

Why Christians don't care about JUDAS

I Background

Christians have known for a long time about the existence of other so-called "gospels." It is not any surprise. Already in AD 180, Irenaeus wrote against some of them, including the "Gospel" of Judas. But until 1945, when the Nag Hamadi manuscripts were discovered, we modern people had only HEARD about them because they had disappeared long ago. In that year, 1945, some local people from Nag Hamadi, in Egypt, discovered 13 very old "codices" (ancient books), containing about 50 different texts from an old religious group called the "Gnostics." Among them were a number of the same "gospels" that Irenaeus and other Christians had written against, back in AD 180.

The "Gospel" of Judas (I should say pseudo-gospel) was not found with those mentioned above. Herbert Krosney, in his book, "The Lost Gospel," says that The Gospel of Judas was found in the 1970s. Apparently some local Egyptian people living near the Nile found it in a burial cave. It turned up later on the antiquities market, and has only just recently been partially restored, preserved and translated. It, along with most of the Nag Hamadi texts, belongs to the group of books known as the Gnostic gospels. The writing of this old manuscripts was analyzed, and the paper and ink were carbon dated. Experts are convinced that this copy was produced around the year AD 300. But because of Irenaeus' writing about it, we know that the book was originally written at some point in time prior to 180, maybe around AD 150. That's in the middle of the second century after Christ.

The word "Gnostic" comes from the Greek word, gnosis, which means knowledge. In general, the Gnostics, as they were called, believed that the answer to man's problems could be found in special, secret knowledge that only a few special people could attain. There were all kinds of Gnosticism, but basically it was a mixture of Greek thought with Eastern mysticism.

There were numerous kinds of Gnosticism. But basically, the teaching was that the world had been created by an evil god, the lower god, an angel or demi-god named Saklas. The higher god lives in the realm of Barbelo who is, apparently, the "mother of heaven." That higher god is the 'good' god, the Self-Generated, "Autogenes." He is the god of spirit. So, basically, the thinking is -- spirit is good; material is bad. They also had a number of other little gods called aeons.

Since they believed spirit is good but material is bad, they thought that all of mankind is evil as well and so were sometimes against marriage and child-bearing. They taught that our goal should be to re-unite ourselves with the realm of light, or spirit, or energy. A person should try to free their spirit from their physical body -- through deep thoughts, reflection, or meditation.

When Gnosticism began is still very much an open question. What we do know for sure is that during the second century, when Christians were spreading the good news of Jesus around the Roman world, Gnosticism became one of Christianity's main competitors. Some Jews, Romans, and Greeks became Christians. Others became Gnostics. There was also a group that tried to combine Gnosticism with Christianity and thus came up with the Gnostic gospels.

But the big problem with these old Gnostic manuscripts that were found at Nag Hamadi, and with this old gospel of Judas, is that they use the names of apostles, and talk about Biblical characters. So, if they have nothing to do with Christianity, as we claim, then how can they have used Christian themes?

Well, in the FIRST century, nobody could very easily have written their own book about Jesus and put an apostle's name on it for the simple reason that the apostles were still alive and would have disputed that book. So any forgeries like that would not have kept their credibility for very long, especially if they went against what the apostles had written in all their other books and letters.

Nonetheless, in the SECOND century, when the apostles were no longer around, there was a real

opportunity for people to try to blend Gnosticism with Christianity, and some did try. That was when these Gnostic gospels began to appear.

That's the background. Now let's dive in a little deeper. Let's look more closely, first of all, at how different the two religions are.

II Sethian Gnosticism

Most of the Nag Hamadi texts, and Judas as well, teach a form of Gnosticism called "Sethianism." Sethian Gnostics believed in the Old Testament story of Adam's sons -- Cain, Abel, and Seth. Of course, being Sethians, their big hero was -- who? SETH! That's right. You guessed it. After Abel was killed, and Cain became an outlaw, they saw Seth as the start of a more enlightened group of people who knew that the material world is evil. So, if you had this secret knowledge, which only 'special' people can attain, then you were a member of the "Generation of Seth."

III The Ideas in the Gospel of Judas

The main theme of The "Gospel" of Judas is in line with this kind of Sethian thinking. In Judas, the other disciples worshipped the lower, creator god. So, in the first scene, the disciples are all together, praying over a meal, and Jesus starts laughing at them. They say, "Master, why are you laughing at our prayer of thanksgiving. We have done what is right." Jesus says, "You are not doing this because of your own will but because it is through this that YOUR god will be praised." So the disciples are apparently NOT praying to the god of Jesus. Judas, on the other hand, tells Jesus he knows that Jesus came from the "immortal realm of Barbello." So, only Judas got it right, and the rest of the twelve were wrong.

