot destroy the fact that Paul is saying that "all scripture"--- "every scripture" is inspired of God. This is a forceful reference to the subject under discussion. The scripture he refers to is the "holy scriptures" of the preceding verse. In essence, Paul is saying that the scriptures given by inspiration of God and the Holy Scriptures are one and the same thing.

**The phrase "inspired of God" comes from the same root source as our English words "pneumatic," "pneumonia," etc., and with the prefix "Theo" (meaning God), literally means "God breathed." Paul is thus saying that the "holy scriptures" is a product of the breath of God.**

2 Peter 1:20-21: Peter, in a passage of equal force, written in the negative, says, "Knowing this first that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: But holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The negative "no" implies simply that none of the prophecies that are recorded came from a private source. Not one single one. The phrase "prophecy of scripture" is used to indicate those writings which constitute the will of God in all its parts. Some might think that there is a "scripture" that is not a "prophecy." However, as Moses, David, and others are referred to as prophets, so their writings would be "prophecies."

**When Peter refers to "private interpretation," he is contrasting human origin with divine. If this were not so, the next verse would mean very little. These men spake as the Holy Ghost directed them to speak and not as their own hearts dictated. These were the prophets of God and were not left to their own imaginations.**

In exactly the same way, there are prophecies in the New Testament written by prophets. Listen to Peter in verse 19, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." If it is more sure and compares with that of old time prophecy, then it too must be a product of the Holy Ghost.

I Corinthians 14:37: Paul, "If any man think himself to be a prophet~ or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." Paul spoke only that which was commanded by the Lord.

Peter joins Pauls writings with "the other scriptures" in 2 Peter 3: 15-16. Thus, he shows that these writings are just as authoritative as any of the other writings of God.

### Verbal Inspiration

The Bible makes claims not only in regard to the amount of inspiration, but to the way in which it has been inspired. We speak of what is commonly called "Verbal Inspiration." Modern liberalism has acted on this doctrine as well as that of plenary inspiration and has said that God gave the writers the thoughts and they in turn wrote according to their own words the thoughts which the Lord had given to them.

While we do not question that the thoughts are the Lords, we do deny emphatically that the words are those of the men who penned them. Let us notice briefly why we believe in verbal inspiration; that is, why we believe that the Lord determined the words to be used in the Bible as well as the thoughts.

Reason: It would not seem reasonable, first of all, to suppose that the divine source would leave His divine thoughts regarding the eternal souls of men to be expressed by the inadequate words of unlearned and ignorant men. We will sometimes express just a small variation in meaning to that which we wish to express just by the use of a supposed synonym. Do you think that God could take a chance on this sort of thing?

Biblical Proofs: We are not left, however, to the reasoning of our own minds in this matter of verbal inspiration. Let us notice now the infallible proof of the Bible regarding the matter.

In Deut. 18:18 a prophecy is made regarding Christ that underlies the whole thought of verbal inspiration. The Lord said that He would raise up a prophet like Moses, and that he would put His words in His mouth. If He was to be like Moses and the Lords words would be in His mouth,



then it should go without saying that Moses like the other prophet had the "words" of the Lord in His mouth. Verbal Inspiration.

Peter spoke of these prophets in 2 Peter 1: 21, saying that they were "moved by the Holy Ghost." The expression "moved" suggests that these men were "borne along" (Vine) to express the thoughts of God in words which He provided. Maybe these prophets did not understand the entire situation (I Peter 1: 11), but they wrote at; the Lord gave them the words to write His thoughts. Verbal Inspiration.

New Testament: In Matthew 4:4 Christ said that man was to live not by bread-alone but by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." It says more than man must live by the thoughts of God. Man is required to live by the words which God has spoken. Verbal Inspiration.

"Ye should remember the words" (2 Peter 3:2); "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast" (Hebrews 2:2); "Ye received from us even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." (I Thessalonians 2:13) All of these passages place a great emphasis on the idea of the "word." Why would the "word" be emphasized if it was only the "thought" which had been given?

The most convincing proof in all the Bible regarding the matter of verbal inspiration is found in I Corinthians 2:4-13. Paul, in so many words, says that the gospel was not written in the words of man's wisdom. He says that it was a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit (vs. 4). His argument is that the mystery was revealed by the Holy Spirit (vs. 10) and that the Spirit wrote the gospel by giving it to the apostles (vs. 12). Finally, he says, "which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." (vs. 13, NASV).

How can anyone say that the Bible was written in men's words, when the apostle Paul says that it was written in the Spirits words? There could be no more conclusive argument than this. One would simply have to deny the passage to deny the point of the teaching -- Verbal Inspiration.

TRUTH MAGAZINE, XVI: 33, pp. 9-11  
June 22, 1972

# The Holy Scriptures: Verbally Inspired

By [Wayne Jackson](#)



In logic, there is a principle called the Law of the Excluded Middle. Simply stated, it is this: a thing must either be or not be, the case. A line is either straight, or it is not. There is no middle position.

Applied to the Bible, one, therefore, might declare: **The Scriptures are either inspired of God, or they are not inspired of God.** If the writings of the Bible are not inspired of God, then they are the mere productions of men. As such, would merit no religious respect; in fact, in view of their exalted claims, they would merit only contempt.

Paul, an apostle of Christ, wrote:

“Every scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible asserts its own inspiration — of this there is no doubt. But **to what extent** does the sacred volume claim inspiration? This is a question that has perplexed many.

## Some Popular, But False Theories

Some have suggested that the Bible is inspired only in the sense that other great literary productions are inspired. That is, they all are simply the results of natural genius, characteristic of men of unusual ability.

Such a notion must be rejected immediately since: (a) it makes liars of the biblical writers who claimed the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source of their documents (2 Sam. 23:2; Acts 1:16); and (b) it leaves unexplained the mystery of why modern man, with his accumulated learning, has not been able to produce a comparable volume that has the capacity to make the Bible obsolete.

Others have claimed that only certain portions of the Scriptures are inspired by God. We often hear it said, for example, that those sections of the Bible that deal with faith and morals are inspired, but other areas, particularly those accounts that contain certain miraculous elements, are merely the productions of good but superstitious and fallible men.

Again, though, such a concept is not consistent with the declarations of the divine writers. They extended inspiration to every area of the Scriptures. In many instances, the even emphasized the inspiration of the very sections that modernists dub as non-historical, mythical. See, for example: Matthew 12:39-40; 19:4ff.; Luke 4:27; John 3:14-15.

Too, the allegation has been made that the Bible is inspired in “sense” but not in “sentence.” This assertion means that in some sense the Scriptures are of divine origin. But the very **words** of the Holy Book are not to be construed as inspired. Such a view is nonsensical. If the words of the sacred narrative are not inspired, pray tell **what is inspired?** Is the binding? The paper? The ink?

The truth is, if the words of the Bible are not inspired by God, then the Bible contains no inspiration at all!



## Verbal Inspiration

What do we mean when we speak of the “verbal inspiration” of the Holy Scriptures?

Frank E. Gaebelin suggested that a sound view of inspiration holds that “the original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted the exercise of their own personalities and literary talents, yet wrote under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God, the result being in every word of the original documents a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message which God desired to give to man” (1950, p. 9).

In his classic work, **Theopneustia — The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures**, L. Glaussen, professor of systematic theology, Oratoire, Geneva, defined inspiration as

“that inexplicable power which the Divine Spirit put forth of old on the authors of holy Scripture, in order to their guidance even in the employment of the words they used, and to preserve them alike from all error and from all omission” (n.d., p. 34).

Let us take a closer look at 2 Timothy 3:16. The Greek text says: **pasa graphe theopneustos** — “all scripture [is] God-breathed.” Something within this context is said to be “God-breathed.” What is it? All Scripture. The term “scripture” [graphe] denotes that which is written. But it is the words of the biblical text that are written; hence, the very words of the Bible are God-breathed!

No one can appeal to 2 Timothy 3:16 as evidence of Bible inspiration without, at the same time, introducing the concept of verbal inspiration. The truth is, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is abundantly claimed throughout the sacred canon. Consider the following examples.

### The Bible claims to be inspired

More than 3,800 times in the Old Testament, the claim is made that the Scriptures are the **word** [or **words** of God.

For instance, “And Jehovah **said** unto Moses, **Write this** for a memorial in a book” (Exodus 17:14).

David declared: “The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and his **word** was upon my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2).

God instructed the prophet Jeremiah, “Behold, I have put **my words** in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9).

The Scriptures are exalted as the Word of God some 175 times in Psalm 119 alone!

### **Verbal inspiration affirmed by Christ**

Jesus Christ certainly endorsed the concept of verbal inspiration. He affirmed that neither “one jot nor one tittle” would pass away from the law “until all things be accomplished” (Matthew 5:17-18). The jot was the smallest Hebrew letter, and the tittle was a tiny projection on certain Hebrew characters. Professor A.B. Bruce has noted:

“Jesus expresses here in the strongest manner His conviction that the whole Old Testament is a Divine revelation, and that therefore every minute precept has religious significance” (1956, 1:104).

The Lord frequently made arguments based upon the text of the Old Testament, wherein He stressed very precise grammatical points. His argument for the resurrection from the dead in Matthew 22:32 depends upon the present tense form of a verb — “I **am** [not “was”] the God of Abraham.”

Within the same context, Christ quoted Psalm 110:1, showing that David, speaking in the Spirit, said, “The Lord said unto my Lord...” (Matthew 22:41ff.). Again, the emphasis is on a single word.

Jesus (affirming His own deity) asked the Pharisees why David referred to his own descendant, the promised Messiah, as **Lord**. Not recognizing the dual nature of the Messiah (i.e., as man, He was David’s seed; as deity, He was David’s Lord), they were unable to answer. But had Christ not believed in the inspired words of the Old Testament, He could hardly have reasoned as He did (see also John 10:30ff.).

## Verbal inspiration promised to the disciples

Christ promised His apostles that the words of their gospel declaration would be given them. He told them: “But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what you shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you shall speak” (Matthew 10:19).

And, note Luke’s parallel that they were not to “meditate beforehand” how to answer their antagonists (Luke 21:14). That has to involve their very words!

## Authors understood they were verbally inspired

It is quite clear that the penmen of Scripture were conscious of the fact that they were recording the words of God.

Paul wrote: “I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you” (1 Corinthians 11:23). Again, “This we say unto you by the word of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

“When you received from us the word of the message, even **the word of God**, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works in you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

When Philip preached in Samaria, those people to whom he spoke had heard “the word of God” (Acts 8:14).

In a remarkable passage, Paul asked: “For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him?”

He means this: you cannot know what is in my mind until I, by my words, reveal to you what I am thinking. That is the apostle’s illustration. Here is his point.

“Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God...which things [i.e., the things of God] we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:11-13).



There is not a more comprehensive statement of verbal inspiration to be found anywhere in the holy writings. The mind of God has been made known by means of the inspired words of those representatives whom He chose for that noble task.

### **Mutual respect among inspired writers**

The biblical writers considered one another's productions to be inspired of God.

In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul writes: "For the **scripture** saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his hire."

In this passage, the apostle has combined Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, and classified them both as "scripture."

Similarly, Peter refers to Paul's epistles as "scripture" in 2 Peter 3:15-16.

### **Mechanical Dictation – A Straw Man**

Whenever you hear someone accusing advocates of verbal inspiration of believing in "mechanical dictation," most likely you are dealing with a theological liberal!

The notion of "mechanical dictation" (i.e., that the Bible writers were only dictaphones or typewriters, hence, their cultural and personality factors did not enter into their works) is not taught by many conservative Bible scholars.

Certainly, Paul's writings differ in style from those of John, etc. But that does not negate the fact that after God used the individual writers of Scripture, in the final process, only the exact words that He wanted in the text appeared there!

### **Has Transmission Destroyed Inspiration?**

"But suppose," someone wonders, "the Bible was verbally inspired initially.

Hasn't the transmission of the text across the centuries caused a corruption of the original documents, so that verbal inspiration has been virtually destroyed?"

No, not at all. The text of the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—has been preserved in a remarkable fashion.

For example, after years of scientific research in connection with the text of the Old Testament, professor Robert Dick Wilson, who was thoroughly acquainted with forty-five languages, stated that “we are **scientifically certain** that we have substantially the same text that was in the possession of Christ and the apostles” (1929, p. 8, emp. added).

Evidence for the textual reliability of the New Testament is no less impressive. Scholars are now in possession of some 5,378 Greek manuscripts (in part or in whole) of the New Testament, and some of these date to the early part of the second century A.D. It has been estimated that textual variations concern only about 1/1000th part of the entire text (see Gregory, 1907, p. 528).

Transmission, therefore, has not destroyed verbal inspiration.

## **Does Translation Affect Inspiration?**

Since the Holy Scriptures originally were penned in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and since then have been translated into many languages, some are concerned that the translation process has destroyed the Bible's initial inspiration.

But there is no need for concern over this matter so long as **accurate** translation is effected. When a word is translated precisely from one language into another, the same thought or idea is conveyed; thus, the same message is received.

That translation need not affect inspiration is evinced by an appeal to the New Testament itself.

In the 3rd-2nd centuries B.C., the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek. This version, which was begun in Alexandria, Egypt, is known as the Septuagint.

Note this interesting fact: Jesus Christ Himself, and His inspired New Testament writers, frequently quoted from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament Scriptures! For example, in Matthew 22:32, Christ quoted from the Septuagint (Exodus 3:6), and of that passage said: "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God?" (22:31).

The translation from Hebrew to Greek did not alter the fact that the message was the Word of God!

It also might be observed in this connection that scholars generally agree that the Septuagint is not as reliable a translation as is the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Yet in spite of this, the New Testament frequently quotes it. However, as one author observed:

"The writers of the New Testament appear to have been so careful to give the true sense of the Old Testament, that they forsook the Septuagint version whenever it did not give that sense" (Horne, 1841, 1:312).

The fact is, when a New Testament writer was quoting from the Greek Old Testament, the Holy Spirit sometimes led him to slightly alter the phraseology to give a more accurate sense. Thus, inspiration was still preserved even though a less-than-perfect translation was being used.

## **Conclusion**

The Scriptures are the verbally inspired Word of God. This view has been entertained by reverent students of the Holy Writings for multiplied centuries.

Fritz Rienecker noted that the Jewish "rabbinical teaching was that the Spirit of God rested on and in the prophets and spoke through them so that their words did not come from themselves, but from the mouth of God and they spoke and wrote in the Holy Spirit. The early church was in entire agreement with this view" (1980, 2:301).



## Are We Missing Any Authentic Apostolic Although Uninspired Gospel Accounts?

### Truth about the “Lost Gospels”

#### Who wrote the “lost Gospels”?

No one knows for sure. Even though the names of Jesus’ apostles and other companions are attached to several lost Gospels, no evidence exists to suggest that the authors of these texts even *could* have been eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus. In many cases, names such as “Mary” or “Philip” have been attached to these Gospels simply because these individuals are such prominent characters in the book. In a few cases—such as *Gospel of Thomas*, for example—the Gospel does actually claim to come from a prominent apostle or church leader, though it is clear from the language used in the book that the document was written long after the death of its namesake.

#### How are these writings different from the New Testament writings?

The “lost Gospels” were primarily fanciful accounts of Jesus’ life, or they were written to promote a theology that contradicts the eyewitness testimony found in the New Testament. A few lost Gospels—for example, *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, *Infancy Gospel of James*, and perhaps *Gospel of Peter*—seem to have been penned by well-meaning Christians who felt compelled to expand stories in the New Testament. Many parts of these writings don’t directly contradict anything in the New Testament, but they tend to expand the New Testament accounts in fanciful and theologically problematic ways. For example, according to these writings, Jesus used his divine powers for his own benefit throughout his childhood. A couple of lost Gospels—such as *Gospel of the Lord* and *Gospel of the Ebionites*—were variations of the New Testament Gospels, edited to fit the theology of certain sects.



(Courtesy of the Schøyen Collection, Oslo and London)

Inkwell discovered near the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were copied.

The distinct theology of most of the “lost Gospels” was, however, *Gnostic*. From the perspective of most Gnostics, the deity who created the universe was not the true or supreme God; the creator of the physical world was an evil deity, a rebel against a higher and greater deity. Since they understood the cosmos to be the product of an evil deity, most Gnostics viewed everything physical—especially the role of women in reproduction—as evil; they also claimed that Jesus Christ only *seemed* human. According to Gnostics, Christ came to deliver humanity from the limitations of the physical world. As such, Gnostics were not typically interested in the actual, historical events of the life of Jesus; the Gnostics focused most of their attention on other-worldly sayings and myths, many of which depicted biblical villains as heroes and vice-versa.

