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The Tyndale Gospel

Bad news
of Betrayal

THE JUDAS GOSPEL: BAD NEWS OF BETRAYAL

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Introduction

According to The New York Times of April 6, 2006, The Judas Gospel together with the other Gnostic Gospels “have produced a new generation of Christians who now regard the Bible not as the literal word of God, but as a product of historical and political forces that determined which texts should be included in the canon, and which edited out. For that reason, the discoveries have proved deeply troubling for many believers.”

Is this true? Have the Gnostic Gospels produced a generation of Christians who no longer believe that the Bible they have in their hands today is the literal Word of God? Those of us who are truly born again, born of the Spirit, born from above should not be troubled by the Judas Gospel for the Holy Spirit that indwells us is the Spirit of truth and guides us into all truth (John 16:13). What is truth? God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow me” (John 10:27). The Lord says His sheep will be able to discern His good voice of truth from the strange voice of falsehood.

The Gospel of Judas is not good news at all but another bad news of betrayal - Jesus is betrayed once again by Judas in this recently found “Gospel” named after

him. Actually, the title—“The Gospel of Judas”—misleads. The title gives the impression that it was Judas himself who had written this Gospel. No, Judas wrote no Gospel. This so-called “Gospel” was not written by Judas but by some unknown person who for some twisted reason wanted to revise Biblical history by turning the villain Judas Iscariot into a hero—the best and most loyal disciple of Jesus.

Now, let me critique the Gospel of Judas (according to the text released by the National Geographic Society), and offer three reasons why this Gospel is a fictitious and spurious one.

The Judas Gospel is a Heretical Gospel

The Gospel of Judas begins like this: “The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot.” The fact that the Gospel of Judas is introduced as a “secret account” lets out the “secret” that it is an unorthodox gospel created by the Gnostics who were known for their “secrets.” Prof Tan Kim Huat of Trinity Theological College writing for The Straits Times on April 14, 2006 asked: “Is Gnosticism a variety of Christianity or is it a mutation so dangerous that it should be treated as a heresy?” Our answer to his two-part question is, “No, Gnosticism is not a ‘variety of Christianity’ but a totally different religion that is altogether occultic, and yes, it is definitely a heresy by the infallible and authoritative standards of the divinely inspired and preserved Scriptures.”

What is Gnosticism and who were the Gnostics? The

word “gnostic” comes from the Greek *ginosko* which means “to know.” Gnosticism was a 2nd century cult which used the name of Christ to spin a heretical brand of Christianity teaching that (1) salvation requires secret knowledge outside of the Bible that is accessible only to the privileged elite; (2) matter is evil; and (3) Jesus did not really come in the flesh.

The gospel of Christianity is no secret but clearly revealed in the Written Word of God—the 66 books of the Canonical Scriptures. The Apostle John wrote referring to the Canonical Gospels: “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). The Written Word reveals to us the Living Word, and it is sufficient for us to know how to find salvation in Christ, the only Saviour of the world.

What is the gospel? The word “gospel” (*euangelion*) literally means “good news.” The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 explains what is the gospel: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” Christ crucified and resurrected is the good news of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life for those who

will put their trust in Him.

This knowledge of the gospel is not secret but open. The knowledge of salvation is not far from us, but very near us. The Apostle Paul tells us in Roman 10:8-9, “But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” But the Gnostics add to the gospel. They say that it is not enough to know Christ and His resurrection, one must attain to some hidden and mysterious knowledge before one can truly know God and live forever. The Gnostic formula for salvation works like this: “Gospel + Secret Knowledge = Salvation.” It is “another gospel.” Anything that adds to the perfect redemptive work of Christ and the pure content of the Gospel of Christ is heteron euangelion, “another gospel” (Gal 1:6).

The Gospel of Judas can shake the faith of the believer. May we not be so easily shaken in our faith like some of the Christians in the Galatian Church. Paul wrote to chide and warn them, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I

now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:6-9).