The "Gospel" of Judas talks a lot about the Sethian view of the spirit world, and it is pretty confusing. For example:

"Adamas was in the first luminous cloud that no angel has ever seen among all those called 'God.' He made the incorruptible generation of Seth...He made seventy-two luminaries appear in the incorruptible generation, in accordance with the will of the spirit. The seventy-two luminaries themselves made 360 luminaries appear in the incorruptible generation, in accordance with the will of the spirit, that their number should be five for each. The twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries constitute their father, with six heavens for each aeon, so that there are seventy-two heavens for the seventy-two luminaries, and for each 50 of them 5 firmaments for a total of 360 firmaments." (One note: There are 360 days in the lunar year, and a god for each one. This shows the Eastern influence.)

If you really think there is anything worthwhile in the Gospel of Judas I would urge you to just read it. You'll see very quickly the difference between it and the New Testament.

According to The Gospel of Judas, Jesus wanted to go back to his home to be with the heavenly mother, Barbello. He wanted to be free of his physical body -- so he asks Judas to betray him. He says, "You will exceed all of them, for you will sacrifice the man that clothes me." This gives Judas the go-ahead. The last couple of lines are, "Judas answered them as they wished. And he gave them some money and handed him over to them." (Note the lack of detail. It doesn't say where Judas made the trade, or to whom. It doesn't even say how much he sold Jesus for.) So, in the end, Judas turns Jesus over to the authorities, and thereby becomes the best of the apostles -- the real hero.

Here's another quote: "When Saklas completes the span of time assigned for him, their first star will appear with the generations and they will finish what they said they would do. Then they will fornicate in my name and slay their children."

I admit I really have no idea what some of these quotes are talking about. But this gives you a feeling for all the "wisdom" you can gain from reading The "Gospel" of Judas.

IV Reaction from Secularists

It is easy to see why Secularists, Atheists, and anyone opposed to Christianity are absolutely salivating over The "Gospel" of Judas, and the other gnostic "gospels." If it could be shown that these texts were as highly regarded by the first Christians as the books of the New Testament were, or even that these gnostic texts were connected to the first century church, that would cause a real problem for serious Christians. However, to the great disappointment of our critics, nothing like that can be shown. Nonetheless, like wishful thinking, secular reporters, and liberal academics continue to come up with quotes like the following:

from National Geographic -- "One of the most significant Biblical finds of the last century -- a lost gospel that could challenge what is believed about the story of Judas and his betrayal of Jesus."

from the New York Times -- "The discoveries of gnostic texts have shaken up Biblical scholarship by revealing the diversity of beliefs and practices among early followers of Jesus....The discoveries have proved deeply troubling for many believers."

from Elaine Pagels -- "These discoveries are exploding the myth of a monolythic religion, and demonstrating how diverse -- and fascinating -- the early Christian movement really was."

from Bart Ehrman, in The Gospel of Judas, page 79 -- "Its reappearance will rank among the greatest finds from Christian antiquity and is without doubt the most important archaeological discovery of the past 60 years."

However, as you'll see in the coming pages, Christians are, in actual fact, not "deeply troubled" by these old books at all. Not in the least.

V Reaction from Christians

The New Testament, by contrast with this Sethian thinking, teaches that Judas was a bad guy, that he betrayed Jesus, who then died as a sacrifice for our sin and rose from the dead, as we will someday. Jesus rose PHYSICALLY, in his BODY(The Sethians didn't like that part). The New Testament books teach that there is ONE God, a good god, who created the world. It teaches that the material world was good, but then Satan screwed things up by bringing humans into rebellion against God, into sin, and that this brought evil into the world. The New Testament also teaches that the one God, while only being one God, is in three persons simultaneously.

If anyone has trouble with this trinity idea, just ask yourself, Do you believe that God is everywhere at once? Well, if you believe that, then why can't He be in three persons at once? What's the big problem?

Finally, and most importantly, the New Testament teaches that Jesus was God, and that he died and rose to save us humans from our sin -- because God loves us even when we don't love him. (Of course, you, the reader, may not agree with this. But this is what the New Testament teaches.)

Christians recognize that the Gospel of Judas has nothing in it that even resembles anything from the New Testament. It's a completely foreign document. Furthermore, it was written long after the disciples had all died. So Christians aren't even interested.

But we cannot ignore the book, because it is being used to spread a false message, a lie, about the origins of Christianity. A lot of non-Christian people are genuinely confused by the book, and by all the Gnostic gospels. After all, the Gospel of Judas uses Judas' name, and talks about the disciples. The Gospels of Philip and Thomas talk about Mary.

An ignorant person would say, "Since they involve Christian names and characters, how can you know they aren't Christian? How can you be so sure?"

We have to explain.

VI What is Judas doing in a Sethian Gnostic Book?