### How many lost Gospels are there?

If a Gospel is defined as an ancient retelling of the events and teachings of Jesus’ life, there are fewer than thirty known Gospels. Most texts survive only in incomplete fragments. Here’s a summary of many of the lost Gospels, most of which could not have been written by eyewitnesses:

- *Gospel of Basilides* (*Gnostic writing, mid-second century AD*) Gnostic writing, now lost, mentioned by several early Christians.
- *Gospel of the Ebionites* (*Ebionite writing, second century AD*) Surviving only in fragmented quotations in the writings of early Christians, *Gospel of the Ebionites* appears to have been a variation of *Gospel of the Hebrews*, edited to fit the theology of a sect known as “Ebionites.” The Ebionites believed Jesus was a human being, adopted by God at his baptism.

“**Matthew** composed his Gospel among the Hebrews in their language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel in Rome and building up the church there. After their deaths, Mark—Peter’s follower and interpreter—handed down to us Peter’s proclamation in written form. Luke, the companion of Paul, wrote in a book the Gospel proclaimed by Paul. Finally, John—the Lord’s own follower, the one who leaned against his chest—composed the Gospel while living in Ephesus, in Asia.”

—Irenaeus of Lyons, mid- to late second century AD<sup>13</sup>

- *Gospel, Egerton* (*Fragments from an ancient document, second century AD*) Not actually a Gospel but a few fragments from an unknown source, the “Egerton Gospel” includes four stories about Jesus. Three of these stories appear, in varying forms, in the New Testament Gospels (Mk. 1:40–45; 12:13–17; Jn. 5:39–47; 10:33–39).
- *Gospel of the Egyptians* (*Ancient writing, perhaps Gnostic, second century AD*) Presented as a dialogue between Jesus and a female disciple named Salome, *Gospel of the Egyptians* encourages all believers to practice celibacy.
- *Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians* (*Gnostic writing, late third century AD*) *Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians* recounts a Gnostic myth in which Jesus is presented as a reincarnation of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve.

- *Gospel of Eve* (Gnostic writing, probably third century AD) Lost Gnostic writing, quoted by Epiphanius of Salamis. *Gospel of Eve* was written at least a century after the time of Jesus. Seemingly also known as *Gospel of Perfection*.
- *Gospel of the Hebrews* (Christian writing, first century AD) Gospel of the Hebrews is truly a “lost Gospel”; it survives only in quotations found in the writings of early Christians. Many scholars believe *Gospel of the Hebrews* represents an early, Aramaic summary of Jesus’ life from the apostle Matthew—a summary that eventually became part of the document that now known as the Gospel According to Matthew. Also known as *Gospel of the Nazoreans*.
- *Infancy Gospel of James* (Christian writing, late second century AD) An account, supposedly written by James, of the life of Mary. According to this document, Mary the mother of Jesus remained a virgin throughout her life.
- *Acts of John* (Docetic writing, late second century AD) Supposed retelling of events from the life of the apostle John. Some copies of this text include comments that are *Docetic*—that is, they imply that Jesus Christ was not fully human—but these comments are not present in every version. It is possible that they were added later.
- *Gospel of Judas* (Gnostic writing, late second century AD) Supposed account of the life of Jesus in which Judas Iscariot is portrayed as a heroic figure, commanded by Jesus to act as the betrayer.
- *Gospel of the Lord* (Marcionite writing, mid-second century AD) Alteration of the Gospel According to Luke, edited to fit Marcion’s theology.
- *Gospel of Mary* (Gnostic writing, late second or early third century AD) Although frequently called *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, the text of this document never indicates which biblical Mary is the story’s central character.
- *Gospel of Matthias* (Ancient writing, perhaps Gnostic, second century AD) Lost document, known to many early Christians. This writing seems to have passed out of usage among Christians because (1) no clear evidence was available to suggest that the apostle Matthias actually wrote the book and (2) the book was used by heretical sects including the Gnostics.
- *Gospel of Nicodemus* (Forgery, fourth century AD) Forgery that claimed to include Pontius Pilate’s report to the emperor about Jesus. Also known as *Acts of Pilate*.
- *Gospel, Oxyrhynchus* (Christian writing, third century AD or earlier) Not actually a Gospel but a tiny papyrus fragment from an unknown source, the “Oxyrhynchus Gospel” describes a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. The events described in this fragment do not contradict any New Testament Gospels and seem to represent an expansion of the events described in Mark 7:1–23.
- *Gospel of Peter* (Christian writing, second century AD) Although familiar to many early Christians, this text was rejected as an authoritative account of the life of Jesus because (1) it could not be clearly connected to the apostle Peter and (2) some passages in the book could be misconstrued to suggest that Jesus wasn’t fully human.
- *Apocalypse of Peter* (Christian writing, second century AD) An apocalyptic text that circulated with *Gospel of Peter*, *Apocalypse of Peter* doesn’t directly contradict any New Testament writings, but the book seems to have been written around AD 135, seventy years or so after the death of the apostle Peter.

- *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter* (Gnostic writing, late third century AD) The *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter* clearly denied that Jesus had a physical body, declaring that “the one whose hands and feet they nailed to the cross [was] only a fleshly substitute.”
- *Gospel of Philip* (Gnostic writing, third century AD) Not actually a gospel but a collection of brief excerpts from other Gnostic writings, *Gospel of Philip* summarizes the views of the followers of the Gnostic leader Valentinus.
- *Gospel of the Savior* (Gnostic writing, early third century AD) Not actually a Gospel but a few fragments from an ancient document known as Papyrus Berlin 22220, *Gospel of the Savior* seems to have been a Gnostic adaptation of *Gospel of Peter*. Also known as *Vision of the Savior*.
- *Gospel of Thomas* (Gnostic writing, mid-second century AD) Not actually a Gospel, but a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus. Most sayings in *Gospel of Thomas* are similar to statements found in the New Testament Gospels. A few, however, seem to represent an early form of Gnosticism. Although some sayings in the book can be traced to the first century AD, the book did not emerge in its final form until the middle of the second century.
- *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Christian writing, mid-second century AD) An account of the childhood of Jesus, supposedly written by the apostle Thomas. In this text, the boy Jesus uses his miraculous powers for his own benefit. The author’s style of writing and his lack of knowledge about Jewish traditions suggest that the book was written in the mid-second century AD, long after the death of the apostle Thomas.
- *Gospel of Truth* (Gnostic writing, late second century AD) Unearthed at Nag Hammadi in the 1940s, *Gospel of Truth* is a Gnostic retelling of the creation story and of the life of Jesus. According to Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of a Gnostic teacher named Valentinus wrote *Gospel of Truth*, also known as *Gospel of Valentinus*.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Jones, T. P. (2007). [\*The gospels: "lost" and found\*](#). Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing.



## True or False?

What if the version of the life of Jesus that's found in the Bible isn't the right one? What if there were other accounts of his life and ministry? And what if none of these versions actually represents eyewitness testimony about Jesus? That's precisely what some scholars are teaching, not just on college campuses but in popular literature and on television.

Popular scholars such as Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels, whose books boast titles such as *The Gnostic Gospels*, *Lost Scriptures*, and *Lost Christianities*, make claims such as this one: "Many years passed before Christians agreed concerning which books should comprise their sacred scriptures. . . . In part this was because other books were available, also written by Christians, many of their authors claiming to be the original apostles of Jesus, yet advocating points of view quite different from those later embodied in the canon."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the viewpoints found in these writings, many of which are called "Gospels," do differ from the New Testament Gospels. In fact, many include descriptions of Jesus that directly contradict the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Most significantly, the "lost Gospels" consistently depict the *nature of Jesus* in ways that disagree with the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. For example, the New Testament writings describe Jesus as fully divine and yet fully human (see, for example, Philippians 2:5-11). But, according to other writings, Jesus Christ was a spirit who merely *seemed* human. In others, such as *Gospel of Philip*, Jesus of Nazareth—a human being—was possessed by a Christ-spirit; then on the cross, this Christ-spirit abandoned the human Jesus.

So what's at stake when it comes to the lost Gospels? Nothing less than the nature of Jesus Christ, the essence of Christian faith! Simply put, if the authors of the lost Gospels were telling the truth, the perspective on Jesus that's found in the New Testament Gospels is false. Let's look together at the historical evidence, though, and see what we actually find.

### ■ What are the "lost Gospels"?

The term "lost Gospels" usually refers to ancient writings that were excluded from the New Testament, even though they included *supposed* recollections of events and teachings from the life of Jesus. A few of these "lost Gospels" have lasted throughout the centuries. Others survive only in tiny fragments of papyrus or in brief quotations found in the writings of early Christian scholars. Several "lost Gospels" were discovered anew in the past 100 years. Copies of some texts—such as *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Truth*, and *Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians*—were unearthed in 1945 in Egypt, near a village known as Nag Hammadi.



(Courtesy of the Schøyen Collection, Oslo and London)

Earliest known fragment of Acts of Paul. When it was discovered that Acts of Paul was a fictional text, Christians rejected its authority.



# What about the "Gospel of Judas" and appeal of Gnosticism?

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by [Ron J. Bigalke](#)

6/28/11

Is the "Gospel of Judas" an accurate depiction of Judas Iscariot? Has the church wrongly accused Judas as the betrayer of the Lord [Jesus](#) Christ? There has been much media attention that proposes a new manner to think with regard to Judas, with significant implications for the [Christian](#) faith.

After being lost for 1700 years in a cave in Egypt, the "Gospel of Judas" has resurfaced. Supposedly the document resurfaced in Geneva in 1983, but only recently has it been translated. The papyrus document is 13-pages and written in Coptic (an ancient Egyptian language). According to the Coptic "Gospel of Judas," Jesus privately instructed Judas to betray Him; therefore, Judas was actually a *good* disciple. The document quoted Jesus as saying: "You will be greater than all the others, Judas. You will sacrifice the man that clothes me."

Although the document is being presented as a newly translated ancient document, it is not a new discovery. Church leaders in 180 AD (particularly Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons in his work "Against the Heresies") denounced this "new gospel" as fiction. The church also denounced the [heresy](#) of Gnosticism, which it espouses.

[Gnosticism](#) is the attempt to present an Eastern worldview with Christian language. A syncretistic sect that blended many different religions, including Christianity, wrote the Gnostic gospels. From the very moment that they appeared, Christian leaders and the church (in general) rejected the Gnostic gospels as uninspired and incompatible with the historic doctrines of the Christian faith. Gnosticism was popular in the Roman world, and many duped minds were enchanted with Gnostic writings and their endless mysteries (even the gruesome and sensational initiation ceremonies).

Pre-publicity suggestions for the "Gospel of Judas" claimed it would "shake Christianity to its foundations." Of course, such ridiculous thinking that the church has hid this text and others is a myth propagated in works like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and other conspiracy theorists. Documents such as the "Gospel of Judas" give the unregenerate mind of the unbeliever an excuse for not believing the claims of Christ, and, of course, it caters to the sensational and generates lots of money in books.

One reason the "Gospel of Judas" is no rival to the four Gospels, is that Gnosticism arose in the middle of the second century. If the document was authentic, it should probably be dated to the middle or latter part of the second century. By contrast, The New Testament Gospels were all written within the first century. What this means is the "Gospel of Judas" was not written by eyewitnesses. The "Gospel of Judas," though, is entirely compatible with the Gnostic teaching that blamed God for evil in the world because it rejected His sovereignty. Furthermore, Gnostics frequently championed the rehabilitation of Old Testament figures, such as Cain and Esau.

### **Why is Gnosticism so appealing today?**

The reason is that it is compatible with the postmodern spirit of the age that rejects historical truth. The spirit of the age is “god, as you understand him.” Satan’s greatest lie is that fallen humanity may approach God on his own terms and through his own works. It is believed that God can be found however one may so desire. Of course, such belief denies the authority and necessity of divine revelation.

Just as the “Gospel of Judas” is not new, so are theories regarding Judas not new. For example, the 1973 play “Jesus Christ Superstar” had Judas singing, “I have no thought at all about my own reward. I really didn’t come here of my own accord. Just don’t say I’m . . . damned for all time.” There is also Taylor Caldwell’s 1977 novel *I, Judas*, which offered an explanation for Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. The worldwide sales of more than 40 million copies of *The Da Vinci Code* have no doubt excited postmodernists and provided the foundation for many more conspiracy works.

Even Michael Baignet, co-author of the 1982 conspiracy work *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (perhaps the inspiration for *The Da Vinci Code*), has a new book entitled *The Jesus Papers*, which recycles the supposed “cover-up” that Jesus survived the crucifixion. Now some professor of oceanography from Florida State University has released a new “scientific” study that rare meteorological conditions allowed Jesus to walk on a floating patch of ice, in contrast to the Gospels stating He walked on water. One is not surprised by the outlandish claims against the Bible by unbelievers; for those who reject miracles will accept any theory (no matter how ridiculous) as long as they can continue to suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness.

Unfortunately, the world today is grossly illiterate (as if the “Gospel of Judas” would “shake Christianity to its foundations”) regarding the Bible. On the other side, the fact is that many today simply do not care whether the “Gospel of Judas” differs from the true Gospels, as long as God can be found as they so desire. The concern of the canonical councils to only recognize the books of the Bible (and consistently reject the Gnostic gospels) that have *always been* God’s Word is foreign to most people. It is no wonder then that people can be so easily deceived about obviously fraudulent material.

### **What can Christians do?**

Recognize the tremendous opportunity before the church. Christians should be laboring to remove objections against Christianity and seeking evidence of Christianity. Due to the success of *The Da Vinci Code*, there is tremendous opportunity to attack and rebut false claims. How exciting! . . . the unbelieving world is talking about the Bible (of course, it is not positive, but at least the door is open to defend *the* faith). The church should desire to do whatever is possible to help people understand the folly of their unbiblical beliefs. When that happens, the opportunity is there to present not solely the arguments whether Christianity is true (although that is important), but that in this postmodern world the Christian faith can be known to be true.

## Gospel of Judas

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The Gospel of Judas was developed by a Gnostic sect in the second century A.D. and was originally written in Greek around 130-170. This fact alone tells us that it was not authored by Judas himself. The oldest extant copy is a Coptic manuscript written in Sahidic (last phase of ancient Egyptian) in the fourth or fifth century.

The gospel of Judas is included in a 62-page papyrus<sup>1</sup> manuscript that was uncovered in Egypt during the 1950's or 1960's.<sup>2</sup> The translator of the Gospel of Judas is Rodolphe Kasser of the University of Geneva, a leading Coptic Scholar, and the contents are due to be released in April, 2006. At the date of writing this article (April 7th, 2006), the complete translated text of this pseudepigraphal writing is unavailable. However, at CNN.com we have the following excerpts:

- "The newly translated document's text begins: 'The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot.'
- "In a key passage Jesus tells Judas, 'You will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.'
- "'This indicates that Judas would help liberate the spiritual self by helping Jesus get rid of his physical flesh,' the scholars said."
- "'Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom,'" Jesus says to Judas, singling him out for special status. '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.'"
- "The text ends with Judas turning Jesus over to the high priests and does not include any mention of the crucifixion or resurrection."<sup>3</sup>

According to the National Geographic website on the Gospel of Judas page, it says that the newly discovered gospel is "One of the most significant biblical finds of the last century's lost gospel that could challenge what is believed about the story of Judas and his betrayal of Jesus."<sup>4</sup> In fact, National Geographic has invested a lot of money in its presentation.

"Retired Claremont Graduate University professor James Robinson said that 'early in November he learned that Kasser and several European, Canadian and U.S. scholars had signed agreements with the National Geographic Society to assist with a documentary film and a *National Geographic* article for an Easter 2006 release and a succession of three books.'"<sup>5</sup>

### Is the Gospel of Judas authentic?

The Gospel of Judas apparently depicts Judas in favorable terms and commends him as doing God's work when he betrayed Christ to the Jewish religious leaders. This, of course, contradicts what was written by the apostles in their gospels of Matthew and John, as well as those gospels written by Mark and Luke who are under the direction of Peter and Paul.