The Judas Gospel has a Different Jesus

What kind of Jesus does the Judas Gospel present? The Judas Gospel presents a Jesus who has a habit of laughing at people. He laughs at his disciples for saying grace, he laughs at their questions, he laughs before he speaks, he laughs after he speaks. The word “laugh” appears eight times in the Judas Gospel. This compares with only twice in the whole New Testament and that only in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus said in Luke 6:21, “Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.” In Luke 6:25, Jesus warned that those who laugh now will weep later, “Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.” In John 11:35, we find Jesus weeping. Jesus was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). He did not come into this world to have a jolly good time, but to suffer, to bleed, and to die for us so that we might be saved. “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The Judas Gospel also presents Jesus not as the Creator but a creature. The disciples referred to Jesus not as “the Son of God” (ie, God Himself) but “the son of our god.” Jesus also says that his god is different from the god of his disciples. In the world of the Gnostics there are many gods and many levels of divinity. The highest level is pure spirit. This is typical of the Gnostic thinking that all flesh is evil.

Since Jesus is in the flesh, Jesus must be evil and could not have come from the supreme God who is pure Spirit. Then where did Jesus come from? Judas is the one who has the answer. In the Gospel of Judas, Judas tells Jesus, "I know who you are and where you come from. You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo." Barbelo is one of the inferior gnostic gods from the lower levels of the immortal realm. Jesus himself confesses to Judas that he is not God but one of the twelve angels created by God. Jesus is the first of the twelve angels who is "Seth" and called "Christ." This is pure nonsense.

The truth is Jesus is God and the Creator of the world. In the very first verse of the Gospel of John, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This Word is none other than the Living Word—the Lord Jesus Christ—who created the universe: verse 3 says, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." This invisible God and Creator became a human being and took on human flesh to be our Saviour. John 1:14 says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." The flesh of Jesus was not at all sinful, evil or bad, but utterly sinless, pure and perfect, "full of grace and truth."

The mystery of Jesus Christ is a mystery revealed, not for a secretive and elite few but for all to know and believe so that they might be saved from their

sins. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only (uniquely) begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The Judas Gospel is a False Text

The Judas Gospel is one of the many false gospels written by the Gnostics. How many Gnostic Gospels were there? Some say 15, some say 30, some say 80. The experts are not even sure. Christians have always recognised only the Four Canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—to be the inspired Word of God. The DaVinci Code and the National Geographic Society are saying the very opposite—the Gnostic Gospels are true and the Four Gospels false.

Now, how do we know that the Four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we have today are true and not the recently discovered Gnostic Gospels like the Gospel of Judas? Christians have long had answers to such attacks on the Word of God and they are in the twin doctrines of the Verbal Plenary Inspiration (VPI) and Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of the Holy Scriptures as taught in Psalm 12:6-7, Matthew 5:18, 2 Timothy 3:16, and 2 Peter 1:21.

The divinely inspired or God-breathed (*theopneustos*) New Testament Scriptures were those written by God's special servants, namely, the Apostles of Jesus Christ. Now it is argued that the Gnostic Gospels were also written by Apostles like Thomas and Judas. Why were the Gospels of Thomas and Judas not included in the Bible? The answer is simple. They were not gospels written by the Apostles in the first place, nor written by eyewitnesses, nor written in the first century but appeared only two to three hundred years after the death of Christ, after the Apostles of Christ had passed away, and after the Four Canonical Gospels had long been written, read and received as Holy Scripture by the Church. Ireneus, the Bishop of Lyons, testified in the 2nd century: "Matthew published a written gospel for the Hebrews ... Mark also, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, transmitted to us in writing the things preached by Peter. Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by him. Lastly, John, the disciple of the Lord, who had leant back on His breast, once more set forth the gospel, while residing at Ephesus in Asia." Ireneus' testimony can be trusted for he was a disciple of Polycarp who died a famous death as a martyr of Christ, who was also a disciple of the Apostle John.

What is more is that the Four Canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John fulfilled all the prophecies of the Old Testament Scripture concerning the Jewish Messiah and His redemptive mission on earth. There are about 300 prophecies concerning Christ's first coming. These prophecies

were given centuries before Christ came and they have all been fulfilled precisely and completely (eg, Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:21-22, Jer 23:5 and Luke 3:23, Mic 5:2 and Matt 2:1, Ps 22:16 and Luke 23:33). The Four Gospels on the basis of the Old Testament give us "a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet 1:19). The Judas Gospel on the other hand can make no such claim for it contradicts the Old Testament Scripture concerning who Christ was and what He came to do.

