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Judas's Story? Gospel Attributed to Jesus's Betrayer Stirs Controversy

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Biblical scholars have been buzzing this year about the recently translated Gospel of Judas. Several books were released this past year attempting to explain its significance.

The *Gospel of Judas* (http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/religion_and_spirituality/the_gospel_of_Judas/3126.aspx) holds the key to undoing the anti-Semitism for which Judas Iscariot has so long been the catalyst. With this concept in mind, Marvin Meyer wrapped up his lecture to over one hundred listeners at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles as part of a subscription lecture series titled *Archaeology and the Bible*. Presenting "The Recently Published Gospel of Judas, Gnosticism and the Jewish Connection" to a mostly Jewish audience, Meyer spent time outlining some of the background and intrigue that led to the final reconstruction of the *Gospel of Judas* in April this year. Meyer is Professor of Bible and Christian Studies at Chapman University, Orange County, and one of the leading translators of the *Gospel of Judas*.

A seasoned raconteur when it comes to telling a story, Meyer held the attention of his audience for an hour before coming to the relevance of this "Christian" document to the Jewish world. Surprised at the initial public interest in the gospel, he credited the resources and

marketing skills of the [National Geographic Society](http://www.nationalgeographic.com)

(http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/04/0406_060406_judas.html)

(http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/04/0406_060406_judas.html) who funded the translation of the document and publication of two books on the subject. They also produced a documentary about the process of recovery and translation. Despite the flush of publicity, Meyer wryly noted that humility was in order in that despite all these resources, the book never came close to outselling *Marley and Me: Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog*.

Clearly we are going to be presented with more on Judas Iscariot. Meyer intends to produce another title for release next spring that will document the way in which Judas has been treated in Christian literature since the first century. For him, the *Gospel of Judas* stands in stark contrast to that treatment. But the orthodox are striking back at Judas. Several books have hit the news stands discussing the betrayer of Jesus and his newly translated gospel. Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham and one of the Church of England's leading scholars, has written a book titled *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity?* Simon J. Gathercole of the University of Aberdeen also has a title in production, and more are likely to follow.

According to Meyer, some alterations to the text of the gospel can be expected before the critical edition is launched in the spring. These are due to the challenges of translation, and only time will tell whether these will be as far reaching as those suggested by Craig Evans, another of the translation team, who spoke to a CBC News team on the same day as the lecture. (See "[Judas No Hero, Scholars Say \(http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/judas-no-hero-scholars-say-1.630353\)](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/judas-no-hero-scholars-say-1.630353)".) Evans insists that the translation team read the script the wrong way. Instead of being seen as the hero of the work, says Evans, Judas is better described as a dupe. Scholars meeting at the recent Society of Biblical Literature in Washington, D.C., apparently supported the alternate reading of Evans.

Meyer concluded by noting that more ancient texts have been found in Egypt by a Polish team of archaeologists digging in the famed Valley of the Kings. His hope is that another copy of the *Gospel of Judas* will come to light to help fill in the blanks that are left in the only existing copy of the document. Meyer teased his audience with the hope of more surprises and discoveries. Even of this document, a minimum of some 42 pages may still be missing from the codex if the page numbering is correct. These pages may have been held in another library or source since the codex was discovered in the 1970s. In addition, the papyrus used to add

substance to the covers of the codex are still to be translated. These are normally scraps of old receipts, memos and documents which can provide interesting insight into the environment in which the book was first created.