The Gospel of Judas falls into the category of pseudepigraphal writings. This means that the gospel is not authentic, it is a false writing. In fact, the gospel was not written by Judas, but by a later Gnostic sect in support of Judas. Gnosticism was an ancient heresy that taught salvation through esoteric knowledge. Gnosticism was known at the time of the writing of the later epistles in the New Testament and was rejected by the apostle John.<sup>6</sup>

The ancient writer Irenaeus (130 - 202 AD), in his work called Refutation of All Heresies, said that the gospel of Judas was a fictitious history:

"Others again declare that Cain derived his being from the Power above, and acknowledge that Esau, Korah, the Sodomites, and all such persons, are related to themselves. On this account, they add, they have been assailed by the Creator, yet no one of them has suffered injury. For Sophia was in the habit of carrying off that which belonged to her from them to herself. They declare that Judas the traitor was thoroughly acquainted with these things, and that he alone, knowing the truth as no others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal; by him all things, both earthly and heavenly, were thus thrown into confusion. They produce a fictitious history of this kind, which they style the Gospel of Judas."<sup>7</sup>

We can conclude that the Gospel of Judas is not authentic, is not inspired, and was properly rejected by the early church as an unreliable and inaccurate depiction of what really happened concerning Judas.

Of course, the complaint is often raised that this opinion, like that of the early church, simply rejected anything that opposed a preconceived idea. But, this complaint falls by the wayside when we understand that the early church knew which documents were authored by the apostles and which were not. God did not make a mistake when he led the Christian Church to recognize what is and is not inspired. The Gospel of Judas was never recognized by the church as being inspired.

## Addendum

On April 9, National Geographic aired the special on the Gospel of Judas. Unfortunately, the special was below standard in its scholarly representation of both sides of the argument--on the validity of the New Testament Gospels as well as the Gospel of Judas. It did not give competent counter evidences against its liberal and inaccurate suggestions regarding the formation of the New Testament Cannon. The special failed miserably to adequately deal with the formation of the New Testament Cannon, how the gospels were arrived at, how we know who wrote them, and when they were written, etc. I was extremely disappointed. Here is a quick example of one of the many problems.

The National Geographic show had a "scholar" who stated that most experts agree that the earliest gospels weren't written until around 60 A.D. The problem here is that no substantiation was offered for this opinion. Second, internal evidence in the Gospels and the book of Acts contradicts the statement. The book of Acts was written by Luke well after he wrote the Gospel of Luke. Acts is a history of the early Christian church and it does not include the accounts of "Nero's persecution of the Christians in A.D. 64 or the deaths of James (A.D. 62), Paul (A.D. 64), and Peter (A.D. 65)."<sup>8</sup>

The book of Acts is a compilation of the early church's history. One would think that it would naturally include the death of such important figures as James, Paul, and Peter if it were written any time after their deaths. Since this book does not include such information, it appears that it was written before, at least, the death of James (A.D. 62). Let's offer a conservative number of three years prior to the death of James, which would mean Acts could have been written around A.D. 59. This would mean that the Gospel of Luke was written years before that, let's pick a low number of five years before Acts which puts Luke at around A.D. 54.

Additionally, it is generally agreed upon that Mark was the first Gospel written. Therefore, Mark was before Luke. Let's pick another low number of five years by which Mark preceded Luke. This would reasonably put the Gospel of Mark at 49 A.D. This is a conservative estimate, and it could be that Mark was written much earlier. Therefore, very quickly we see that the statement made in the program that the gospels weren't really written until after 60 A.D. can be easily countered. The question is, why is it that National Geographic did not produce competent counter arguments?

Another issue is regarding Gnosticism, which was not properly represented. Gnosticism basically states that God cannot become incarnate. The show suggested that gnostics were Christians, but this cannot be since they contradict one of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith -- which was also taught in the Old Testament ([Zechariah 12:10](#)). John the apostle, who wrote 1<sup>st</sup> John, addressed the early formation of Gnostic thought in Chapter Four when he denounced those as antichrists who denied that Jesus had "come in the flesh." National Geographic failed miserably to represent Christian theology, and instead misrepresented Gnosticism, trying to make it appear that the present Christian theological system was merely the result of political happenstance.

CARM concludes that the National Geographic program was very biased and insufficiently researched.



# Is the “Gospel of Judas” True?

By **Gary Young**

In April 2006, the [National Geographic Society](#) of Washington D.C. held a press conference in which they announced the coming publication of a document called the *Gospel of Judas*. This document, they stated, would be published in English translation, as well as being the subject of the Easter edition of *National Geographic* magazine, and a television documentary to be produced by the National Geographic Society.

In both the press conference itself and in resulting press coverage, the *Gospel of Judas* is presented as a dramatic and important discovery which, like the (equally fictitious) *Da Vinci Code* threatened the “official” church doctrine by presenting an alternative account of the Gospel story. In this one, we’re told, Judas Iscariot, betrayer of Jesus in the canonical Gospels, is seen as the hero and one who was given more revelation and played a more significant part than any other apostles. In this account, Judas hands Jesus Christ over to the Jewish authorities only because Jesus Himself had actually instructed him to, rather than because of his greed as portrayed in the canonical Gospel accounts (Luke 22:1-6; John 12:4-6; Acts 1:16-18).

In the media press release reports this is described as “giving new insights into the relationship between Jesus & the disciple who betrayed him,” and being “deeply troubling for some believers” (Wilford & Goodstein). It has also been described as a “more positive portrayal of Judas” (Gugliotta and Cooperman, p. A10).

Is this in fact the case? Does the *Gospel of Judas* really undermine and invalidate the traditional Gospel account of the betrayal & crucifixion of Christ? Should this document cause Christians to re-evaluate their faith, and does this document indeed give valuable insight into the relationship between Christ and Judas Iscariot? This preliminary article is intended to provide some answers to these questions, and determine whether the *Gospel of Judas* does indeed provide Christians with any cause for concern.

## The History of the *Gospel of Judas*

In actual fact, knowledge that there was a document called the *Gospel of Judas* and of its basic content has always been known. The early Christian writer Irenaeus mentioned it in his work *Against Heresies*, in which he attacked the various unbiblical doctrines which were being taught by various groups in his time. Writing in about A.D. 180, Irenaeus describes a group called the Cainites who revered various characters in the Bible including Cain, Esau, Korah and Judas, whom the Biblical text described as evil. This Gnostic sect, Irenaeus tells us, taught that these were all actually doing God's will, and in reference to Judas he informs us that:

"They claim that the betrayer Judas was well informed of all these things, and that he, knowing the truth as none other, brought about the mystery of the betrayal. . . they produced a spurious account of this sort, which they call the *Gospel of Judas*" (Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* I.31.1).

When this statement is compared to the text which has recently been published (see below) there is little doubt that the two "Gospels" of Judas are indeed one and the same document.

The manuscript now under discussion was uncovered in cave near El-Minya in Egypt in the late 1970s, in an area in which Gnostic groups such as the Cainites are known to have been particularly strong in the second & third centuries A.D. Numerous collections of Gnostic texts dating from this period, including the famous Nag Hammadi library, have been uncovered in Egypt. These contain numerous false Gospels and other "pseudepigraphal" &> literature produced by these various Gnostic groups, many of which are known to Irenaeus and other writers of the period.

After many vicissitudes and languishing for many years in a safety deposit box in the United States, the codex was finally purchased for preservation & publication in 2004. The codex consists of 62 papyrus pages, and contains numerous other Gnostic texts & other writings from the period on its pages, in addition to the *Gospel of Judas*. The text itself is in the Coptic language, almost certainly translated from Greek originals. The codex has been dated by Carbon 14 dating & by paleographic techniques, and found to date from approximately A.D. 300. The *Gospel of Judas* itself of course must have been written well before this to have been mentioned by Irenaeus in A.D. 180.

New Testament scholars H.C. Puech & B. Blatz, writing without knowledge of the new codex, believed that the *Gospel of Judas* would have been written at some time between A.D. 130-170 (p. 387).

The National Geographic Society has announced that at the completion of their studies the codex will be donated to and housed at the Coptic Museum in Cairo, Egypt.

## **The Nature and Significance of the *Gospel of Judas***

The opening words of the *Gospel of Judas* instantly confirm Irenaeus' identification of it as a Gnostic document. The opening words are "The secret account of the revelation Jesus spoke. . . to Judas Iscariot." These words, and like terms, are extremely common among Gnostic literature.

The Gnostics taught that there was a special secret knowledge ("Gnostic" comes from the Greek *gnosis*, "knowledge") that was communicated over and above the revelation that was communicated in the Bible. The nature of that knowledge varied greatly amongst the different Gnostic sects, but was almost invariably characterized as "secret" and/or "hidden," which the Gnostic text or sect now purported to reveal.

These Gnostic documents come from at least the second century A.D., at the time the Gnostic sects were rapidly expanding. There is no evidence that any of these texts was in existence before about A.D. 130 & therefore they were all written well after the writing of the canonical Gospels.

While they are certainly useful for determining the doctrines and practices of these sects, they reveal to us nothing about the origins of Christianity & the doctrines of the first century A.D. church (McKechnie, Ch. 1). There is, therefore, no reason to assert that the *Gospel of Judas* can tell us anything about the belief or practice of the mainstream church of the first century or indeed of the historical reality of Judas and his relationship with the Lord. Irenaeus is indeed frequently derided for the suppressing of "alternative" accounts of the beginnings of Christianity while promoting the Gospel accounts that were later accepted as canonical. This idea is related to the concept that the church determined the canon of Scripture, accepting some books while rejecting other equally important books.

While the theory might sound good, the fact is that Irenaeus and others defended and promoted the canonical Gospels and rejected other books (including the *Gospel of Judas*), not because of doctrinal preference but because of the evident superiority of the canonical books.

While the canonical Gospels are attested from a very early stage and are cited and attested in early Christian writings in the late-first and early-second centuries A.D., the Gnostic writings are unattested in this period. While the canonical Gospels enjoyed widespread acceptance among all the early churches, the Gnostic documents generally did not receive acceptance from any but the Gnostic sect that originated them. Certainly there is no evidence whatever that the *Gospel of Judas* ever received any acceptance beyond the narrow and rather strange Cainite sect.

Besides its contradiction of the canonical Gospels' accounts of the betrayal of Christ and its lack of attestation & acceptance among the early Christian community, there are several other pertinent points to ask about the *Gospel of Judas*. As it purports to be a secret account of a conversation between Jesus and Judas (but is written in the third person, indicating it was written by neither), we might pertinently ask who did write it? If indeed it were an historical account, how would details of this secret conversation be known to anyone but Jesus & Judas, neither of whom could have written the book? This brief account is difficult to regard as a remotely historical work; it is quite evident that it can teach us nothing about the actual betrayal and crucifixion of Christ.

Essentially, Irenaeus rejected the *Gospel of Judas* for very good reasons; it's a late and unhistorical production of a fringe sect that was characterized by some very unbiblical beliefs. We can certainly learn a good deal about the beliefs of some Egyptian Gnostics in the second century A.D., but we cannot regard it as a legitimate viewpoint of what was believed about Judas in the churches of Christ in the early Christian period, let alone an account of the truth about Judas Iscariot and his role in betrayal & crucifixion of the Lord.

## Conclusion

Evidently, then, the *Gospel of Judas*, while being an interesting document which tells us much about the Cainite and other Gnostic sects in Egypt, tells us nothing about the relationship between Christ and Judas, and in no way overturns, or even threatens, what some are pleased to call the “official” or “traditional” view of the betrayal of Christ as portrayed in the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Sadly, the desire for an attention-grabbing headline sometimes tends to overshadow the cold hard facts in matters of religion and history. Such ideas, as presented in fantasy-like *The Da Vinci Code*, encourage people to imagine a secret and concealed truth which was suppressed by the early church.

There is much of this type media hype surrounding the publication of the *Gospel of Judas*. While it may appeal to conspiracy theorists to imagine that the church has suppressed an equally valid alternative history, the fact is that the *Gospel of Judas* was rejected by the early church because it was just what Irenaeus said it was: an unhistorical, late, and entirely imagined document which was produced by, and served the interests of, a small and highly unusual heretical sect of the second century A.D. In no way should it cause any Christian to reject the Biblical account, because it is evidently inferior in every way to the historical accounts of the canonical Gospels.

**Note: We appreciate very much Gary Young’s permission to use this most informative article that puts the so-called “Gospel of Judas” into its proper historical perspective. Dr. Young is an Australian Christian scholar (Ph.D. in Roman history) whose web site we encourage our readers to visit.**



# The Judas Make-Over

By **Wayne Jackson**

•

**“Was Judas Iscariot a ‘hero,’ who secretly worked together with Jesus Christ to bring about the Messianic mission? Or was he a villain who betrayed his Lord and Master?”**

Ever since the second century A.D. there have been efforts to cast Judas Iscariot (the traitor who delivered Jesus over to the Roman authorities) into a redesigned mold of historical revisionism. From the so-called “Gospel of Judas,” exposed by Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130-200) as a “fictitious history” (*Against Heresies* 1.31.1), to the era of modern musicals, fantasy novels & National Geographic specials, radical journalists have attempted to rehabilitate Christ’s betrayer, transforming him from the rogue he was, into a character deserving of adulation.

One delusional journalist characterizes Judas as possibly “the indispensable and most-favored disciple, ordered by Jesus to betray him so his mission could be fulfilled” (Jay Tolson, “Was This Villain Really a Hero?”, *U.S. News & World Report*, April 17, 2006, p. 52).

The so-called “Gospel of Judas” has Christ saying to the traitor, “But you will exceed all of them [the other disciples]. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me” (*The Gospel of Judas*, Translators, R. Kasser, M. Meyer, G. Wurst, in collaboration with Francois Goudard, Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006).

## Unanswered Questions

No serious student of the New Testament denies that there are mysteries the Gospel records do not fully explain regarding this sinister person. And that is perfectly understandable. Such matters **are not germane to our salvation**, and it has never been the will of God that every whimsical curiosity of man be satisfied.

Why did the traitor sell Jesus for the paltry sum of only 30 pieces of silver when, supposedly, he could have obtained a larger sum (yet see Zechariah 11:12-13)? Why was he allowed to be the treasurer of the apostolic band? Why did the Lord identify Judas as a traitor to certain disciples as they ate the Passover meal? Why did the betrayer return the money, and then commit suicide? Why did the Savior choose a man of this character? More than a century ago (1871), noted scholar A.B. Bruce penned an essay on Judas that contains the most probing analysis of that rebel this writer has ever read. For those who may be interested, see chapter xxiii in Bruce's book, *The Training of the Twelve*.

These questions, though, will never be plumbed satisfactorily. But that does not deter hucksters from attempting to answer them for us, all the while raking in money with their contrived scenarios. There is none so disgusting as he who attempts to achieve fame and fortune by "hitching a ride" on the back of the crucified Son of God. See "Judas' Deal, 2,000 Years Later."

Oddly, Judas increasingly is becoming a sympathetic figure in the minds of the rabble. He has been transformed into a romantic character who was closer to the Lord than the other disciples, and in fact, is being portrayed as "the most loyal of all the disciples." Amazing! There is not a shred of evidence for this bizarre theory. Let us consider the "Judas" issue.

## Prophecy

First of all one should reflect upon the fact that Judas' works were known long before his birth, and his character is subtly etched in Old Testament prophecy.

(1) David declared: "Yes, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted; who did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9). In this song the king speaks of a time of hardship in his life, and the villainy of a false friend who compounded his pain. Interestingly, Christ quotes a portion of this text and makes application to Judas.

However, the Lord omits the section about "trusting" this friend, for he "knew from the beginning" that Judas was the one who would betray him (John 6:64). He does declare, though, that the treachery of this apostle lay

within the prophetic structure of David's declaration of a thousand years earlier, and that ultimately it was "fulfilled" by the action of the traitor (see John 13:18).

(2) In Acts 1, in connection with the selection of a replacement apostle to fill the vacancy left by Judas' apostasy and death, Peter quotes first from Psalm 69:25 (a free rendition of the Greek version): "Let his habitation be made desolate & let no man dwell therein" (Acts 1:20a). Then, subsequent, from Psalm 109:8, "His office let another take" (1:20b).

Peter "fleshes out" the matter by calling attention to the reasons why Judas had to be replaced. He functioned as a "guide" to those who took Christ (v. 16). He was unfaithful in the "ministry" granted him (v. 17). He was guilty of gross "iniquity" (v. 18). He "fell away" and went to "his own place," i.e., the sorry destiny he made for himself (v. 25).

(3) Then there is this prophecy from the pen of Zechariah.