The Gospel of Judas was written in the 2nd century long after Judas had died. And if it were true that Judas was Jesus' best disciple and a hero, then Judas should be basking in glory or martyred, but he committed suicide! Why? The truth is Judas was a crook and betrayed his Master out of his own wicked heart (John 6:70-71, 12:4-6). The fact is that the Gnostics were the ones who plagiarised the names and terms of the Four Gospels to invent their own strange gospel of secret knowledge and man-made gods. The stories found in the Gnostic Gospels are spurious. For instance, the Gospel of Thomas teaches that only men can enter into heaven, women cannot. If a woman wants to get into heaven, she must first become a man. And this was what Jesus did—He turned Mary Magdalene into a man so that she could go to heaven. Now how does one square this with The DaVinci Code which claims that Jesus married Mary Magdalene? They contradict!

The Biblical doctrine of the VPP of Scripture identifies for us where the true Biblical texts are

today. VPP tells us that the true Scripture resides in the continuously used and always existing majority manuscripts which have been traditionally received by God's people and kept pure throughout the ages by the special providential hand of God Himself. These texts as identified by the Dean Burgon Society and Trinitarian Bible Society are the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek Textus Receptus of the great 16th Century Protestant Reformation, the Authorised or King James Bible being the best English translation of these divinely preserved and authentic texts.

The Gnostic Gospel of Judas is disqualified as an authentic text because (1) it was not continuously used, (2) it is just one compared to the thousands of copies we have of the Canonical Gospels today, (3) it disagrees drastically with the words and doctrines of the original, preserved and received Gospels, and (4) it was rejected by the Spirit-guided Church since the beginning for its heresies. Bishop Ireneus for instance knew about the Gospel of Judas in about AD 180 and wrote against its claims, "They [ie, the Gnostics] 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."

The Judas Gospel cannot qualify as an authentic text because it does not fulfil Jesus' criterion of

verbal authenticity to the jot and tittle (Matt 5:18). The Judas Gospel has many gaps and many missing words and sentences. Brackets and ellipses indicating lost words or sentences are seen throughout. The translators often had to fill in the blanks by guessing what the words were, and writing them into the text. Such remarks as [--one line lost--], [--one line missing--], [--about five lines missing--] are found throughout the text. The fact that the Gospel of Judas has not been preserved intact by God's singular care and providence is one evidence that it is not divinely inspired Scripture, not at all.

Conclusion

The divinely inspired Gospels have always been preserved by God and received throughout the ages by His faithful Church. They were never lost only to be found thousands of years later. If what the modernists and textual critics claim is true, that the original and true Gospels are the Gnostic Gospels and not the Four Gospels we have in our Biblical Canon today, then all the Christians who died for their faith under the Roman regime, in the days of the Protestant Reformation, and in anti-Christian countries today have all died in vain believing in a wrong book and a false message. Can this be so? God forbid! For it is written, "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever" (Ps 12:6-7).

But what do we have today? We are living in

a postmodern age of relativity and uncertainty that anyone who dares to believe and defend the present perfection of the Holy Scriptures should be castigated as “foolish,” “extreme,” “schismatic,” “heretical,” “cultic,” and “unregenerate.” On the other hand, those who say that the Bible contains missing verses and passages, insignificant mistakes and redundant words, are considered “godly” and “scholarly.” Is it no wonder that Psalm 12 should end with these words, “The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted” (Ps 12:8)? We are nevertheless comforted by the words of the Psalmist in the Bible we have in our hands today that the Lord will not only preserve His words but also His people who are oppressed and persecuted by the rich, the powerful, and the unbelieving, “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him” (Ps 12:5). God help us!

Judas is alive today in all who deny God’s only begotten Son, and reject His forever infallible and inerrant words (Matt 5:18, 24:35). The Judas Gospel is the bad news of betrayal all over again. We are living in days of Deformation, not Reformation! May the Lord keep us faithful until He comes again. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).