Well, as I mentioned earlier, a hundred years after Jesus was killed, and decades after the last of the apostles had died, it is possible that some Christians, influenced by gnostic thinking, wrote some new gospels. Of course, they would have forged the names, attaching to them the names of apostles who had died long before.

They knew that having an apostle's name on the book would cause people to take it more seriously. Look at the recently published book, "Gospel of Judas." If it were the Gospel of "MARVIN", for example, who would read it? Would it be on Gramedia's bookshelves? Probably not.

The other possibility is that some Sethian Gnostics wrote these books as a way to try to get Christians to switch to Gnosticism. It's a fairly common practice. It's a form of camouflage. You can throw in some characters that people recognize, and have some of those characters say what you want them to. However, when you look at the beliefs being taught, there is nothing Christian in the central teachings of those books.

Still, someone may ask, "How do you know for sure that Judas wasn't really written by the real first-century Judas? That's an important question.

VII Why It Couldn't Possibly Have Been Written By Judas

In our museums and university libraries, we have preserved a lot of ancient books and letters from the first and the second centuries after Jesus. Some of those documents discuss other books of the time. However the first document to mention the Gospel of Judas doesn't come along until AD 180. The comments by Irenaeus, in AD 180, are the very FIRST comments we find anywhere with regard to this book. If it had been in existence prior to AD 140 or 150, it seems that SOMEBODY would have mentioned it sooner. So experts date it at about AD 150.

Here's a modern-day example of what I'm talking about. The DaVinci Code was a popular novel last year, in 2005, right? But let's say that every single copy of the DaVinci Code DISAPPEARED today. So there were no copies left. Now, go 100 years into the future. How could anybody know that there had been a book called the DaVinci Code, back in 2005? Could they possibly know that there was such a book? Sure they could! No problem! Look at all the other books written ABOUT the DaVinci Code. I wrote one of them myself. Look at all the literature about The DaVinci Code. Look at all the emails that talked about it, and the letters back and forth between private individuals. A historian, 100 years from now would definitely be able to know about the DaVinci Code, even if every single copy of the book disappeared.

Okay, back to the Gospel of Judas. The IDEAS in the Gospel of Judas are also very foreign to Jewish thinking of the first century. A Greek, or a Persian might have used all the foreign names of strange gods, like Autogenes, Barbello, or Saklas, maybe even in the first century. But a Jewish man from a small Judean town in the first century would certainly not. Finally, there are a number of references to stars, and to everyone having their own star. This is astrology, and would be very foreign to a first century Jew who grew up near Jerusalem.

By contrast, the ideas of Christianity have been demonstrated to have grown out of Judaism, as you would expect for a religion that started in first-century Jerusalem. The first Christians preached that Jesus had fulfilled all the prophecies of the Jewish Messiah. This theology fits with the time and place where Christianity began.

VIII The Authors of "Judas" Agree – Judas didn't write "Judas"

Don't take my word for it. Let's talk to the men who were hired by National Geographic to restore and

preserve the ancient document, translate as much of it as possible, and publish their findings. These are the men whose names appear on the front cover of the best-selling book called "The Gospel of Judas". They open their book with a translation of the manuscript, and then each member of the team gives an essay on a different aspect of the project. Their names are Randolfe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, Gregor Wurst, and Bart Ehrman. Let's look at their words, taken from the pages of their book.

Let's talk to Bart Ehrman. Bart, when was the Gospel of Judas originally written? Bart's answer is taken from page 91 of the book. Bart says, "Scholars will differ on when it was first composed, but most will probably date it to 140-160 or so."

Thanks, Bart. Hey Marvin, when was the Gospel of Judas originally written? Marvin answers on page 11 of the book. Marvin says, "Without a doubt, it was composed in Greek, probably around the middle of the second century."

Thanks Marvin. Hey, Gregor Wurst, how about you? When do you think someone originally wrote the Gospel of Judas? Gregor answers on page 122, "The existence of a gospel of Judas is first attested by the late second century bishop Irenaeus of Lyon." He says on page 132: "The Gospel of Judas must be placed in the second century."

That's three of the four authors agreeing that this book called Judas comes from the second century, probably the middle second century. (I couldn't find any relevant comment from Randolf Kasser, whose essay was more concerned with the restoring of the manuscript.)

Okay, Jesus was crucified somewhere between AD 26 and AD 36. We know that, not just from the Bible, but from Roman and Jewish sources as well. Tacitus, in his Annals XV, page 44, for example, confirms that it was during Pilate's term as procurator. Pilate ruled from 26 to 36.

Let's say the crucifixion was in AD 34, or thereabouts. The book, Judas, as shown above, was written around AD 150. There is a time-span of 116 years between the two events. Judas was already an adult when Jesus was killed. Let's say Judas was 20 years old. So he would have to have been, at the very least, 136 years old when that book, bearing his name, was written. In my opinion, even if Judas were drinking 'Extra Joss' in large quantities, I doubt that he could have lived that long. So I really think Judas was NOT the actual author. What do you think?