"And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver. And Jehovah said unto me, Cast it unto the potter, the goodly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter, in the house of Jehovah" (Zechariah 11:12-13).

That this prophecy envisions the diabolical maneuvers of Judas in selling out Christ is hardly to be disputed by anyone with a smattering of respect for the authority of scripture (cf. Matthew 27:9-10). [Note: For a discussion of Matthew's use of "Jeremiah," instead of "Zechariah," see the following article on this web site: *"Did Matthew Blunder?"* See also: *"Zechariah's Amazing Prophecy of the Betrayal of Christ"*.

## **New Testament Evidence**

Let us now briefly reflect upon the evidence of the Gospel accounts regarding the character of Judas Iscariot.

(1) Consider, for instance, the Greek term *paradidomi*. The word literally means to "give up," "deliver up," or "betray" — depending upon the context. It is found 122 times in the New Testament.

It can be used in a good sense (e.g., of the gospel that has been “delivered” to us — Romans 6:17). By way of contrast, the word may carry an evil connotation (as when Herod “delivered” John the Baptizer to prison — Matt. 4:12). As noted already, the **context** must determine the character of the action at a given point in time. In a wonderfully thrilling sense, God “delivered up [his Son] for us all” (Romans 8:32; cf. 4:25). And then there also is Paul’s sweet affirmation that Jesus “gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20; cf. Ephesians 5:2,25).

In the case of Judas, however, paradidomi (to betray, deliver up) is used 44 times. **Never** in the New Testament record is Judas portrayed in **any** light other than that of a wretched traitor who, perhaps for a variety of base motives, negotiated the deliverance of Christ to his enemies (Matthew 26:14-16,47-50; Mark 14:10-11,43-46; Luke 22:3-6,47-48; John 18:3-5). He is always mentioned last in the lists of the apostles — a hint of the infamy that forever was to be associated with his name.

(2) If Judas Iscariot was really the “hero” of the crucifixion plot, it is uncommonly strange **he was unaware of it!** Rather, he “repented himself” of the foul deed (Matthew 27:3). “Repented” derives from metamelomai, to “regret,” but, in this instance, with no inclination of change. In addition he confessed “I have sinned, in that I betrayed innocent blood” (27:4). He then “hanged himself” (v. 5). In legal circles, a “death-bed” confession is of the strongest caliber.

This is hardly the way one acts if he imagines he has just performed one of the more noble deeds of all history!

(3) If the foregoing evidence were not sufficient (and it is overwhelmingly compelling), the testimony of Christ himself ought to be decisive.

Jesus declared Judas to be devilish (diabolos) in his character (John 6:70; see J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 135). The Savior characterized him as being “not clean” (John 13:10-11). As a result, Judas “perished,” being described as the “son of perdition” (John 17:12). Luke later adds that Judas “fell away that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25). A.T. Robertson contended there was no doubt in Peter’s mind as to Judas’ guilt and destiny (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. II, 18).

## Conclusion

Neither the ancient Gnostics (with their “Gospel of Judas”), nor Hollywood with its perversion of history, nor the National Geographic Society with its anti-Christian agenda, can alter facts of antiquity. History **is** what it **was**, and nothing can change that. And of that traitor, Christ hauntingly said: “The Son of man goes, even as it is written of him: but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24).



# Frequently Asked Questions about the Gospel of Thomas

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by [Ryan Turner](#)  
edited by [Matt Slick](#)

The following are some common questions that people often have about the Gospel of Thomas. I will add and expand on these questions as new ones come up in discussion.

## What is the Gospel of Thomas?

The Gospel of Thomas is supposedly a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus that was discovered in 1945 at the village of Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Before the Nag Hammadi discovery, very little was known about the Gospel of Thomas other than three small fragments from Oxyrynchus that date to A.D. 200 and roughly a half dozen allusions from Church Fathers. The manuscripts discovered at Nag Hammadi dates to around A.D. 340 though the original composition of the Gospel of Thomas was definitely before that time probably sometime around A.D. 140 to 180.

## Who wrote the Gospel of Thomas?

The Gospel of Thomas was probably written by someone in the second century who had an admiration of James (see saying 12), the brother of Jesus, who died in 62 A.D.<sup>1</sup> It also probably was a person who group who admired the apostle Thomas and had some sort of Gnostic or Syrian Christian influence.

## How is the Gospel of Thomas different from the New Testament Gospels?

**Differences between the Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament Gospels**

Theme	Thomas	NT Gospels
Jesus	A wise teacher: divine, but not necessarily human	Divine and Human ( <a href="#">Mt. 14:33</a> ; <a href="#">Mk. 2:5-10</a> ; <a href="#">Lk. 22:67-71</a> ; <a href="#">Jn. 1:1, 14</a> ).
Messiah	Jesus is not the Messiah predicted by the Jewish prophets (52).	Jesus is the Messiah of the Old Testament prophets.
Salvation	By learning secret knowledge (39) and looking inward (70).	By looking outward in faith to Jesus ( <a href="#">Mark 5:34</a> ; <a href="#">Luke 7:51</a> ; <a href="#">John 6:47</a> ).
The Kingdom of God	Internal only	Internal aspect ( <a href="#">Lk. 17:21</a> ), but also a clearly imminent, literal, future expectation ( <a href="#">Lk. 9:27</a> ; <a href="#">10:9</a> ).
The Nature of God	Many gods (30); possibly even some form of pantheism (77).	One God ( <a href="#">Mk. 12:29</a> )
Man	Capable of saving himself by learning secret knowledge and looking inward (3, 70).	Incapable of saving himself; must look outward to Jesus ( <a href="#">Jn. 6:47</a> ).
Physical Body	The physical body is bad, but the spiritual is good (114).	The physical body is not inherently evil since it will be resurrected ( <a href="#">Lk. 24:39</a> ; <a href="#">Jn. 2:19-21</a> ).
Historical Context	Gnostic and/or Syrian Christianity of 2nd Century	1st Century Jewish Palestine
Church or Community	No clear mention of a community context.	Mention of community context and order ( <a href="#">Mt. 18:15-20</a> ).
Death and Resurrection	Not central to message.	Central to message ( <a href="#">Mt. 12:39-40</a> ; <a href="#">John 2:19-21</a> );).
View of Women	Strongly anti-feminine (114)	Pro-feminine ( <a href="#">Gospel of Mark</a> ).
Old Testament	No references; Jesus does not fulfill Scripture (52).	Many references ( <a href="#">Mt. 4:4</a> ; <a href="#">Mk. 14:27</a> ; <a href="#">Lk. 4:8</a> ; <a href="#">Jn. 10:35</a> ). Jesus fulfills Scripture.
Thomas	Receives a special place amongst the disciples by learning secret knowledge.	No evidence of Thomas receiving special knowledge compared to the other disciples: Peter, James, and John part of the inner circle ( <a href="#">Mt. 17:1</a> ; <a href="#">Mk. 13:3</a> ; <a href="#">Lk. 8:51</a> ).

**Note:** It is difficult to figure out the Gospel of Thomas's exact views on all of these subjects, but the above list is a general overview.

## Is the Gospel of Thomas a Gnostic Gospel?

There is debate within the scholarly community regarding whether the Gospel of Thomas is a Gnostic document. In fact, the reputable Gnostic scholar, Elaine Pagels, changed her views after years of studying the Gospel of Thomas. She now thinks that it is not a Gnostic document. However, in line with many other scholars, it seems best to conclude that it at least contains some Gnostic-like ideas such as salvation by secret knowledge, the extreme asceticism or disdain for the bodily appetites, polytheism, the reference to the bridal chamber, the idea of a heavenly teaching Christ who may not necessarily be human, etc. The Thomas Gospel also places little emphasis on the value of the Old Testament Scriptures. This was certainly in line with Gnostic thinking. Even if Thomas is not Gnostic, it appears to have vast similarities with “Gnosticism” as broadly defined.

## Should the Gospel of Thomas be in the New Testament?

*The short answer is “No.”* The Gospels in the New Testament were either written by apostles (Matthew and John) or associates of the apostles (Mark and Luke). The Gospel of Thomas, however, is a second century work that was written well after the apostles lived. The reasons scholars argue for this late date is because Thomas depends and/or makes allusions to New Testament books including even late ones like the Gospel of John which was written around 90 A.D. Thomas also shows likely evidence of having been influenced by second century Syrian Christianity even such Syrian works as the Diatessaron which dates from 175 A.D.<sup>2</sup> If this is the case, Thomas would be dated in the late second century. (For more information, see the article: [Does the Gospel of Thomas belong in the New Testament?](#)) For these reasons among others, the Gospel of Thomas was rightfully rejected by the church for inclusion in the New Testament canon.

## When was the Gospel of Thomas written?

It is difficult to know the exact date of the Gospel of Thomas, but one should probably date it to A.D. 140-180 since it references second century Gnostic ideas, references the New Testament texts, and possibly has late second century Syrian Christianity influence. Our earliest manuscript fragment from part of the Thomas Gospel dates to around A.D. 200. So, the Gospel of Thomas definitely was written before that time.

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- 1. Ben Witherington, *What have they done with Jesus?*, San Francisco, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 32.
  - 2. Craig A. Evans, “The Apocryphal Jesus: Assessing the Possibilities and Problems,” Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, eds., *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008, pp. 147-72.
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# Is the Gospel of Thomas Real or Fake?

By **Wayne Jackson**

The e-mail I received was from Dr. Paterson Brown, who is affiliated with the Ecumenical Coptic Project in Athens, Greece. He forwarded to me copies of the so-called “Coptic Gospels” of Thomas and Phillip. With reference to the “Gospel of Thomas,” Dr. Brown wrote:

Significantly, Professor Helmut Koester of Harvard University, speaking as President of the Society of Biblical Literature (U.S.A.), has declared that “nearly all biblical scholars in the United States agree that Thomas is as authentic as the New Testament Gospels.”

Authentic? In **what sense**? Certainly not authentic in the sense that the Gospel of Thomas carries the same credibility as the four canonical Gospel records: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

There is considerable evidence that the document that’s called the “Gospel of Thomas” was not actually authored by the apostle who bore that name.

What are the facts relative to this ancient text that has caused such a sensation in recent years?

## Compiled in the Second Century

In 1945, an archaeological excavation at Nag Hammadi in Central Egypt yielded a collection of 13 papyrus codices (books) totaling over 1,100 pages. One of these contained the “Gospel of Thomas” in the Coptic language. In this form, it dates from about A.D. 350.

However, the original work apparently is older since three Greek papyri from the Oxyrhynchus collection (c. A.D. 150) contain fragments of the narrative. It is thus believed that the original “Gospel of Thomas” was compiled about A.D. 140, probably in Edessa, Syria. Some scholars push the date a little later (A.D. 150-200).

There is **no evidence** that this work existed in the first century, even though those associated with the bogus Jesus Seminar so allege.

## Beware of “secret sayings”

“Thomas” consists of a collection of 114 “sayings of Jesus,” that are supposed to be a **secret** revelation the Lord gave to the apostle Thomas. That secret business itself ought to be a red flag!

Some of these sayings repeat the words of Christ from the canonical Gospel accounts. About forty of them are entirely new. Most scholars believe that the Gospel of Thomas is significantly contaminated with the ancient heretical philosophy known as Gnosticism (Cameron, p. 539).

## Absurdities

Occasionally, some very absurd language is put into the Lord’s mouth by means of this document. Here is an example:

Simon Peter said to them: “Let Mary (Magdalene) go out from among us, because women are not worthy of the Life.”

Jesus said: “See I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Saying 114, Funk, p. 532; see also Yamauchi, p. 186).

Does that even remotely resemble the dignified status that women are afforded in the New Testament?

## The Gospel of Thomas: An Apparent Fraud

R. K. Harrison has well noted that this apocryphal work “cannot in any sense be called a ‘fifth gospel’” (Blaklock & Harrison, p. 450). It is readily apparent that the so-called Gospel of Thomas has no place in the inspired canon, and history has been correct in rejecting it—some modern “scholars” to the contrary notwithstanding.

There are, however, two important points to be made in this connection.

1. The dependence of the "Thomas" upon the canonical Gospel records clearly indicates that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were recognized as **the authoritative sources** of information regarding Jesus of Nazareth.
2. The fact that the narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were available to a writer in **Syria** in the mid-second century A.D. is dramatic evidence of the widespread distribution of the sacred documents in the early years of Christian history.

## Conclusion

The twenty-seven New Testament books are the only inspired records of the Christian age that have come down to us. Obviously, in the providential operations of God, they represent what we were intended to have to completely qualify us for Christian identity and service (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

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### The Gospel of Thomas Contradicts the Bible

1. The kingdom of God is inside you (3)
2. "Lucky is the lion that the human will eat, so that the lion becomes human." (7)
3. Heaven and earth came into being for the sake of James the just (12.2)
4. Jesus is not the teacher of his disciples (13.5)
5. There are five trees in Paradise for you (19.3)
6. Jesus is one of the many deities (30)
7. Jesus is not the Messiah (52)
8. Salvation is from knowledge and looking inward (70)
9. Everyone can become Jesus (108)
10. Women must become men in order to enter heaven (114)

"Split a piece  
of wood, and  
I am there.  
Lift up the  
stone, and there  
you will  
find me."

Gospel of Thomas 77



# ANSWERS TO THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

## GOSE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

### What is the *Gospel of Judas*?

- ✘ *Gospel of Judas* is a Gnostic gospel that presents Judas positively.
- ✘ Gnosticism taught that one's spirit needs to escape from the prison of the human body.
- ✘ The book suggests that the betrayal of Jesus was done out of obedience to Jesus' specific instructions; Judas helped Jesus' spirit escape.

## GOSE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

### What is the *Gospel of Judas*?

- ✘ **Where it was found:** El Minya, Egypt
- ✘ **Date it was written:** AD 160 to AD 180, over 130 years after Judas died.
- ✘ **Who is the author:** Unknown
- ✘ **What is the style:** Gnostic
- ✘ **What is the theme:** The loyalty of Judas

# GOSE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

When was *Gospel of Judas* written?

- ✘ Historians have known about *Gospel of Judas* since AD 180.
- ✘ Rejected by church father Irenaeus of Lyons in AD 180.

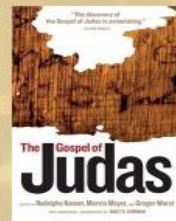


Irenaeus

# GOSE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

When was *Gospel of Judas* written?

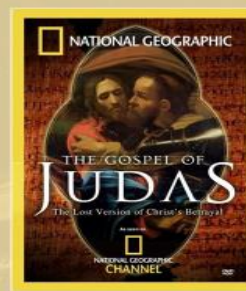
- ✘ In 2006, scholars reconstructed most of the text from recently-published fragments.
- ✘ The book was originally written in Greek, but the available fragments come from a third-century Coptic translation.



# GOSE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

When was *Gospel of Judas* written?

- ✘ Many Coptic words in the book stem from Greek terms that were current from AD 150 to AD 200.
- ✘ This is more than a century after Judas's death!



(National Geographic Society)



# GOSPEL OF JUDAS

## When was *Gospel of Judas* written?

- ✦ *Gospel of Judas* seems to have been written after the Gnostic teachings of Valentinus had spread through many Christian communities.
- ✦ Valentinus died around AD 160.
- ✦ Therefore, the book was most likely written between AD 160 and 180.

# GOSPEL OF JUDAS

## Who wrote *Gospel of Judas*?

- ✦ Although the text presents Judas in a positive light, *Gospel of Judas* never claims to have been written by Judas.

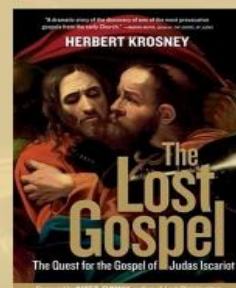


*The Passion (detail)* Hans the Younger Holbein (1524-25)

# GOSPEL OF JUDAS

## Who wrote *Gospel of Judas*?

- ✦ Even if the book *had* claimed Judas as its author, the book could not have been written by Judas.
- ✦ In fact, *Gospel of Judas* could not have been written by any eyewitness of the life and ministry of Jesus.



## GOSPEL OF JUDAS

### Who wrote *Gospel of Judas*?

- ✦ The actual author of the *Gospel of Judas* was anonymous and is still unknown today.
- ✦ It is evident, however, that the author was influenced greatly by Gnostic teachings of the second century.

