

JUDAS' DEATH AND FINAL DESTINY IN THE GOSPELS AND EARLIEST CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

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Abstract

In this study the death and final destiny of Judas Iscariot are examined in the four Gospels, Acts, the earliest Christian writings, and the *Gospel of Judas*. These sources generally portray Judas' end in negative light that has implications on the way the auditors may have interpreted Judas' final destination. This observation runs contrary to the recent trend in scholarship that tends to exonerate Judas for his act of surrendering Jesus to the authorities. Judas was considered by the emerging Christians as a representative apostate from their communities, and as such, his final destination functions as a warning to the early auditors.

1. Introduction

An influential trend within biblical scholarship during the past few decades has been to revise Judas Iscariot into a more positive character than the traditional villain he plays in early Christian traditions (e.g., Klassen 1996; Klassen 2002, 389-410; Maccoby 1992; Caron 2003, 223-45). Influential studies have frequently centered on the question of whether Judas' surrendering of Jesus to the authorities should be considered a betrayal. William Klassen argues that *παραδίδωμι*, which is normally used in the gospels to describe the act, should be interpreted as "hand over" rather than "betray" (e.g., Mark 3:19; cf. Luke. 9:44; 18:32; 20:20; 22:4,6, 21, 22, 48; 24:7,20). Klassen maintains that Judas' act was not a betrayal; in fact, "we have no reason to believe that Jesus considered the act of Judas sinful or wrong" (2002, 409).¹

Positive revisions of Judas enjoy a second wind through recent discussions on the *Gospel of Judas* (e.g., Kasser, Meyer, Wurst 2006 [henceforth KMW]; Scopello, ed. 2008; DeConick, ed. 2009b).² The ancient document from Codex

1 See also Kassen, 1996, 47-58. Gosling (1999, 117-25), however, surveys the word *παραδίδωμι* in classic literature, LXX, and Josephus, and shows many instances in which "betray" is the appropriate meaning.

2 For text and translations, see e.g., Kasser, Wurst, Meyer, and Gaudard (2007 [henceforth KMWG]); Brankaer and Bethge (2007); Pagels and King (2007); Turner (2008, 229-