IX Authors of "Judas" (almost) Agree – New Testament More Accurate

On page 133 of Gospel of Judas, Gregor Wurst, one of the authors mentioned above, basically says that Judas is not any more accurate than the Biblical Gospels.

"We cannot find here (in the Gospel of Judas) any more accurate historical information about Judas Iscariot than we find in the canonical gospels."

This is as far as he will go. If he were a little more honest, he would admit that, since the Biblical Gospels were written 100 years earlier, within the lifetime of the apostles, they are, in fact much MORE reliable than 'Judas.'

However, Bart Ehrman actually does go further, although he also tries to avoid drawing the obvious conclusion. Earlier I quoted Bart, on page 91 of 'Judas', saying that the Gospel of Judas was probably composed around AD 140-160. On page 81 of their book he admits that he knows the Biblical Gospels were written much earlier:

"Mark, most likely the first of the canonical gospels to be written, was almost certainly composed by 65 or 70."

Bart acknowledges both facts. However, he doesn't want to put the two together on the same page, because then he would be forced to conclude the obvious – the New Testament is far more reliable, since

it was composed within the apostles' lifetimes.

X The Enduring Lie

You see, among scholarly, academic people, it is considered unacceptable to admit that the Bible could actually be true. It's a kind of political correctness. So does Bart conclude, logically, that the new gospels never did enjoy much acceptance simply because they came so late, and were so different from the eyewitness accounts that people already had? No. He instead tries, on page 117, to confuse the issue, blurring the difference in time:

"As years and decades passed, more and more writings appeared, claiming to have been written by the apostles... There were lots of gospels. The four in the New Testament are anonymous writings -- only in the second century did they come to be called by the names of Jesus' disciples, and of 2 companions of the disciples. Other gospels also appeared that also claimed to be written by apostles...How were people to know which books to accept?"

Well, by Bart Ehrman's own reckoning, the Gospel of Mark was written about 70 to 95 years BEFORE the Gospel of Judas. In that case, why would it be so hard for the people to know which gospels to accept? Wouldn't they have accepted the same Gospels that they had already BEEN accepting for at least 70 years before the new gospels were ever even written? Especially when these new gospels taught all kinds of ridiculous new beliefs? Would that really be a difficult choice?

Ignoring the obvious, here is how Bart explains the fact that the Gnostic Gospels were never accepted as Scripture, from page 118 of his book:

"In brief, one of the competing groups in Christianity succeeded in overwhelming all the others...This group decided which creeds Christians would recite. And it decided which books would be accepted as Scripture...This group became "orthodox," and once it had sealed its victory over all of its opponents, it rewrote the history of the engagement -- claiming that it had always been the majority opinion of Christianity."

I would argue that it is Mr. Ehrman, and the people with his frame of mind, that are attempting to rewrite history. I would argue there was no need for the early Christians to make any choice at all because they KNEW which Gospels were genuine, and HAD KNOWN for decades, from the time when they first received these Gospels from the hands of the apostles themselves.

Can you imagine the scene, back in AD 150, the first time someone pulled out his copy of The Gospel of Judas, claiming that it had actually been written by Judas himself, but kept secret for 100 years? What would that person's Christian friends have done? They would probably have asked him if he were kidding. Then again, let's say that they thought maybe he was telling the truth. In that case, as soon as they began to read it, they would immediately have seen that it was completely different from any of the eyewitness accounts that they already had. At that point, they STILL would have rejected Judas. It's not hard to see why these writings were never accepted by the Christians of that time.

The people who would have found books like The Gospel of Judas appealing would not have been Christians. They would have been people who wanted something with a flavoring of Christianity, but not requiring any of the difficult decisions which Christianity demands. And now, today, in our own time, it's the same.

XI Why Christians Don't Care About Judas

Now you can start to see "WHY CHRISTIANS DON'T CARE ABOUT JUDAS." It's obvious to us, first of all, that its teachings have absolutely nothing to do with our faith. It is not Christian at all. And secondly, it was written so late that it is basically a forgery. It wasn't written by an eyewitness, like the Gospels of the Bible were. Here are a couple of quotes:

Pastor Dave Kenney, Baptist: "I'm not sure why anyone would find this book interesting. No one thinks it was written by Judas. It's from at least 100 years after he died. To look for new understanding in this book -- it's like thinking I have some insight into the private thoughts of Abraham Lincoln."

Father Jonathan Morris, Catholic: "At least two of the four Christian Gospels were written by eyewitnesses. The Gospel of Judas, on the other hand, was written over 120 years after the death of Christ by an author condemned as a false teacher by the early Christian community... I must say, the silliness of giving the same credibility to "the Gospel of Judas" as to the Christian Gospels is unworthy of the venerable tradition of my morning paper.