## GOSPEL OF JUDAS

### What does *Gospel of Judas* suggest?

**According to *Gospel of Judas*, Jesus supposedly told Judas, “You will be cursed for generations, ... but you will eventually rule over all of them. ... For what you are sacrificing is merely the man in whom I am clothed.”**



*Suicide of Judas*  
Gislebertus  
(1120-30)

## GOSPEL OF JUDAS

### What does *Gospel of Judas* suggest?

- ✦ Like many Gnostic texts of the mid-second century AD, *Gospel of Judas* claims that Jesus only *seemed* to be human.
- ✦ Where *The Da Vinci Code* claims that Jesus was not God, but just a “mortal prophet”, *Gospel of Judas* claims that Jesus was not mortal at all, but God “clothed” in human form.



## Gospel of Peter

[1] But of the Jews none washed his hands, neither Herod nor one of his judges. And since they did not desire to wash, Pilate stood up. [2] And then Herod the king orders the Lord to be taken away, having said to them, 'What I ordered you to do, do.' [3] But Joseph, the friend of Pilate and of the Lord, had been standing there; and knowing they were about to crucify him, he came before Pilate and requested the body of the Lord for burial. [4] And Pilate, having sent to Herod, requested his body. [5] And Herod said: 'Brother Pilate, even if no one had requested him, we would have buried him, since indeed Sabbath is dawning. For in the Law it has been written: The sun is not to set on one put to death.' And he gave him over to the people before the first day of their feast of the Unleavened Bread. [6] But having taken the Lord, running, they were pushing him and saying, 'Let us drag along the Son of God now that we have power over him.' [7] And they clothed him with purple and sat him on a chair of judgment, saying: 'Judge justly, King of Israel.' [8] And a certain one of them, having brought a thorny crown, put it on the head of the Lord. [9] And others who were standing there were spitting in his face, and others slapped his cheeks. Others were jabbing him with a reed; and some scourged him, saying, 'With such honor let us honor the Son of God.' [10] And they brought two wrongdoers and crucified the Lord in the middle of them. But he was silent as having no pain. [11] And when they had set the cross upright, they inscribed that THIS IS THE KING OF ISRAEL.

[12] And having put his garments before him, they divided them up and threw as a gamble for them. [13] But a certain one of those wrongdoers reviled them, saying: 'We have been made suffer thus because of the wrong that we have done; but this one, having become Savior of men, what injustice had he done to you?' [14] And having become irritated at him, they ordered that there be no leg-breaking, so that he might die tormented. [15] But it was midday, and darkness held fast all Judea; and they were distressed and anxious lest the sun had set, since he was still living. [For] it is written for them: Let not the sun set on one put to death. [16] And someone of them said: 'Give him to drink gall with vinegary wine.' And having made a mixture, they gave to drink. [17] And they fulfilled all things and completed the sins on their own head. [18] But many went around with lamps, thinking that it was night, and they fell. [19] And the Lord screamed out, saying: 'My power, O power, you have forsaken me.' And having said this, he was taken up. [20] And at the same hour the veil of the Jerusalem sanctuary was torn into two. [21] And they drew out the nails from the hands of the Lord and placed him on the earth; and all the earth was shaken, and a great fear came about. [22] Then the sun shone, and it was found to be the ninth hour. [23] And the Jews rejoiced and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it, since he was one who had seen the many good things he did. [24] And having taken the Lord, he washed and tied him with a linen cloth and brought him into his own sepulcher, called the Garden of Joseph. [25] Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, having come to know how much wrong they had done themselves, began to beat themselves and say: 'Woe to our sins. The judgment has approached and the end of Jerusalem.' [26] But I with the companions was sorrowful; and having been wounded in spirit, we were in hiding, for we were sought after by them as wrongdoers and as wishing to set fire to the sanctuary. [27] In addition to all these things we were fasting; and we were sitting mourning and weeping night and day until the Sabbath. [28] But the scribes and Pharisees and elders, having gathered together with one another, having heard that all the people were mourning and beating their breasts, saying that 'If at his death these very great signs happened, behold how just he was,' [29] feared (especially the elders) and came before Pilate, begging him and saying, [30] 'Give over soldiers to us in order that we may safeguard his burial place for three days, lest, having come, his disciples steal him, and the people accept that he is risen from the death, and they do us wrong.' [31] But Pilate gave over to them Petronius the centurion with soldiers to safeguard the sepulcher. And with these the elders and scribes came to the burial place. [32] And having rolled a large stone, all who were there, together with the centurion and the soldiers, placed it against the door of the burial place. [33] And they marked it with seven wax seals; and having pitched a tent there, they safeguarded it.

[34] But early when the Sabbath was dawning, a crowd came from Jerusalem and the surrounding area in order that they might see the sealed tomb. [35] But in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, when the soldiers were safeguarding it two by two in every watch, there was a loud voice in heaven; [36] and they saw that the heavens were opened and that two males who had much radiance had come down from there and come near the sepulcher. [37] But that stone which had been thrust against the door, having rolled by itself, went a distance off the side; and the sepulcher opened, and both the young men entered. [38] And so those soldiers, having seen, awakened the centurion and the elders (for they too were present, safeguarding). [39] And while they were relating what they had seen, again they see three males who have come out from the sepulcher, with the two supporting the other one, and a cross following them, [40] and the head of the two reaching unto heaven, but that of the one being led out by a hand by them going beyond the heavens. [41] And they were hearing a voice from the heavens saying, 'Have you made proclamation to the fallen-asleep?' [42] And an obeisance was heard from the cross, 'Yes.'

[43] And so those people were seeking a common perspective to go off and make these things clear to Pilate; [44] and while they were still considering it through, there appear again the opened heavens and a certain man having come down and entered into the burial place. [45] Having seen these things, those around the centurion hastened at night before Pilate (having left the sepulcher which they were safeguarding) and described all the things that they indeed had seen, agonizing greatly and saying: 'Truly he was God's Son.' [46] In answer Pilate said: 'I am clean of the blood of the Son of God, but it was to you that this seemed [the thing to do].' [47] Then all, having come forward, were begging and exhorting him to command the centurion and the soldiers to say to no one what they had seen. [48] 'For,' they said, 'it is better for us to owe the debt of the greatest sin in the sight of God than to fall into the hands of the Jewish people and be stoned.' [49] And so Pilate ordered the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing. [50] Now at the dawn of the Lord's Day Mary Magdalene, a female disciple of the Lord (who, afraid because of the Jews since they were inflamed with anger, had not done at the tomb of the Lord what women were accustomed to do for the dead beloved by them), [51] having taken with her women friends, came to the tomb where he had been placed. [52] And they were afraid lest the Jews should see them and were saying, 'If indeed on that day on which he was crucified we could not weep and beat ourselves, yet now at his tomb we may do these things. [53] But who will roll away for us even the stone placed against the door of the tomb in order that, having entered, we may sit beside him and do the expected things? [54] For the stone was large, and we were afraid lest anyone see us. And if we are unable, let us throw against the door what we bring in memory of him; let us weep and beat ourselves until we come to our homes.' [55] And having gone off, they found the sepulcher opened. And having come forward, they bent down there and saw there a certain young man seated in the middle of the sepulcher, comely and clothed with a splendid robe, who said to them: [56] 'Why have you come? Whom do you seek? Not that one who was crucified? He is risen and gone away. But if you do not believe, bend down and see the place where he lay, because he is not here. For he is risen and gone away to there whence he was sent.' [57] Then the women fled frightened. [58] Now it was the final day of the Unleavened Bread; and many went out returning to their home since the feast was over. [59] But we twelve disciples of the Lord were weeping and sorrowful; and each one, sorrowful because of what had come to pass, departed to his home. [60] But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew, having taken our nets, went off to the sea. And there was with us Levi of Alphaeus whom the Lord ...

# Does the Gospel of Peter belong in the New Testament?

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by Ryan Turner

The canon of the New Testament was reserved only for those writings that were either written by an apostle or an associate of an apostle. Since the Gospel of Peter was written in the mid second century, it is not a candidate for inclusion in the New Testament. The numerous embellishments in the Gospel of Peter clearly indicate that it was composed in the second century and was not written by the apostle Peter. This second-century date of authorship is in conformity with modern New Testament scholarship's appraisal of the Gospel of Peter. Therefore, the early church rightfully rejected this Gospel which was falsely attributed to Peter.

## Background Information about the Gospel of Peter

### What is the Gospel of Peter?

Though incorrectly ascribed to the apostle Peter, the Gospel of Peter is comprised of fourteen paragraphs (or 60 verses), written around 150 A.D., which describes the events surrounding the end of Jesus' life including his trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.<sup>1</sup> This Gospel is only partially preserved in one 8<sup>th</sup>- 9<sup>th</sup> century manuscript, beginning and ending in mid-sentence (Harris, 245).<sup>2</sup> The Gospel of Peter contains many similarities with New Testament Gospels including the basic outline of the end of Jesus' life with his trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, but it also contains a number of additions including, most notably, a description of the actual resurrection event with two giant angels, a super-sized Jesus, and a talking cross emerging from the empty tomb.

### When was the Gospel of Peter discovered?

The Gospel of Peter was allegedly discovered in 1886-1887 during excavations in Akhmîm, upper Egypt. A ninth century manuscript was found in the coffin of a monk which is now known as the Akhmîm fragment. Interestingly, this book fragment contains no name or title. However, since the manuscript had (1) alleged docetic<sup>3</sup> overtones & was (2) found in the midst of other works attributed to the apostle Peter, such as the Apocalypse of Peter, scholars think that the Akhmîm fragment belonged to the Gospel of Peter.<sup>4</sup>

### Do any ancient writers talk about the Gospel of Peter?

Prior to the discovery of the Akhmîm fragment in 1886-87, scholars knew very little about the Gospel of Peter. Their first main source was Eusebius of Caesarea (c. A.D. 260-340), the well-known early church historian, who noted that the Gospel of Peter was among the church's rejected writings and had heretical roots.<sup>5</sup> The second main source for the Gospel of Peter is a letter by Serapion, a bishop in Antioch (in office A.D. 199-211), titled "Concerning What is Known as the Gospel of Peter."<sup>6</sup>



Bishop Serapion notes that the Gospel of Peter had docetic overtones and advised that church leaders not read it to their congregations. From Bishop Serapion's statements we know that the Gospel of Peter was written sometime in the second century, but we are left with little knowledge of its actual contents from Serapion's statements alone.<sup>7</sup>

### **Is the Gospel of Peter a Gnostic Gospel?**

There is some debate among scholars regarding whether the Akhmîm fragment actually is a Gnostic document. There are two possible Gnostic examples in 4:10 [paragraph 4] and 5:19 [paragraph 5]. Paragraph 4 describes the crucifixion of Jesus and states, "But he held his peace, as though having no pain." This may reflect the Gnostic view of Docetism which viewed Jesus Christ as not possessing a real physical body. *This would explain Jesus' lack of pain on the cross.* Furthermore, paragraph 5 describes Jesus' death cry on the cross as, "My power, my power, thou hast forsaken me." Some scholars see this as a reference to "a docetic version of the cry of dereliction which results from the departure of the divine power from Jesus' bodily shell."<sup>8</sup> However, some scholars dispute these references as referring to full blown Gnosticism or Gnostic teachings at all.

## **When was the Gospel of Peter written?**

Though this work was attributed to the apostle Peter (Par. 14), contemporary New Testament scholars rightfully note that the Gospel of Peter is a second century A.D. work. Most scholars would not date this Gospel before 130-150 A.D because of: (1) the numerous historical errors including a preponderance of legendary embellishments and the lack of first century historical knowledge, and (2) the likely dependence which the Gospel of Peter has on the New Testament Gospels. For these reasons among many, most scholars today reject the Gospel of Peter as (not) giving us as accurate of a portrait of Jesus as the standard New Testament Gospels and regard it as a late composition from the second century A.D.

### **Historical Errors**

#### ***Error #1: The Guilt of Jews***

The confession of the Jewish authorities guilt (par. 7; 11) lacks historical credibility.<sup>9</sup> The confession of the Jewish authorities makes more sense in a context after 70 A.D. where the Jews were blamed for the destruction of Jerusalem as a result of not accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Furthermore, the reference of the Jewish scribes and elders saying, "For it is better, say they, for us to be guilty of the greatest sin before God, and not to fall into the hands of the people of the Jews and to be stoned," likewise reflects a period after 70 A.D. and is definitely not earlier than the Synoptic material.

#### ***Error #2: The High Priest Spending the Night in the Cemetery***

Furthermore, the author of the Gospel of Peter (or Akhmîm fragment) possessed very little knowledge of Jewish customs. According to paragraphs 8 and 10, Jewish elders and scribes actually camp out in the cemetery as part of the guard keeping watch over the tomb of Jesus. Craig Evans wisely notes, "Given Jewish views of corpse impurity, not to mention fear of cemeteries at night, the author of our fragment is unbelievably ignorant (Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 83)."

The ruling priest spending the night in the cemetery; no ruling priest would actually do that. Due to these serious blunders, it is highly unlikely that this Gospel reflects earlier material than the New Testament gospels. Instead, the author is most likely far removed from the historical events surrounding Jesus' death and burial.

### ***Error #3: Embellishment of the New Testament Resurrection Accounts***

There are a number of apparent embellishments in the Gospel of Peter, especially surrounding the guarding of the tomb and the resurrection. Regarding the guarding of the tomb, there are seven even seals over the tomb (8), and a great multitude from the surrounding area comes to see the sealing of the tomb. Though these are certainly historical possibilities, it appears to indicate that these are embellishments compared to the more simple accounts in the New Testament Gospels.

The New Testament writers never describe exactly how the resurrection took place, since presumably no one was there to witness it other than the guards. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the Gospel of Peter's account is that it actually describes the resurrection of Jesus (9-10)!

“9 And in the night in which the Lord's day was drawing on, as the soldiers kept guard two by two in a watch, there was a great voice in the heaven; and they saw the heavens opened, and two men descend from thence with great light and approach the tomb. And that stone which was put at the door rolled of itself and made way in part; and the tomb was opened, and both the young men entered in. 10 When therefore those soldiers saw it, they awakened the centurion and the elders; for they too were hard by keeping guard. And as they declared what things they had seen, again they see three men come forth from the tomb, and two of them supporting one, and a cross following them: and of the two the head reached unto the heaven, but the head of him who was lead by them overpassed the heavens. And they heard a voice from the heavens, saying, Thou hast preached to them that sleep. And a response was heard from the cross, Yea.”<sup>10</sup>

This resurrection account does not retain anything of the historical soberness that is in the New Testament resurrection accounts. Instead, this description of the resurrection of Jesus has a large angel whose head “reached unto the heaven,” and a giant Jesus whose head “overpassed the heavens!” Finally, the best example is the talking cross. The voice from heaven says, “Thou has preached to them that sleep.” The cross responds by saying, “Yea.” While it is possible that there was a giant Jesus whose head surpassed the heavens and a talking cross, it is more likely this story is probably an embellishment of the simpler empty tomb and resurrection accounts in the New Testament Gospels. It is probably just another attempt like some other Gnostic Gospels to “fill in the gaps” in the events surrounding Jesus' life.

How anyone could think of this resurrection account as more primitive than the Gospels seems quite unreasonable. Evans wisely states, “...can it be seriously maintained that the Akhmîm fragment's [Gospel of Peter's] resurrection account, complete with a talking cross and angels whose heads reach heaven, constitutes the most primitive account?” (Evans, 84).

### **Dependence on the New Testament Gospels**

It is difficult to prove exact literary dependence by the Gospel of Peter on the New Testament Gospel; however, there are at least a couple instances in Peter which are best explained by the author having familiarity with the canonical New Testament Gospels. The Gospel of Matthew

is a prime example, with its guard at the tomb of Jesus. The Gospel of Peter author likely took this account & embellished it by having Jewish leaders come and camp out at the tomb overnight. This may have served the apologetic purposes of the author of The Gospel of Peter which reflected Jerusalem conditions after destruction of temple. Furthermore, the centurion's confession (par. 11) appears to also reflect the Gospel of Matthew ([Matthew 27:54](#); cf. [Mark 15:39](#); [Luke 23:47](#)).

Finally, the Gospel of Peter's reference of the thief uses the same Greek words to reference the thief in paragraph 4 (4.10, 13), which likely reflects the Gospel of Luke (23:33, 39).

