

Gospel of Judas

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The 39 books of the Old Testament form the Hebrew Bible of Judaism (the Jewish people); the Christian Bible by the early Christian church adds the additional 27 books of the New Testament. This complete list of books was found “acceptable” because the church deemed them to be divinely inspired books of truth. Some of the non-canonical writings such as the gospel of Thomas, the gospel of Peter, the gospel of Mary and the gospel of Judas have been called the lost gospels and ruled as not canonical. I will focus on the gospel of Judas and why it was not included in the canon.

The gospel of Judas was discovered in the 1970s in an Egyptian cave and is part of a codex. Codices were ancient books constructed of folding pages bound at one side. In 2006 the National Geographic published this gospel causing a huge uproar. The reasons given for not including or rejecting these and other “lost gospels” are compelling. The main criticisms of these gospels and their authors: the Jesus they depict is not recognizable as the Jesus known in the Bible Gospels; they twist the truth of God’s nature; they contain errors on important Christian basics like sin, holiness, ethics, and redemption; and they can’t be proven to have origins among Jesus’ earliest followers. The date of a manuscript is key to determining the authenticity of writings outside the canon. Most weren’t written until the 2nd century and beyond.

Too, these “lost gospels” have Gnostic overtones. Gnosticism, which seriously threatened the early church, was dedicated to searching for “enlightenment” from secret and hidden wisdom among Christ’s teachings. Gnostics view Jesus only as a “teacher of wisdom,” not as “Savior.” The Gnostics believed that the road to salvation was through secret knowledge given by Jesus to his inner circle. The biggest controversy in this text revolves around the theory that Jesus wanted Judas to betray Him in order to fulfill Jesus’ plan. This is contrary to the New Testament, which presents Judas as a traitor.