Notice how Father Morris compares the Gospel of Judas to the Biblical Gospels. He says two of the four Gospels were written by eyewitnesses. But is that really true? How sure are we about that?

XII Dating The Biblical Gospels

There is not a single event datable to the first century, or ANY century for that matter, in the entire Gospel of Judas. There are no details; there is no context. The same is true for The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Philip, and The Gospel of Truth – in fact, for all the Gnostic Gospels. None of them have any detailed descriptions of anything. Why is that?

Well, if I, a 21st century man, were to write a story about the Revolutionary War in America 230 years ago, or even about WW II, just 60 years ago, I would not include much detail either. Why? It's because I don't KNOW any of the details. It's because I was not alive during the Revolution, or during WW II. I hadn't been born yet, so I wouldn't know what details to write.

In the same way, the person who originally wrote the gospel of Judas was writing about things that happened so long ago that nobody living at that time still remembered them. He had no idea of the details.

By contrast, Matthew fills his first chapter with a detailed genealogy involving the names of real people, many of them mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, some of them found in other sources outside the Bible. His second chapter begins as follows: "Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod." Luke, in chapter 2:1-2, says that Mary was looking very pregnant with Jesus during the time of the first Syrian census under Quirinius, another historical figure known from sources outside the Bible. These cross-referenced dates sometimes cause trouble with Biblical historians if there seem to be any discrepancies. Nonetheless, they are worth their weight in gold, because they firmly anchor the New Testament to a time and place in history.

The reign of Caesar Augustus is referenced in Luke 2:1. The death of Herod the Great, and the beginning of the reign of Archelaus is referred to in Matthew 2:19-22. Quirinius' census of AD 6-7 is referred to in Acts 5:37. In Acts 4:6 and other places the high priests Annas and Caiaphas are mentioned. These are all high profile men whose lives have been documented in historical records outside the Bible. The writers went out of their way to include these references because they obviously wanted people to know they were writing eyewitness accounts, not fairy tales.

The beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist, and basically of Jesus, as well, is introduced in the following manner:

"It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John, son of Zechariah."
(Luke 3:1-3)

Obviously this author of Luke was very concerned to make sure that history was properly recorded for future generations. The reason the gnostic gospels, by contrast, read like folk-tales, with no specific details given about anything. People could tell the difference between a REAL gospel and a FAKE one

when the Gnostics were first written. The difference is still there today.

We don't have precise, undisputed dates for Jesus' birth or for his death on the cross. However, as mentioned above -- because of the details included in the Biblical Gospel accounts, we have an idea of when he was born, within a range of five or ten years -- maybe about BC 7. We also know, as mentioned previously, that his crucifixion happened during Pilate's ten year rule, somewhere between 26 and 36.

The rule of Gallio as proconsul of Achaia is another historical landmark. We know from an old Roman inscription, found at Delphi, that Gallio's term of office was between AD 51 and AD 53, and he is mentioned in Acts 18:12-17. Paul's visit to Corinth is recorded there, the only time when Paul, Silas, and Timothy were together. The letter to the Thessalonians opens with a greeting from all three of those men. Therefore, we know that the book of Thessalonians was written at some point in time between 51 and 53, when the three men were together in Corinth.

If you read Acts 18 through 24, you will find that Paul was in Ephesus a couple years before Festus took over from Felix as governor of Judea (Acts 24:27). We know from Roman sources that this change of power, Felix to Festus, happened between AD 55 and 58. So Paul was in Ephesus a couple years before AD 56 or 57. The 8th verse of I Corinthians 16 says that Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus. So we know that I Corinthians was written from Ephesus to the church in Corinth in the mid-fifties of the first century.

In I Corinthians 15:3-5, Paul talks about his message, the good news that Christ died for our sins "according to the Scriptures". It sounds to me like he was talking about one of the Biblical Gospels. If that's true, then the first Gospel -- the Gospel of Mark -- was probably written before the mid-fifties of the first century. (That's about 20 years earlier than what Bart Ehrman said. But even using his dating, Mark is still almost a century older than the Judas gospel.)

The historical dates that are most helpful for dating the New Testament are the ones that are NOT mentioned.

The book of Acts does not mention Paul's death, which we are fairly certain happened during Nero's persecution of AD 64. The only explanation is that Acts was written before that persecution happened. So the book of Acts was probably written between 61 and 63. And since Luke wrote Acts as something of a sequel to his Gospel, we can date the Gospel of Luke to about AD 60.