Since the Gospel of Peter is likely a 2<sup>nd</sup> century work due to the historical errors listed above, it is likely that the Gospel of Peter at least used similar traditions that are found in the New Testament Gospels, if not the Gospels themselves. This is a more sober conclusion rather than basing our argument on source criticism alone, which is often bound with mere speculation of hypothetical sources & layers of editing & redaction. Given the numerous embellishments and historical errors, it is likely that the author had some familiarity with the canonical Gospels and combined it with his own speculations. However, to what extent the author had knowledge of the New Testament Gospels, we may never know.

## Conclusion

Despite the claims of some, the Gospel of Peter does not belong in the New Testament due to its serious embellishments and likely dependence on the New Testament Gospels. For these reasons among many, most scholars today reject the Gospel of Peter as giving us as accurate of a portrait of Jesus as the standard New Testament Gospels, and regard it as a late composition from the second century A.D.

### Truth about the New Testament Gospels

How?  
How did early Christians determine which writings really came from eyewitnesses?

- Serapion probably knew from oral tradition that John Mark had once served as Peter's translator and the Gospel According to Mark represented the words of Peter.



# A Summary of the Evidence for a Second Century Date of the Gospel of Peter

## Historical Errors and Embellishments

- Seven seals are used to seal the tomb of Jesus (Paragraph 8).
- A crowd from Jerusalem comes to see the sealed tomb of Jesus (Par. 9).
- The Jewish leaders camp out at the tomb of Jesus overnight.
- The Jewish leaders fear the harm of the Jewish people (Par. 8). This does not describe the historical situation of the Jews before the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 A.D.
- The Resurrection story actually describes how Jesus exited the tomb with two giant angels, a super-sized Jesus, and a talking cross.

## Late References

- Transfer of responsibility of Jesus' death away from Pilate to Herod and the Jews.
- "The Lord's Day" reference (Par. 9) indicates a later time period (cf. [Rev. 1:10](#); Ignatius's *Epistle to the Magnesians* 9:1).

## Possible Gnostic Overtones

- Silence during the crucifixion "as if he felt no pain." This could be consistent with a docetic view of Jesus which was common in Gnostic circles.
- Crucifixion cry is "my Power!" "my Power!" which likely indicates a supernatural being departed from him.
- Jesus' death is described as being "taken up," implying that he was rescued without dying. This would be consistent with some Gnostic views that thought since Jesus was not fully a man, he could not actually die on the cross.

## Possible New Testament Parallels

- The centurion's confession (Par. 11) appears to reflect the Gospel of Matthew ([Mt. 27:54](#); cf. [Mk. 15:39](#); [Lk. 23:47](#)).
- The posting of the guard at the tomb appears to reflect the Gospel of Matthew.

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- 1. To read a copy of the Gospel of Peter, please visit: <http://sacred-texts.com/bib/lbob/lbob30.htm>. I also consulted "The Gospel of Peter" in *The Ante Nicene Fathers*, volume 9, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, pp. 7-8.
  - 2. Interestingly, we do not know if the Gospel has a report on Jesus' public ministry and miracles since the copy of the Gospel of Peter that we have is just a fragment. The Akhmim fragment ends abruptly with probably an appearance of Jesus about to take place at the Sea of Galilee. Some scholars state that the Gospel of Peter fragment may date to the 7th century. See P. M. Head, "On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter," *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992), 209.
  - 3. Docetism was a belief in the early centuries of Christianity which held that Jesus was fully divine, but not fully human. In other words, Jesus was God, but not man since physical reality is evil.
  - 4. A few scholars debate whether the Akhmim fragment actually is the Gospel of Peter, but for the sake of argument, we will just assume that the Akhmim fragment actually is the Gospel of Peter especially since this is the consensus view of scholarship today.
  - 5. *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.3.1-4; 3.25.6; and 6.12.3-6
  - 6. Bishop Serapion's letter is actually preserved by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.3-6
  - 7. Some scholars have attempted to find parallels or quotations of the Gospel of Peter in other early church fathers including Origen, but these parallels are questionable.
  - 8. Head, 214. Head does not actually ascribe to this viewpoint.
  - 9. It is possibly based on Jesus' statements about Jerusalem (**Lk. 21:20-24; 23:48**) and perhaps to Caiaphas's counsel (**Jn. 11:49-50**). 10. <http://sacred-texts.com/bib/lbob/lbob30.htm>







## The Gospels: "Lost" & Found

The New Testament begins with four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ commonly known as "Gospels," a word that means "good news" or "victorious tidings." The Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have been familiar to Christians for so many centuries that many believers have assumed these Gospels are the only retellings of the life of Jesus that ever existed. But there are more than a dozen other "Gospels," plus several supposed accounts of episodes from Jesus' life that aren't known by the name of "Gospel."

Some of these alternative "Gospels" have been familiar among scholars for centuries. Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* popularized several "lost Gospels," including *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, and *Gospel of Thomas*. A couple of years later the *Gospel of Judas* was reconstructed and translated anew. The media implied that *Gospel of Judas* and other lost Gospels provide information about the historical Jesus that isn't included in the New Testament Gospels. Several writers and entertainment corporations were quick to turn a profit by sensationalizing the news of this reconstructed "Gospel." Indeed, the viewpoints found in the "lost Gospels" do differ from the New Testament Gospels.

ACCORDING TO NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS	ACCORDING TO "LOST GOSPELS"
Jesus was fully human and fully divine	Jesus was a spirit who seemed human or a mere human uniquely inhabited by a divine spirit (Gnostic gospels)
Judas Iscariot willingly chose to betray Jesus	Jesus told Judas to betray him ( <i>Gospel of Judas</i> )
The first miraculous sign that Jesus performed was turning water to wine at Cana	Jesus performed self-serving miracles throughout his childhood ("infancy Gospels")

How likely is it that the lost Gospels really tell us the truth about Jesus Christ? An open-minded look at the historical record quickly reveals that there is little reason to doubt the New Testament Gospels and great reason to reject the so-called "lost Gospels."



# The Truth about *The Da Vinci Code*

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

*The Da Vinci Code* theory (both the book & a subsequent movie of the same name), has generated significant publicity over the past several years. Of course the crackpot journalists, TV talk-show hosts, and liberal theologians are vigorously promoting these productions as “truth” about Christianity. Even some naive folks, who ostensibly are associated with “Christendom,” are encouraging their friends and associates to read the book and see the movie, and to use the information as a “tool” for evangelism.

As a “tool,” these productions have the value of a one-handle pair of pliers! Most nominal “Christians” do not have two-cents worth of discernment in being able to separate biblical truth from error.

The author of *The Da Vinci Code* is Dan Brown, a former schoolteacher, songwriter, and mediocre novelist. His *Da Vinci* book, which finds its place on the fiction shelves of Barnes & Noble, etc., made Brown a millionaire. It is reported that by 2006 Brown’s book had sold over 60.5 million copies and had produced more than \$200 million in revenue.

The volume is a combination of a fractional element of truth, a galaxy of heretical error and a money-driven scheme to capitalize commercially off of the New Testament gospel. This latter ploy is so vile as to defy attempt at any appropriate characterization.

In an excellent article entitled, “*The Da Vinci Code* vs. The Facts,” Dr. Steve Morrison has catalogued some of the egregious errors that characterize this literary monstrosity (n.d., 4.2). I have surveyed these points and added my own observations.

(1) It is alleged that up until the Council of Nice (about A.D. 325), Christ was viewed merely as a human prophet and not “the Son of God” (Brown 2004, 233). Anyone who has even a nodding acquaintance with the New Testament knows this is an outrageous lie. God acknowledged Christ as his Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5), as did the Lord’s disciples (Matthew 16:16).

Even those involved in the crucifixion were forced to concede that “truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54), as did that vicious persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, who was so overwhelmed with the evidence of Jesus’ divine nature (Acts 9:20), that he traveled some 12,000 miles proclaiming the facts about Jesus Christ, and died as a martyr on behalf of his Savior.

(2) It is contended that there are many “Gospels” beyond Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—more than eighty is claimed. And these must be granted credibility equivalent to that of the New Testament documents (Ibid., 231). It is true that there were documents circulating in the second century and onward that were called “gospels,” e.g., the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary, etc., but these fanciful works were rejected as spurious by contemporary scholars. The article on “Gospels,” in McClintock & Strong’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, demonstrates the vast difference between real & bogus records.

(3) Supposedly, the books of the New Testament were not collected into one volume until the time of Constantine, in the fourth century (Ibid., 231). It doesn’t really matter when New Testament books were finally gathered together. The important point is this: the documents were wide circulated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century onward. Every passage of the entire New Testament (with the exception of about a dozen verses) can be found in the writings of the early “church fathers”—long before the days of Constantine.

(4) According to the Da Vinci theory, the “original” Christianity had a feminine “goddess” (Ibid., 237-239). The textual New Testament writings are the testimony of the “original” Christianity & there is nothing remotely resembling a Christian goddess in these narratives. However, there were many “goddesses” in the Graeco-Roman world, and eventually some quasi-Christian cults did attempt to elevate Mary to the status of virtual goddess, the “Queen of heaven” — a myth that continues to be perpetuated even today by Roman Catholicism. The theory is false.

The *Da Vinci Code* is but another of those crass efforts to cash in on the world-wide influence of Jesus Christ, without the appropriate honor that acknowledges his true identity & yields in submission to him as Lord. *The Da Vinci Code* is a cheap and disgusting manifestation of greed.

## CHART: “Gnosticism Unmasked”

*The label “Gnosticism” is of fuzzy logic, describing diverse sects and ideas in the ancient world. This chart summarizes those elements within various Gnostic groups that the majority of Christians found especially troublesome. A particular Gnostic sect would not necessarily have held all of the following beliefs.*

<b>DOCTRINE</b>	<b>GNOSTIC VIEW</b>	<b>ORTHODOX VIEW</b> (as expressed by Irenaeus of Lyons)
<b>GOD</b>	There are two opposing Gods: the supreme, spiritual, unknown Father who is distant from the world and revealed only by Christ; and the subordinate, ignorant, and evil creator of the world (Demiurge).	There is only one true God who is the Creator of the world and the Father of Jesus Christ.
<b>WORLD</b>	The material world crafted by the Demiurge is evil and keeps the spiritual ones from perfection. It must perish and be escaped.	The material world was created good by God. It will someday be renewed and made into a fit home for the redeemed.
<b>HUMANITY</b>	The Gnostics are by nature the elite, spiritual ones, for they have the “seed” of the spiritual realm inside them. This divine spark (the spirit) is trapped within the material, fleshly body and yearns for release from this evil dungeon.	God created all human beings as a union of body and spirit. We are not spiritual by nature—this is a gift available to all by faith through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

**SALVATION**

Only the immortal spirit of the Gnostic is saved as it gains release from material captivity and returns to the Father's spiritual realm. Salvation is by knowledge (*gnosis*)—by knowing that the true God is the Father, not the Demiurge, and that the true home of the spirit is its place of origin, the Father's realm, not the material world with its bodies of flesh.

Both the immaterial and material aspects of God's creation are saved. By faith in Jesus Christ, a person receives the Holy Spirit who provides spiritual life, resurrects their flesh to eternal life, and redeems the created world.

**CHRIST**

Christ is a spiritual, divine being from the Father's realm who comes to the world to reveal the Father and the true identity of the spiritual ones, the Gnostics. Christ did not become incarnate or suffer on the cross. Instead, he either merely seemed to be human or temporarily inhabited a human being named "Jesus."

Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior, the eternal Son of God made flesh, who truly suffered for the sins of humanity and was truly raised in immortal resurrection to eternal life.

**CANON and HISTORY**

There are gospels and testimonies of the apostles that convey the perfect revelation of Christ in addition to (and in some ways superior to) the church's four gospels. This revelation brought by Christ manifests the true knowledge of the Father and the Gnostics, while the Law and the Prophets manifest the Demiurge.

The church recognizes only four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and believes that these four, along with the rest of the New Testament, are in harmony with the Law and the Prophets. All witness to the one true Creator and Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [Gnosticism Unmasked](#). (2007). *Christian History Magazine-Issue 96: The Gnostic Hunger for Secret Knowledge*.

# Recurrent Resurgent Gnosticism

- ✦ The term “Gnosticism” is taken from the Greek word for knowledge (gnosis).
- ✦ Whereas the Apologists utilized philosophy to defend Christianity, Gnosticism used philosophy to reinterpret Christianity.
- ✦ Gnosticism refers to a blended religious philosophy that invaded Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity.
- ✦ A beginning form of Gnosticism, mixed with Judaism, existed in the Apostolic Period.
- ✦ In the second century, a more developed Gnosticism threatened the church.
- ✦ Fighting the Gnostic heresy was a major preoccupation of church leaders and authors in the early church.

**There were certain different Gnostic systems, but they all had certain common features:**

- ✦ *Radical dualism of spirit and matter.*

**Matter is totally independent of God and irremediably evil. God could not have created the evil world of matter; its origin is accounted for by a series of divine emanations (called aeons) by which the nature of Deity is progressively weakened to the point where it could endure contact with matter. “Pleroma” (fullness) was the term for the higher aeons. What they call evil comes from this fall of Pleroma.**



**There were certain different Gnostic systems,  
but they all had certain common features:**

**+ *Concern for a personal salvation.***

**Salvation is the release of man's spirit from the bondage and prison of the flesh (there is not any resurrection). The means of salvation is "gnosis," or intuitive knowledge of one's true self. Salvation is sometimes mediated by certain rites and special ceremonies.**

**There were certain different Gnostic systems,  
but they all had certain common features:**

**+ *Conduct of the "saved."***

**Gnostic principles involved a denial of the flesh and a living of the life of the spirit. To some this meant extreme asceticism, to others the opposite – the libertinism of the Carpocrates !**

## Gnosticism: Perplexing Questions

How can the  
existence of creation  
be explained?

What is the  
origin of evil?

*How can a holy God  
create a universe  
with sin?*

# Essential Components of Gnosticism

*Dualism*  
*Emanations*  
*Knowledge*

God  
(Pure Spirit)

