



**Forest Hill  
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**Sunday:**

Bible Study..... 9:30 A.M.  
Morning Worship.....10:30 A.M.  
Evening Worship..... 6:00 P.M.

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**IS THE "GOSPEL OF JUDAS" TRUE?**

Gary Young

(from *Christian Courier: Penpoints*, April 17, 2006)

The National Geographic Society has once more attempted to capitalize upon the name of Jesus Christ by a promotion of the so-called "Gospel of Judas" in recent interviews, publications, etc. This controversy is much ado over nothing. In this article, Australian Christian scholar, Gary Young (Ph.D. in Roman history), puts this issue into its proper historical framework.

Author's Note: This is a preliminary article to provide an immediate response to the recent publication and promotion of the Coptic *Pseudo-Gospel of Judas*. This article will be updated by a more comprehensive treatment of the topic in a few months when more material is available.

In April 2006, the [National Geographic Society](http://www.nationalgeographic.com) of Washington D.C. held a press conference in which they announced the coming publication of a document they called the *Gospel of Judas*. This document, they stated, would be published in an English translation (Kasser *et al.*), as well as being the subject of the Easter edition of *National Geographic* magazine, and a DVD and 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" doctrine of the church by presenting an alternative account of the Gospel story.

In this one, we are told, Judas Iscariot, the 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 of the other apostles. In this account, Judas hands Jesus 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 press reports this is described as "giving new insights into the relationship between Jesus and 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 & 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 and crucifixion of Christ? Should this document cause Christians to re-evaluate their faith, and does this document indeed give any valuable insight into the relationship between Christ and Judas Iscariot? This preliminary article is intended to provide some answers to these immediate 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 and 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 U.S.A, the codex was finally purchased for preservation and publication in 2004. The codex consists of 62 papyrus pages, and contains numerous other Gnostic texts and 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 and 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 and 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.

## Thanks To All Who Contributed To The Lectureship's Success!

Bobby Liddell

The 2006 Memphis School Of Preaching Lectures, on "THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST," were conducted March 26-30, 2006. Attendance was high, interest was great, and the attitude characterizing the speakers and listeners was enthusiastic and optimistic. We are indebted to the Forest Hill elders for their providing such a splendid opportunity for us to study the Bible, gather for fellowship, and worship God together.

We were delighted to see the great crowds of people from far and near, to renew acquaintances, to have our spirits lifted, and to be encouraged to follow faithfully in the way of the Lord. The lectures helped renew our confidence in the power of the Gospel, and our hopes of the joyful homecoming in Heaven one day.

Our prayer is that the combined efforts of all who labored sounded forth the "good news," brought honor and glory to God, lifted up the Christ, and encouraged men to follow Him. Thus, we happily and gratefully extend our most sincere appreciation to ALL who helped.

We realize that most would never know ALL that must be done in the preparation and presentation of such a lectureship. First, we thank all the good brethren of the Forest Hill Church of Christ, and the godly men who serve as elders, for their wisdom and foresight in the work of the Memphis School of Preaching. Thanks to all the members who expended countless hours of labor, and did so with such joyful willingness! Truly, Forest Hill is a great congregation of loving, dedicated, hard working brethren.

Thanks to all who worked to prepare the buildings, and to keep them clean, to those who worked so hard in preparing and serving delicious meals for hundreds every day, to those who made our surroundings so beautiful and comfortable, decorating and arranging things so well, to those who welcomed guests into their homes, to those who helped with parking RVs, and parking cars, to those who recorded the lectures, and made the sound systems and internet broadcasting all work so well, to those who directed our worship and led us in such thrilling singing, to those who cared for children and taught children's classes, to those who directed visitors, to those who worked in the book displays, "and such like."

(continued next week)

(continued on page 4)

Thanks to the Phillips Street congregation, and to OABS.org under the direction of Tom Bright, for broadcasting the lectures over the Internet. Go to OABS.org (or link from MSOP.org) to view them.

A very special thanks to the Griders for all their help, to all of the song leaders, to the students and their wives for all they did, and to the members of area congregations for their splendid help in providing meals every day.

Thanks to brother Curtis A. Cates for his superbly capable direction of the School, his faithful, exemplary life, kind encouragement, and wise counsel. Thanks to all the faculty and staff of MSOP and Forest Hill, with whom it is such a blessing to work. Every detail was handled flawlessly, with a delightful spirit of cooperation.

A special thanks to brother Paul Sain, and to Sain Publications for their excellent work in printing the lectureship book, and in working, with brother Tony Lawrence, to make possible the CD (containing all the lectureship books from 1982 through 2006, and much more valuable material). We are deeply indebted to sister April Meacham who devoted hundreds of hours to help proofread the manuscripts, and who was a constant source of encouragement.

Thanks, also, to all the speakers whose dedicated labors brought forth such a rich study of "THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST." Who knows how many souls may be encouraged to salvation, and to greater service by their work? Especially, are we grateful for all who attended the 2006 Lectures.

Most of all, we express our thanksgiving to our loving Heavenly Father for His great mercy and loving kindness. To God be the glory, honor, and praise!

We look forward to your being with us next year, **March 25-29, 2007**, for the Forty-first Annual Memphis School of Preaching Lectures on "**Epistles To Corinth.**" See you then!

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