The destruction of Jerusalem is not mentioned either. Rome destroyed the Jewish temple, along with the entire city of Jerusalem in AD 70. But in the gospel of John, chapter 5, verse 2, the author says, "Now there IS in Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, a pool which, in Aramaic, is called Bethsaida." Well in AD 70, that gate, and that pool were both destroyed. So it is pretty obvious, based on internal evidence, that John was written before AD 70.

So the dates of the Biblical Gospels are very firmly set by details found throughout those books. By cross-referencing events with known facts from Roman history, we have a pretty good idea of the time-frame during which the New Testament was written.

XIII First Century People

But all of the rich detail in the New Testament serves another purpose as well. It shows unmistakably that these really ARE first century documents. It shows that the authors of these books were real middle first century people, who knew their own world much better than any modern-day historian or archaeologist possibly could.

Geisler points out that the Gospel of Luke mentions 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands without making any mistakes. For years, critics had been saying that the town of Bethsaida, mentioned in Matthew 11:21, Mark 6:32, and John 6:5, was pure fantasy, since no trace of it had ever been found. But then, recently it was found by Dr. Rami Arav, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene, mentioned in Luke 3:1 was thought by historians to be pure fiction. Then a temple inscription, dated between A.D. 14 and 29, was found with his name on it. The "Erastus" of Acts 19:22 was thought to be a fictional character, until his name was found on an inscription near the theater in Corinth. In the original Greek text, Luke refers to titles such as "Politarch"(Acts 17:6-8), and "The First Man of the Island"(Acts 28:7). In each case, archaeology confirmed his accuracy.

The discovery of the graves of some of the first Christians has confirmed beyond any doubt that the New Testament is truly from the first century. In the Jerusalem suburb of Talpiot, there is a catacomb (a family burial cave).

Some of the old style, stone coffins are decorated with Christian symbols, and have Greek inscriptions, dedicating the person inside to Jesus. One coffin has the name "Matthius" inscribed on it. It could be that of an early church leader, or possibly even the apostle. But Matthius seems to have been a fairly common name. However, another coffin had the name of "Simon Barsabas" (mentioned in Acts 15:22) written on it. That's not a common name at all. The tomb had been sealed around circa A.D. 42.

On the Mount of Olives, right outside Jerusalem, there's another catacomb with dozens of these old stone coffins called "sarcophagi", occupied by some of the first Christians. These were inscribed with the names Jairus, and Salome, among others. The name "Shappira" was also found on one coffin. The only first century reference to anyone with that name is Acts 5:1. One of the coffins is inscribed "Shimon bar Yonah", Simon, son of Jonah. It is possibly Peter himself -- buried with Jewish and Gentile Christians, all in the same tomb.

Another tomb found near Bethany has the names "Mary", "Martha", and "Lazarus," along with dedications to Jesus and Christian symbols, inscribed on each of three coffins sitting next to one other. These are the names of three siblings who were Jesus' very good friends (John 11:1-44, Luke 16:19-31). More Christian tombs from the early part of the first century have been found in Nazareth and other places, indicating that the number of Christians was substantial, even very early in the century.

Charles Claremont-Ganneau was the first to discover the burial site of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. P. Bagatti found the large tomb nearby that held Shappira, some Greek Christians, and Simon (Peter) Bar-Jonah. Prof. Eliezer L. Sukenik also excavated some of the tombs.

In addition to what's noted above, Dr. Rami Arav thinks that he has identified Peter's house, in Capernaum, from inscriptions on the walls.

Archaeology bears out the accuracy what is written in the four gospels. The detailed accounts of Jesus' travels, of his dealings with people from various levels of society, of his trial and of his crucifixion all paint a very vivid picture of the time in which he lived on earth. Acts is even more interesting to the historian, as it chronicles Paul's journeys around the Roman world of his time.

XIV We Know Who Wrote the Biblical Gospels, (mostly)

On page 117 of the Gospel of Judas, already quoted above, Bart Ehrman says: "The four (Gospels) in the New Testament are anonymous writings – only in the second century did they come to be called by the names of Jesus' disciples, and of 2 companions of the disciples."

He thereby implies that the four Gospels of the New Testament are just as unreliable as the second-century Gnostic pseudo-gospels, but Bart is only telling half of the story. Here's the rest of the story.

1) We don't actually know when copies of Mark, for example, started having "Gospel of Mark" written on top. The oldest copies we have DO have the apostles' name on them. But the oldest COMPLETE copies we have of Mark are from the second century. The same is true of all four Gospels.

2) The four Gospel writers would not have seen any reason to put any kind of title on their books. To them, it was simply the good news about Jesus. It would be natural that titles weren't included until churches began to have copies of more than one gospel, which would be a few years after the originals were written.

3) In the case of Matthew, there is little evidence, but no reason to doubt his authorship. In the case of Mark, there is good reason for it to actually be Mark. In the case of Luke, and in the case of John, we CAN identify the authors as Luke and as John.

Matthew – Well, okay, not much evidence, except for the traditional identification, and no reason whatever to challenge it.

Mark -- John Mark was a minor figure in the early church, a companion of Paul's on one trip. Paul even felt that Mark had deserted the team. So, that being the case, why would any forger choose Mark's name to put on a Gospel?

A Christian historian named Papias, writing in about AD 130, but quoting an even earlier source, stated that Mark wrote the book of Mark while in Rome, taking notes from Peter.

There is evidence to confirm Papias' account. There are a lot of Latin words used in this Gospel, like "legion" in 5:9, "denarius" in 6:37, and "centurion" in 15:39, for example.

Luke -- First, Luke 1:1, and Acts 1:1 make it clear that the book of Acts and the book of Luke were written by the same person. Secondly, Luke is mentioned as Paul's companion in Philemon 24, Colossians 4:14, and II Timothy 4:11. Also, In Colossians 4:14, Paul states clearly that Luke is a Doctor. And finally, In Acts 16:10-17, Acts 20:5 to 21:17, and other places, the writer of Acts, in describing Paul's activities, uses the pronoun, WE – meaning that the author of Acts was Paul's companion.

We can be fairly sure, from the medical terminology used, that both Acts and Luke were written by a medical doctor.

Luke 4:38 describes a woman with a (megalo = medical term meaning category 1, severe) fever. Luke 18:25 has Jesus saying it's harder for a camel to go through the eye of a (belona = medical term for a surgeon's needle) than for a rich man to get to heaven. In that same reference (Matt 19:24, Mark 10:25), the other Gospel writers refer to an ordinary sewing needle. In Acts 13:11, an (axlu = medical term for a disease of the eye) falls over a man. Acts 28:4, likewise, does not just refer to any kind of snake, but to a (tharion = medical term for a very poisonous kind of snake). There are other examples. These are just a few.

Besides this, the two books are also written with a physician's mindset. For example, in Luke 5:12, the man is "full of leprosy" but in the other Gospels he's just "a leper." And when Jairus' daughter is raised from the dead (Luke 8:55, Matt 9:25, Mark 5:41), only Luke adds that afterward, Jesus ordered that she be given some food to eat.

In summary, we know that Luke and Acts were written by the same person, and that person was a medical man who had been Paul's companion on some of his journeys. That narrows it down to one man – Luke.

One more piece of evidence – If someone were going to put the name of one of the apostles on to a fake gospel, why would they choose Luke? Luke was almost completely unknown, except for those few mentions in Paul's letters. This is the same reasoning we applied to Mark, earlier.

John is the author of John. That's based on John 21:20-24, where he says, in fact that he is Jesus' beloved disciple. Also, that title is used in John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20, and 21:24. The actual name, John, is never used in the Gospel of John. That would be very odd, unless John were the author. Whether you believe the author of John or not, the fact is that the author DOES claim, very clearly, to be Jesus' beloved disciple.

The material presented here convinces me that the Gospels are authentic. They are clearly from the middle first century, and seem to truly be from the disciples. However, the question still remains, for some people: When did the books become Scripture?

XV Scripture Was Never Chosen – It Just Was

I did not ask, "When were the books of the New Testament chosen?" I asked, "When did they become Scripture?" And there's a clear answer to the question. From that point in time when they were first written, in the middle of the first century, people regarded them, since they came directly from the apostles, as God's Holy Scripture. Some of the best proof for this is right there in the documents themselves:

The evidence that Paul's letters were written in the AD 50s and early 60s is so overwhelming that ALL scholars AGREE on it. That makes Paul's letters the earliest confirmed documents we have on Christianity. And in Paul's letters, it becomes clear that Paul regards the four Biblical Gospels as Scripture. For example:

(I Tim. 5:17-18) "The Scripture says...in another place, 'Those who work deserve their pay.'"

You're probably saying, "So what. What does that have to do with anything?" But the interesting thing is that, in this passage, the Scripture being quoted is Luke 10:7 of the New Testament, the 3rd gospel. Paul was killed around AD 64 to 67. So Paul, of course, had to have written this letter prior to that time. Therefore this means that the Gospel of Luke was already regarded as Scripture before AD 67.

In 2 Peter 3:14-15, Peter is talking about Paul's letters. He says: "This is just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him – speaking of these things in all his letters." Then, in 15-16, he writes, "Those who are ignorant...have twisted his letters...just as they do the other parts of Scripture."

So in these two passages we have Paul confirming one of the Gospels as Scripture, and Peter, one of the Gospel sources, confirming Paul's letters to be Scripture.

XVI When Were the Gnostic Gospels Ever Thought Of as Scripture?

Peter and Paul both died, according to ancient historians, in Nero's persecution of AD 64 to 67. John lived on a bit longer, but by about AD 90, the last of the apostles had died. The torch of Christianity now passed to the next generation of leaders, many of whom had known the apostles personally. Clement of Rome, writing around the time of AD 96, quotes from the book of I Corinthians, and from the book of Hebrews. Later, Polycarp, the apostle John's own disciple, along with another church leader, Ignatius, both writing around AD 110 to 115, quoted from 19 of the 27 books of the New Testament, including three of the four Gospels. And they quoted them as Holy Scripture.

Critics of Christianity will tell you about all the divisions in the church in the second century.

Here's the really interesting point: It's true, the Christian community of the second century – second century, not first -- WAS divided by heresies. The two biggest heretical leaders in the early to middle second century, around AD 140, were Marcion and Valentinus. So, what books did THEY quote from?

Well, Marcion actually made up his own list of accepted books, and finally, that's where you see all the Gnostic Gospels listed. Right?

Nope. Marcion did make up his own list of accepted books – but the list just included certain books of the New Testament, and parts of others. Still – no Gnostics.

Then another heresy came along – the main guy who tried to blend Gnostic thinking with Christianity – Valentinus. He also quoted a lot of books. So finally, that's where you see a lot of Gnostic gospels quoted, right?

Nope. He quoted mostly from the New Testament books also. However, he finally gave us the very first evidence we have of the existence of ANY of the Gnostic gospels. He quoted from the "Gospel of Truth" and from the "Preaching of Peter," – only 2.

Of the 50 or so Gnostic Gospels found at Nag Hamadi, only 2 are positively known to exist before AD 140, quoted by Valentinus. At the same time, if you include all the quotes from these four early post-apostolic writers, you have 23 of the 27 books of the New Testament already quoted, multiple times. The only Biblical Gospels not quoted yet, in any surviving documents, by this point in time -- about AD 140 -- are James, II Peter, II John, and Jude.

Keep in mind, all we have left of history is the collection of documents that we've saved. So just because we don't have a certain gospel, Gnostic or Biblical, quoted, doesn't mean, for sure, that it didn't exist. It DOES mean, almost for sure, that it wasn't circulated very widely, not read very much.

So, if practically the whole New Testament has been found already in AD 110, while only two of the Gnostics are found, even 30 years later – it becomes obvious that whether the Gnostics existed or not, they were at least not being read by very many people.

A document known as the Muratorian fragment gives us the first actual listing of the books of the New Testament. It has roughly the same books that are quoted by Ignatius and Polycarp.

The Muratorian Fragment dates back to about AD 170. We know that, because it mentions Pius I as having recently been a bishop of Rome. Pius I was the Roman bishop from AD 142-157. The copy we have of this document was discovered in the Ambrosian Library, in Milan, by a priest named Father Muratori, one of the greatest Italian historians of his day.

By about AD 170 almost the only book of the New Testament that had NOT been recognized as legitimate, in one way or another, was II Peter.

Look at the process. The earliest, most widely read Christian books that had come straight from the apostles were accepted right away. Later on, some of the less well-known books also gained acceptance.

The books that had more trouble being accepted as part of Scripture were Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, and the Revelation of John. Nobody really knows for sure who wrote Hebrews, James seemed, to some, to disagree with Paul's writings, until people understood it better. With II Peter, and II and III John, there was a question as to whether they really had been written by Peter and John. Jude's authorship was also questioned, and Revelation was in question for awhile because one heretical group, the Montanists, used it.

How many Gnostic gospels were included on the Muratorian list? None. How many Gnostic gospels were quoted by the early Christians? None. So when the churches could finally come together, at Nicea, for example, in AD 325, was there a big political fight? No. Christians around the entire empire were reading the same books. The evidence proves it. When the councils finally made an official "canon," they were simply confirming the Christian community's common practice – just making it official.

(place chapters two and three of Kristen and Islam in here.)

XVIII In Conclusion

Hopefully, now you can see at least PART of the reason why Christians don't care about Judas. Why would we ever trade an authentic treasure like our New Testament for a cheap, counterfeit loser like The Gospel of Judas, or any of the other poor attempts at imitation?

The evidence from the New Testament books alone is overwhelming, showing that they are true first-century documents. It's also clear that the authors knew they were writing Scripture, and that their writings were accepted as Scripture from when they were first produced. Finally, the manuscript evidence is overwhelming, showing that the words have not changed over time.

But the most important evidence, that this really IS God's word, is the message. Every other holy book gives you a point game. Every other religion is just a point game. Be a good person, and you'll go to heaven. ONLY in Christianity do we have something different. Those New Testament documents show me that I am completely UNABLE to be good enough to impress God. They teach me that I must humble myself, lose my pride, and rely on Jesus for life -- even for life after death.

And no matter what happens -- NOBODY will EVER take that away from us. But the best news is that anyone can have it for free. Just pray to him.