Demiurge

World Man



Chart 44

# Gnosticism's Concept of Salvation

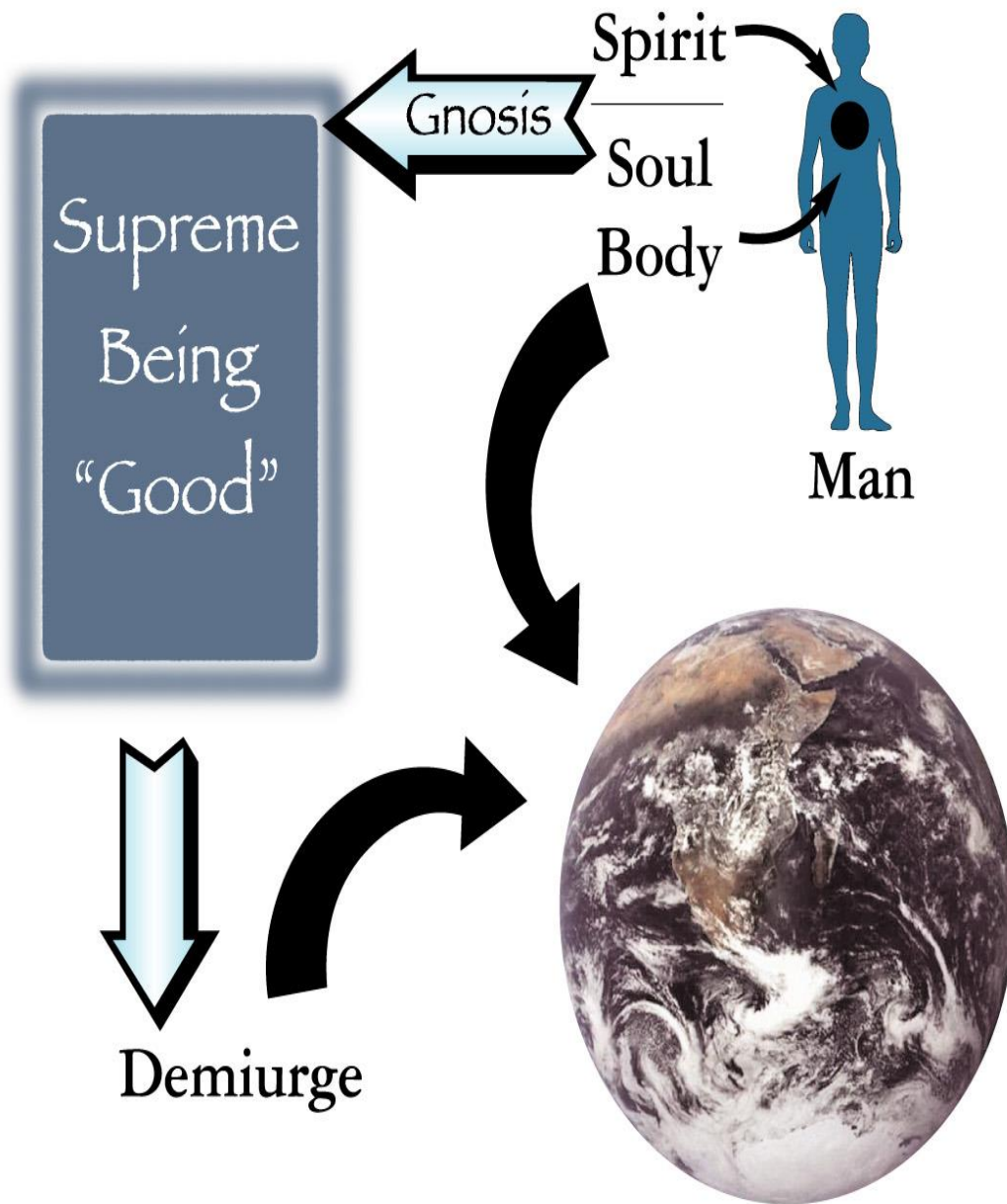


Chart 45



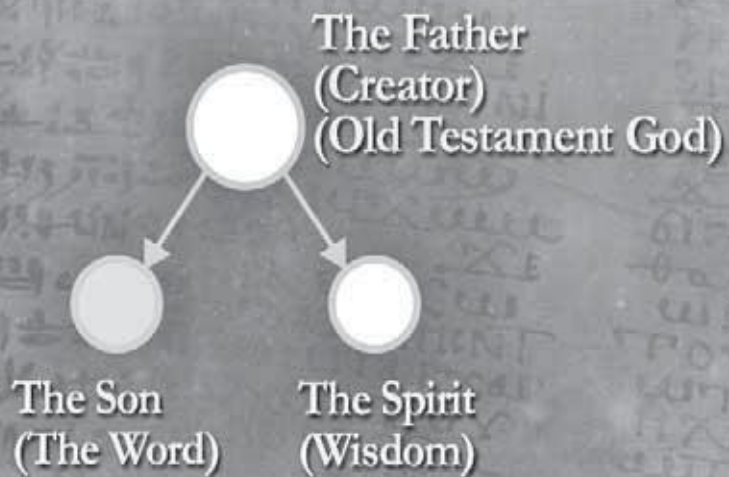
## Irenaeus's View of God

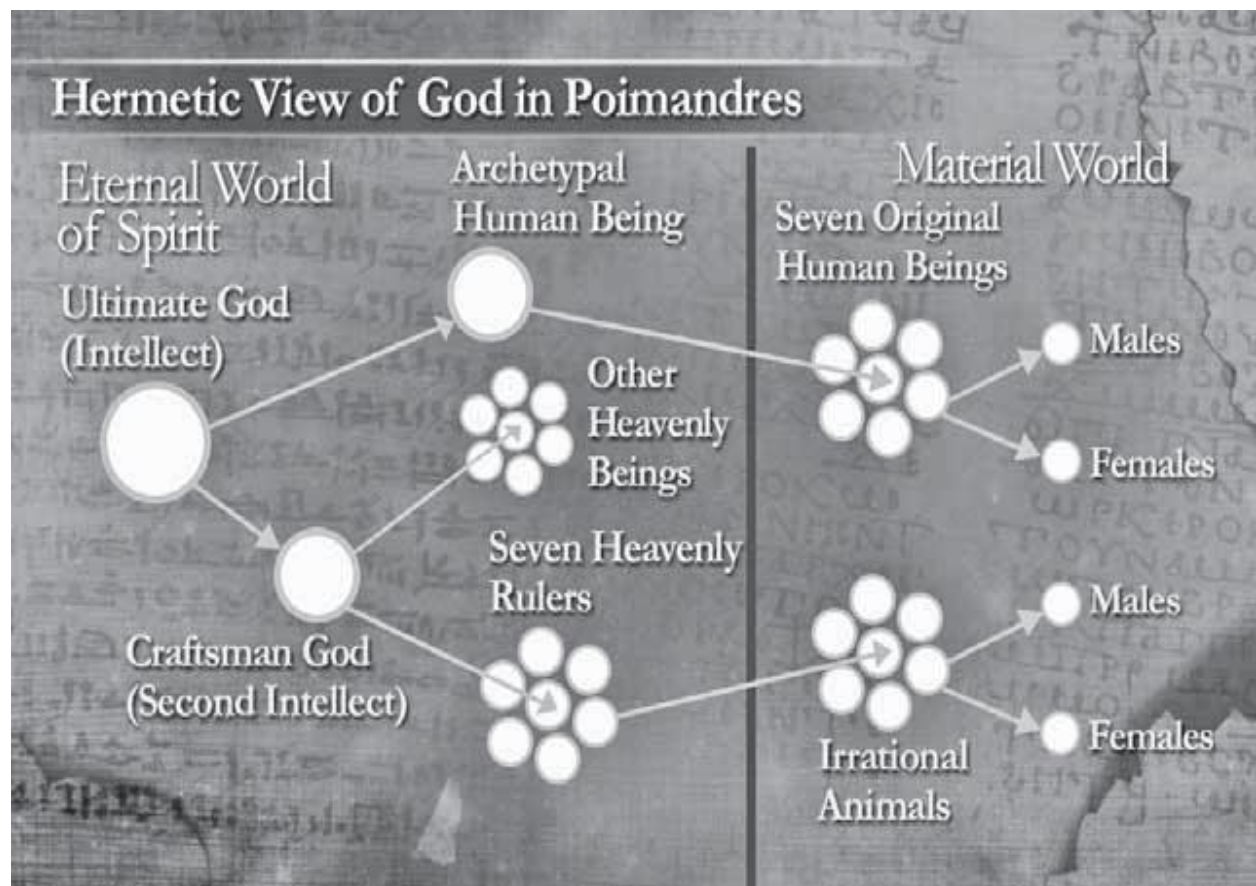
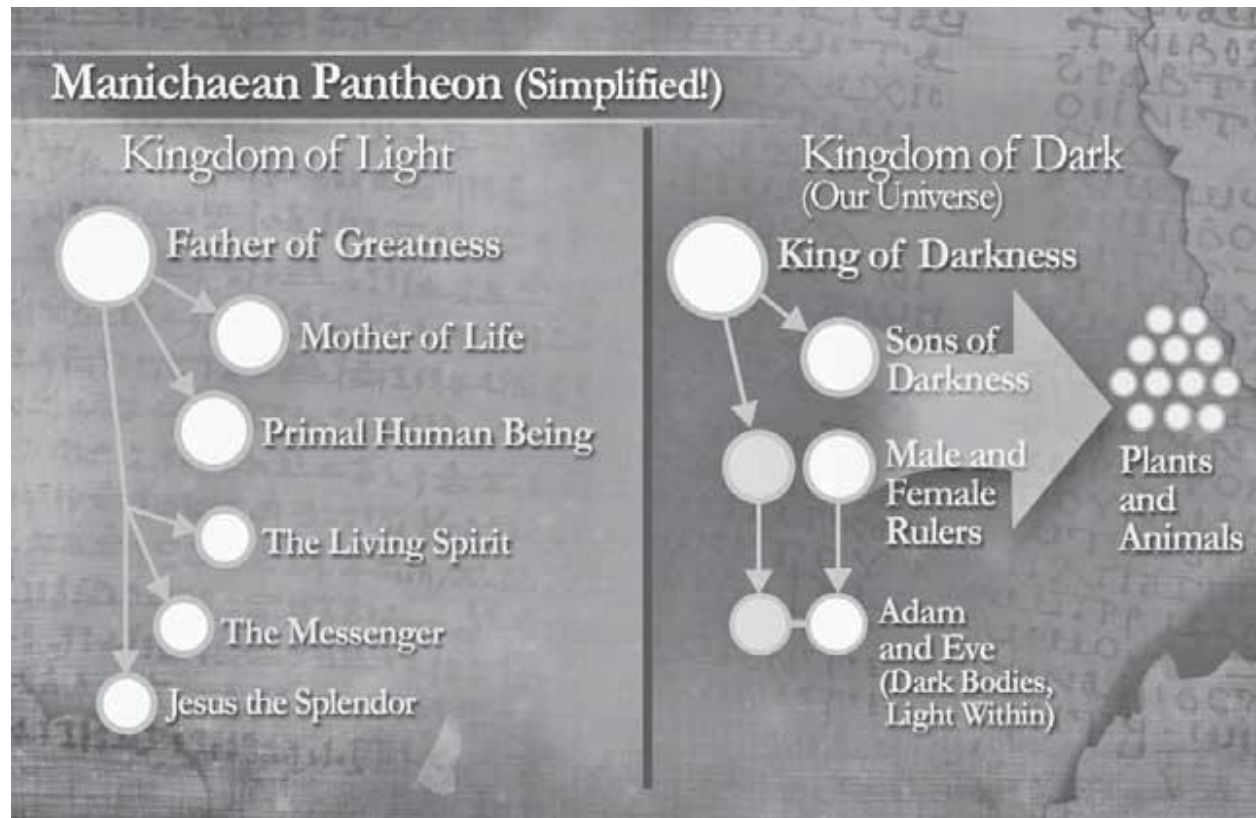
Seven Heavens with "Powers, Angels, and Archangels"

Leader of Each Heaven:

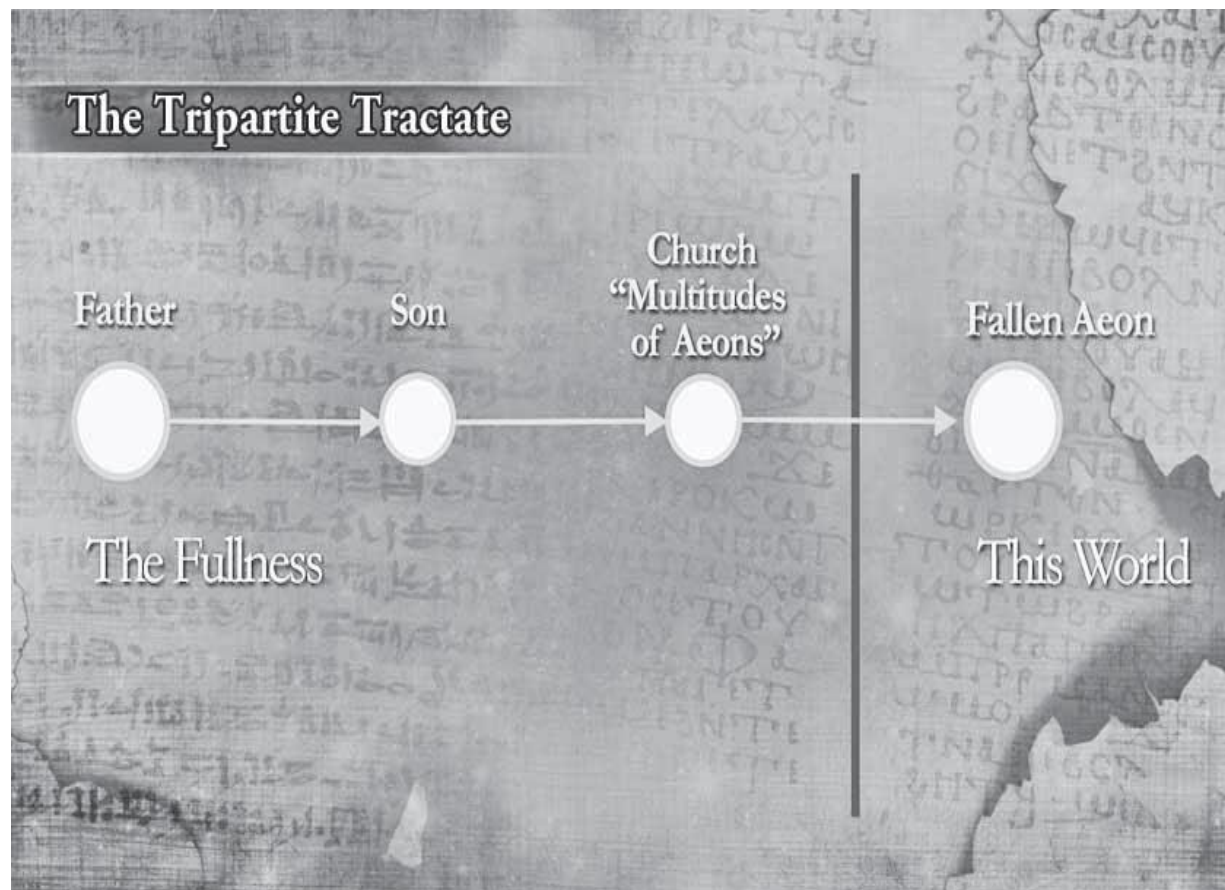
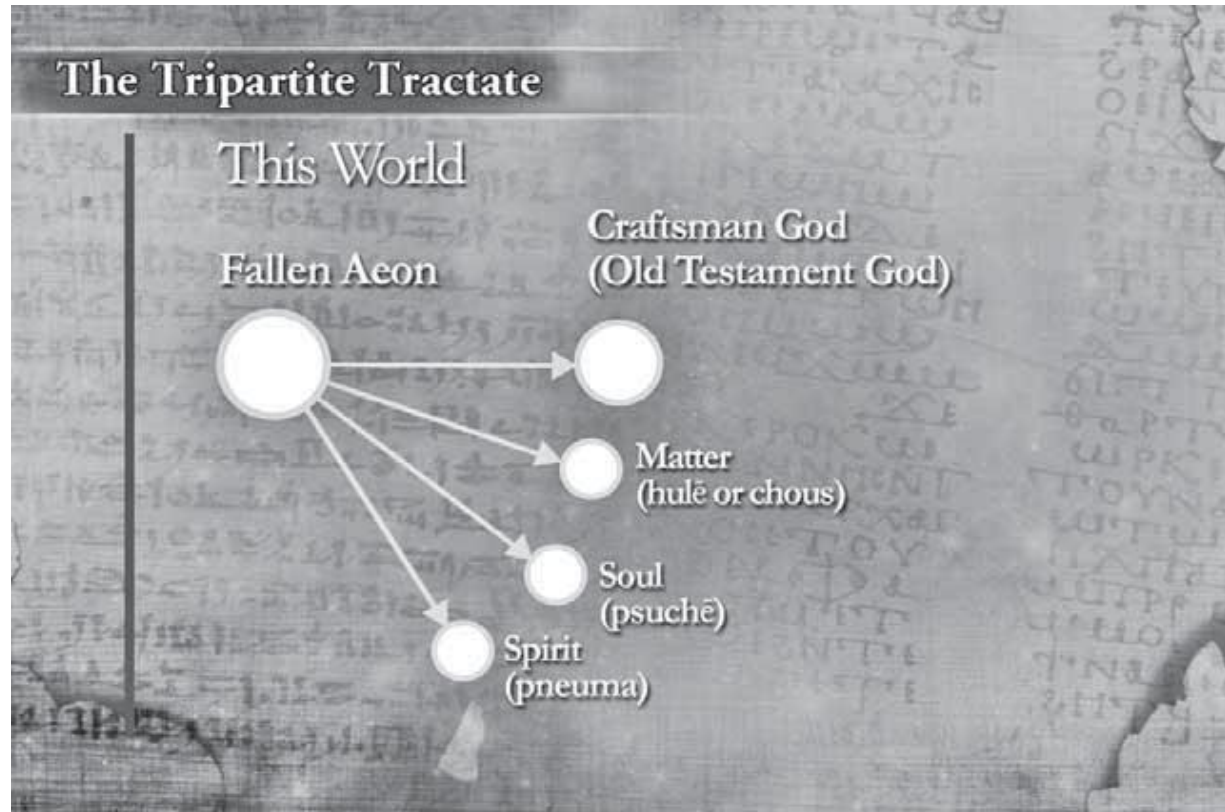


## Irenaeus's View of God









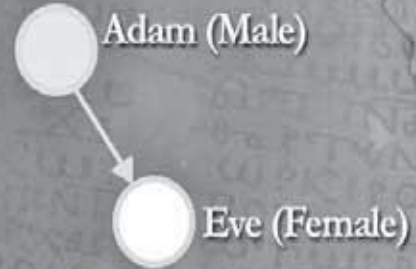
- ✚ “Even his detractors had a hard time criticizing Valentinus’s intellect. Following in the footsteps of his older contemporary, Basilides, Valentinus pursued the goal of creating a truly Hellenistic form of Christianity, reimagined through the lens of Plato’s philosophy.
- ✚ What made Valentinian gnosticism so powerful was its subtlety. Valentinus & his followers were able to remain within the larger Christian community long after other gnostic groups had either voluntarily split or been forced out. Valentinus taught from the same sacred texts as mainstream Christians and utilized many of the same worship practices; only in private gatherings were Valentinians instructed in the hidden or secret meanings to all of these practices.”
- ✚ “Because of this circumspect behavior, Valentinus was able not only to remain in the larger Christian community, but to aspire to leadership. Apparently, when elections were held to determine the next bishop of Rome after the death of Hyginus around 143, Valentinus was nominated to take his place and reportedly lost by only a handful of votes. Later, it seems, he either broke with the Roman church or was expelled. There is evidence that he (both) left Rome & died around 160. With him, the golden age of Christian gnosticism came to a close.
- ✚ While their teachings would continue to have influence for centuries to come, Christian gnostics were never again as creative or as productive as they were during the middle years of the second century.”



## Male and Female Selves in Valentinian Thought

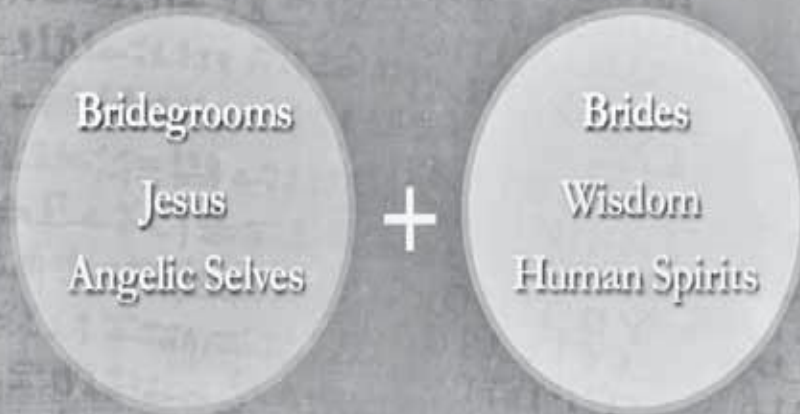


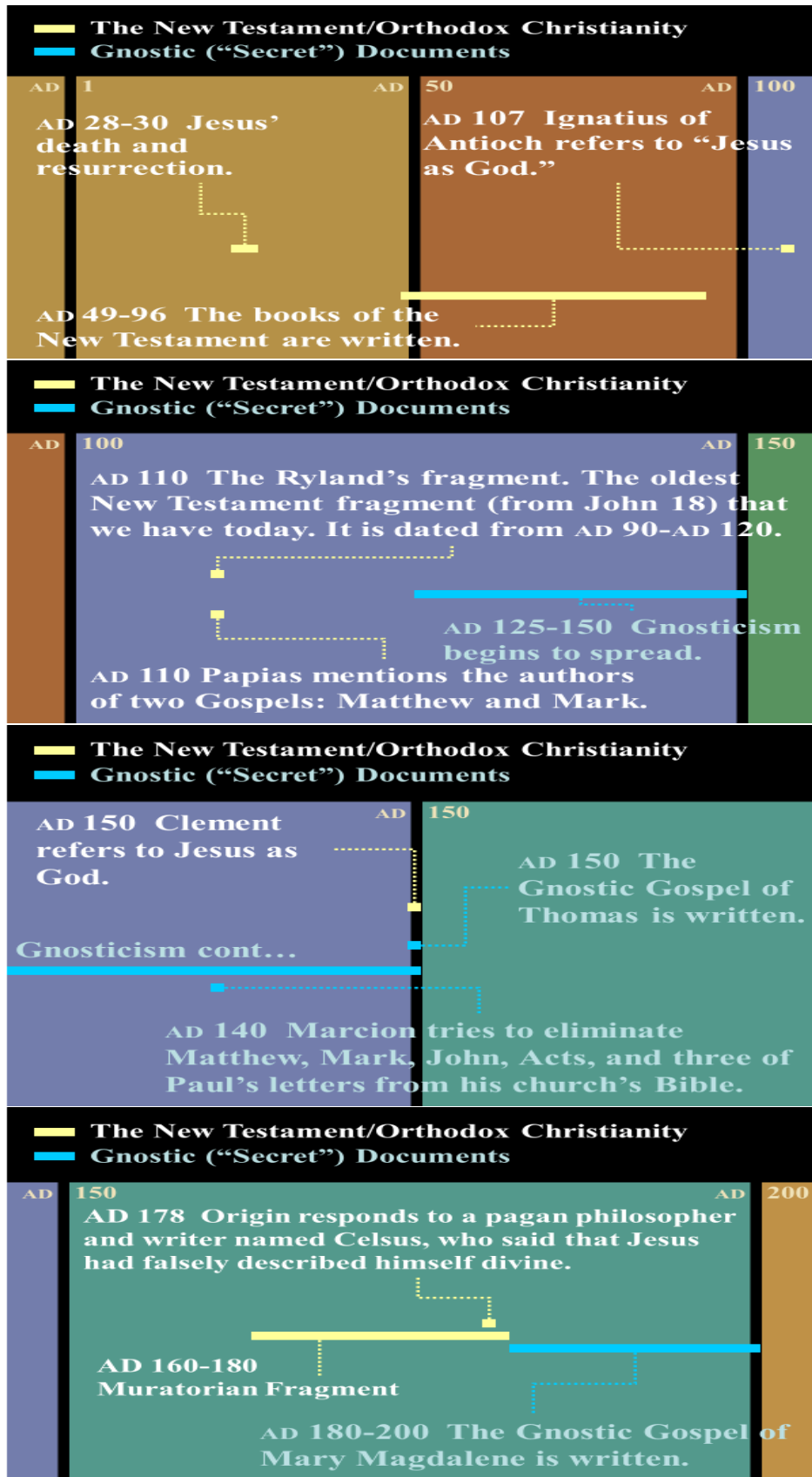
Symbolized  
in Genesis

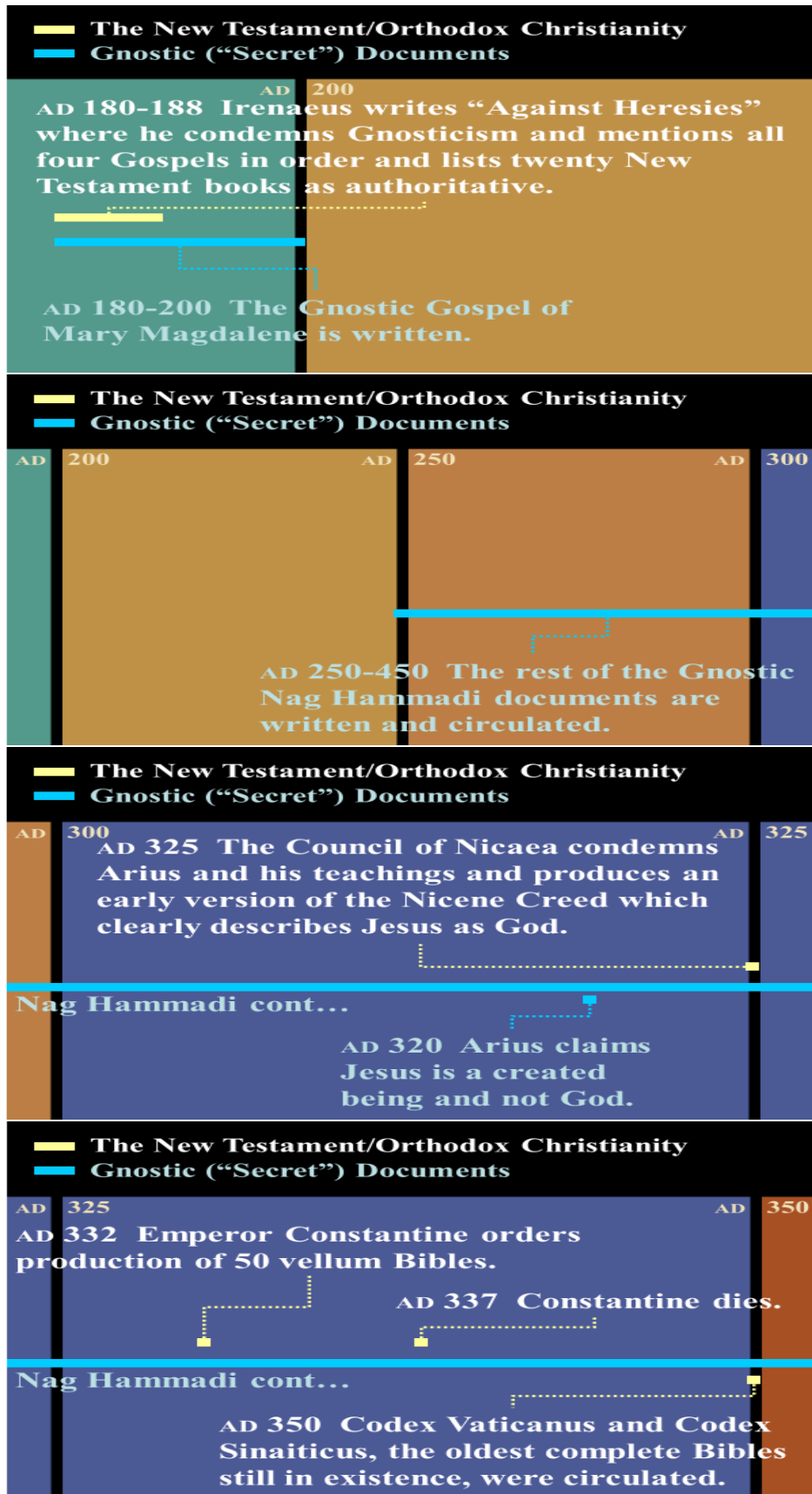


## Ultimate Salvation

"The Fullness"  
= Bridal Chamber







## The Gnostic “Gospels” of Philip and Mary Magdalene



- Leigh Teabing says that these gospels either teach or imply the following:
- Mary was the wife of Jesus.
- The mother of His child.
- She was to lead the church after Jesus’ death (244-48).

## The “Gospel” of Mary



- After an appearance of Christ to his disciples, Peter asks Mary to tell them the words of the Savior that she knows, but that they do not.
- She describes a vision of the ascent of the soul past four ruling powers to its rest.

## The “Gospel” of Mary



- Andrew rejects the revelation, not believing it came from Christ.
- *“And Peter said, ‘Did the Saviour really speak with a woman without our knowledge? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?’”*



## The “Gospel” of Mary



- *“And Levi answered, ‘Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like an adversary. If the Saviour made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us’ (247).*

## The “Gospel” of Mary

### *What does this text teach?*



- Mary received a special revelation from Jesus that the male disciples did not.
- Levi implies that Jesus (*who knows her very well*) considered her worthy.
- Jesus loved Mary more than his male disciples.

## The “Gospel” of Mary

### *What does this text mean?*



- It’s possibly symbolic. Peter may represent “Orthodoxy”; Mary “Gnosticism”.
- If this is so, then “Mary” (*Gnostics*) are claiming special revelation even if “Peter” (*Orthodox*) can’t believe it.

## The “Gospel” of Mary



- Composed in the late second century - one hundred years after NT gospels.
- It’s almost certainly not historically reliable.
- But doesn’t *The Gospel of Philip* indicate that Mary and Jesus were married?

## The “Gospel” of Philip



- “*And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’*” (246).

## The “Gospel” of Philip



- “As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*” (246).
- This gospel was originally written in Greek.

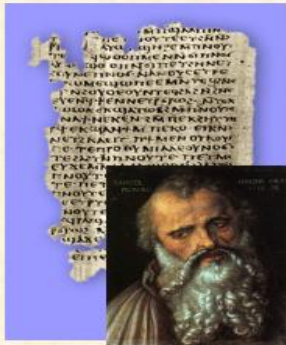


## The “Gospel” of Philip



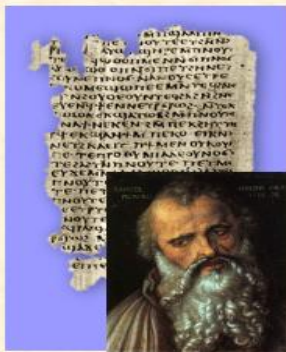
- Even the Coptic translation, found at Nag Hammadi, uses a Greek loan word for “companion” - *koinonos*.
- This term can mean “wife” in a spiritual sense, but it’s not the common Greek term for wife.

## The “Gospel” of Philip



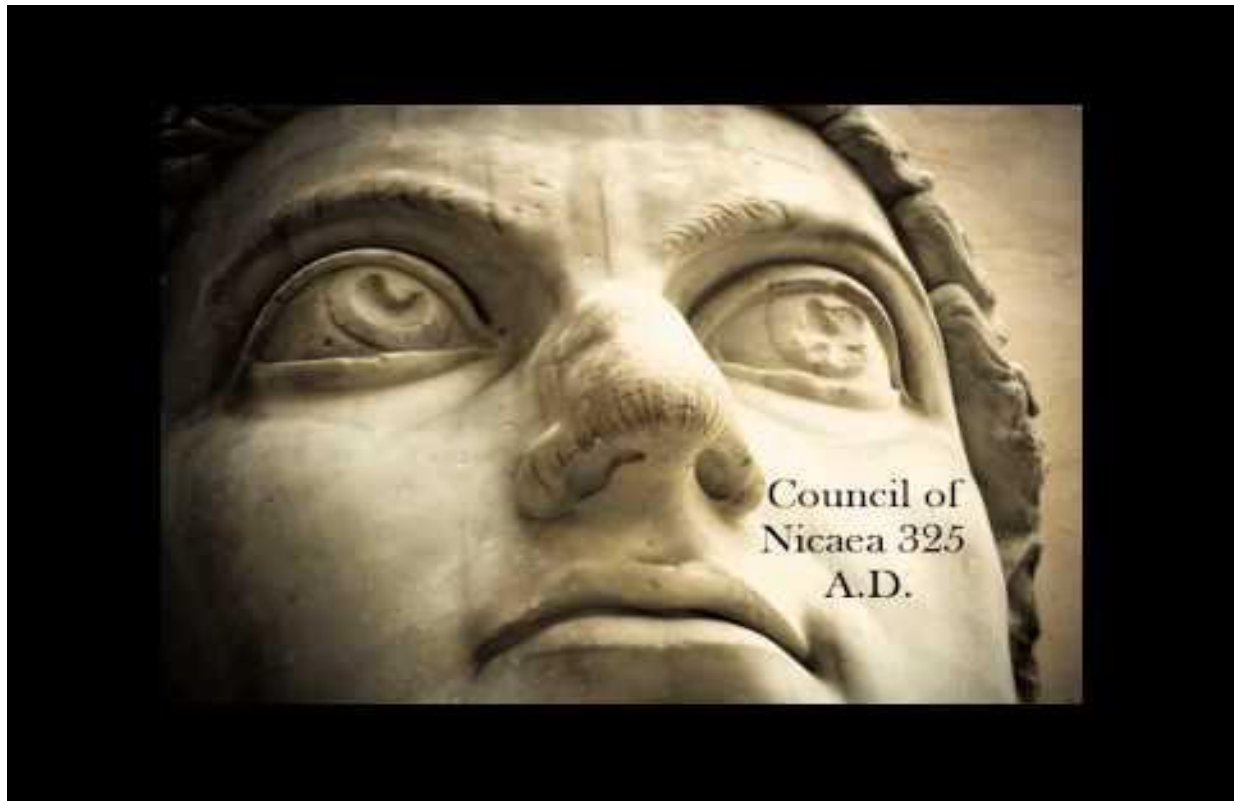
- *Koinonos* is most often used in the NT of a “partner”.
- Luke uses this term to describe James and John as Peter’s business “partners” (5:10).
- Contrary to Teabing’s claim, the statement that Mary was Jesus’ *companion* does not at all prove that she was His wife.

## The “Gospel” of Philip



But what about the statement:  
*“Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the mouth.”*

- This portion of the manuscript is damaged. We don’t actually know *where* Christ kissed Mary.



# Scripture

## THE RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

*The interval between the dates of the original composition [of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John] and the earliest extant evidence [is] so small as to be negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed.<sup>15</sup>*

—Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum