WILKINSON COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
PRESENTS
2009-2010 SERIES

A NIGHT WITH...

JUDAS ISCARIOT

What have people said about Judas and Jesus in the New Testament, the Gospel of Judas, and other literature? Was Judas as bad—or as good—as people think?

TUESDAY, APRIL 6 | 7:00 P.M.
WALLACE ALL FAITHS CHAPEL

MARVIN MEYER
PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

With oral interpretation by Communication Studies Faculty: Richard Doetkott, Lance Lockwood & Christina Moorhead

ADMISSION IS FREE. LIGHT RECEPTION TO FOLLOW. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT (714) 997-6947.

PARKING FOR EVENTS IS AVAILABLE AFTER 5 PM IN THE LASTINGER PARKING STRUCTURE AND ORANGE LOT. PERMITS COST $2 FOR 2 HOURS AND $3 FOR FOUR HOURS.
A Night with Judas Iscariot

Script

Marvin Meyer

Singer or reader(s): Judas’s song from “Jesus Christ Superstar”

Now, if I help you, it matters that you see
These sordid kinda things are coming hard to me.
It’s taken me some time to work out what to do.
I weighed the whole thing out before I came to you.
I have no thought at all about my own reward.
I really didn’t come here of my own accord.
Just don’t say I’m damned for all time.

I came because I had to; I’m the one who saw.
Jesus can’t control it like he did before.
And furthermore I know that Jesus thinks so too.
Jesus wouldn’t mind that I was here with you.
I have no thought at all about my own reward.
I really didn’t come here of my own accord.
Just don’t say I’m damned for all time.
Annas, you’re a friend, a worldly man and wise.
Caiaphas, my friend, I know you sympathize.
Why are we the prophets? Why are we the ones
Who see the sad solution – know what must be done?
I have no thought at all about my own reward.
I really didn’t come here of my own accord.
Just don’t say I’m damned for all time.

Judas: Shalom lakem. Salaam alaykum. You heard the lyrics from “Jesus Christ
Superstar”: “Just don’t say I’m damned for all time.” You know who’s singing that song?
That’s supposed to be me! Moi! Yehuda, Judah, Judas, Judas Iscariot! The very thought
that I would be damned for all time! I’m just an ordinary Jewish guy with an ordinary
Jewish name – Yehuda in Hebrew, Judas in Greek – named after Judah the son of Jacob or Israel. I’m just one of all sorts of men named Judas around here; everybody and his brother is named Judas. My main claim to fame is that I was known as a friend of Rabbi Jesus – Rabbi Yeshua. People know I spent time with the rabbi.

Yet what horrible things have been said and written about me over the centuries! That I turned on Jesus and betrayed him – handed him over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. That I did this with a kiss – though of course I kissed my friend Jesus, as we do in the Middle East – what could be wrong with that? It has been said that I was nothing but a wicked Jew, evil from childhood and ugly as sin. One writer, Dante, put me in the lowest and worst circle of hell, down there with Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar. Not bad company, but hell is not the place where you want to spend eternity, damned for all time. And this is not funny: my name sounds like a word for Jew, and so I became the poster-boy for anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism. I have been caricatured with a big nose, greedy eyes, with my hand gripping a moneybag. You know the artwork I’m talking about.

My poor Jewish mama must be turning over in her grave because of the terrible things they have said and done with her son Judas.

How did we ever get to this point? The first person who wrote about me and my friends didn’t really write about me at all. I’m talking about my fellow Jew, Shaul, Paul, who wrote about all of us who were close friends of Jesus, in the middle of the first century, and calls us “the twelve,” but he never mentions me by name. He says that Jesus was “handed over” to be crucified, and he uses the same Greek verb, paradidonai, that
later is translated as “betrayed” – with reference to me, of course. And who, according to Paul, handed Jesus over to be crucified?

**Readers:** Paul, to the Galatians: I have been crucified with Christ. No longer do I live, but Christ lives with me. The life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and handed himself over for me.

Paul, to the Romans: So what shall we say about this? If God is for us, who is against us? He – God – who did not spare his own son, but handed him over for all of us – won’t he also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

**Judas:** I didn’t hand Jesus over, according to Paul. Jesus handed himself over. Or God did it.

But about twenty years later the gospel authors start picking on me and blaming me. I guess someone had to take the rap for the death of Jesus – so let’s blame Judas “the Jew.” And get the Roman Pontius Pilate off the hook. After all, the Greek-speaking gospel authors were sharing their lives with other Romans in a Roman empire, and they had to get along with their neighbors. So ultimately, they say, the Romans aren’t really responsible for getting our savior Jesus killed. The Jews did it. Judas did it.

At least Mark, the first gospel author, keeps his cool. He says I handed Jesus over to be crucified – I betrayed him – but he doesn’t say why I did it and exactly what I did. About ten years later Matthew says I betrayed Jesus for money and then felt remorseful afterwards, and so I committed suicide by hanging myself. Luke begins to pile on. He says the devil made me do it, and he goes on to write that I died in a ghastly way, by
falling and having my guts burst out. Still later John charges that I am the personification of evil, that I am actually a devil – “the son of perdition.”

And it gets even worse, in the next years of the second century. It starts getting personal. Somebody starts making up stuff about me as a kid.

Readers: The so-called Arabic Infancy Gospel: A woman had a son who was tormented by Satan. This boy was named Judas, and whenever Satan seized him, he would bite whoever came near him, and if he found no one around him, he would bite his own hands and his other limbs.

One day demon-possessed Judas came by and sat to the right of Jesus. Then he was attacked by Satan in the same way as usually happened, and he wanted to bite the lord Jesus, but he couldn’t. Nevertheless, he hit Jesus on the right side, and as a result Jesus began to cry. Immediately Satan departed from that boy Judas and fled like a mad dog.

Judas: It gets nastier and nastier. Listen to what one of the church fathers says about me.

Readers: Papias, Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord: Judas went around in this world as a supreme example of impiety. He grew to be so bloated in his flesh that he could not squeeze through an opening a chariot could easily go through – not even his bulging head. They say that his eyelids got so swollen that he could not see any light, and a doctor could not observe his eyes, even with an optical instrument, because they were buried so deep in the surrounding tissue. His genitals became more massive and repulsive than
anyone else’s, and when he relieved himself, to his perverse shame, he discharged the pus and worms that streamed all through his body.

**Judas:** Come on, I’m a pretty good looking guy. Maybe I could lose a few pounds, but that is ridiculous.

Another author, who fancies himself to be a poet on the order of Virgil, takes out his thesaurus to find the range of diabolical epithets to lay on me.

**Readers:** Sedulius, Paschal Hymn:

You bloody, savage, rash, insane, rebellious,
Faithless, cruel, deceitful, bribable, unjust,
Cruel betrayer, vicious traitor, merciless thief –
Are you the standard-bearer for these fearsome swords?
Do you command the sacrilegious ranks that threaten us
With point and spear, as you press your face to his and mix your Poison with his honey, and betray the lord under the pretense of affection?
Why do you pretend to be his ally and greet him with loving treachery?
Peace never conspires with terrible swords,
Nor does the wolf give fearsome kisses to the pious lamb.

**Judas:** As I said, I simply kissed my friend Jesus when we said hello.
These writers even take on my wife, now with a fanciful story of what happened between me and my wife after the betrayal.

**Readers**: The Gospel of Nicodemus: Judas went home to make a noose of rope, in order to hang himself, and he found his wife sitting down and roasting a cock over a charcoal fire prior to eating it.

He said to her, “Get up, wife, and find a rope for me, because I want to hang myself, as I deserve.” But his wife said to him, “Why are you saying these sorts of things?” Judas said to her, “In truth, you should know that I have handed my teacher Jesus over in a wicked way to the evildoers, so that Pilate might execute him. But he will rise again on the third day – and woe to us!” His wife said to him, “Don’t speak or think like that. For it is just as possible for this cock roasting over the charcoal fire to crow as for Jesus to rise again, as you are saying.”

And immediately, as she finished speaking, that cock spread its wings and crowed three times. Then Judas was convinced even more, and immediately he made the noose of rope and hanged himself.

**Judas**: In the Gospel of Barnabas, which probably was influenced by Islamic ideas that Jesus – prophet Isa – should not die on the cross, it is maintained that I was the one who was crucified, not Jesus.

**Readers**: The Gospel of Barnabas: In an impulsive manner, Judas went before anyone else into the room from which Jesus had been taken up to heaven by God. The disciples
were asleep. Then God acted to transform Judas so completely in his speech and appearance to resemble Jesus that we the disciples were convinced he was Jesus. He woke us up, and he asked where the master was. We were amazed, and we replied, “Lord, you are our master.” He smiled and said, “Now you are being foolish, not recognizing me as Judas Iscariot.”

While he was saying this, a military force came in and seized Judas, since he resembled Jesus in every respect.

The soldiers took Judas and bound him, and they mocked him. He told the truth and insisted that he was not Jesus, but the soldiers ridiculed him and said, “Your highness, do not be afraid, because we have come to make you the king of Israel. We have bound you only because we know that you refuse to receive the kingdom.”

At last, after scourging and whipping Judas so horribly that blood rained from his body, the soldiers led him to Mount Calvary, where they were in the habit of hanging evildoers, and they crucified him there, naked, to shame him even more.

**Judas:** In yet another text, the Golden Legend, it is claimed that I killed my father and married my mother before becoming a fickle friend of Jesus and betraying him.

**Readers:** The Golden Legend: One night, after a certain Jewish couple named Ruben and Ciborea had performed their marital duty, Ciborea fell asleep and had a dream. What she saw utterly terrified her. With groans and sighs she recounted the dream to her husband: “I dreamed that I gave birth to a diabolical son who became the instrument of ruin for our entire race.”
When, after a time, she gave birth to a son, the child’s parents were stricken with fear, and began to reflect hard on what to do with him. They shuddered at the thought of killing their own son, but neither were they inclined to bring up the destroyer of their own race; so they put him in a basket and exposed him to the elements on the sea.

The surging sea drove him to an island called Scarioth. From this island the lad, Judas, was called “Iscariot.”

In time Judas made his way into an orchard to steal its fruit on behalf of Pontius Pilate, but he encountered the owner of the orchard and killed him by striking him on the head with a rock. The owner of the orchard was Ruben, Judas’s father. Completely unaware of this, Judas was given all of Ruben’s property by Pilate, and he was united with Ruben’s wife, Ciborea, in wedlock. Only later, in conversation with Ciborea, did Judas discover what he had done: he had killed his father and married his mother.

**Judas:** That’s not me being written about in the Golden Legend. That story has nothing to do with me. That story is about the Greek character Oedipus from the myth of Oedipus.

I’m sorry to say that there are more tall tales about me and my wickedness. But thank God there are also a few other texts from the old days that tell a different story. Like the Gospel of Judas, composed in the second century, and found in Egypt fairly recently and now in bookstores everywhere. It’s entitled the Gospel of Judas, but I didn’t write it. I don’t know who originally did, but this gospel gives a more gnostic, mystical spin to my story. I’m not saying it all happened like this, but the Gospel of Judas credits me as the friend of Jesus who knew him well and learned a great deal from the rabbi about the meaning of life and how to overcome death.
'This is how the National Geographic folks imagined part of the story of the Gospel of Judas might look if it were reenacted.

**Film clip:** the National Geographic television documentary, “The Gospel of Judas” (or the like)

**Judas:** The text of the Gospel of Judas opens with statements that make it clear that the story of the gospel centers on Jesus talking with the disciples – and especially with me. This is how it reads at the beginning.

**Readers:** The secret revelatory discourse that Jesus spoke with Judas Iscariot in the course of eight days, three days before his passion.

**Judas:** As the Gospel of Judas continues, it is admitted that only I among the disciples had the correct view of who Jesus is.

**Readers:** Jesus said to the disciples, “Let any of you who is a strong enough person bring forward the perfect human being and stand before my face.” They all said, “We are strong.” But none of their spirits dared to stand before him, except Judas Iscariot. He was able to stand before him, yet he could not look him in the eye, but he turned his face away.
Judas said to him, “I know who you are and from what place you have come. You have come from the immortal eternal realm of Barbelo, and I am not worthy to pronounce the name of the one who has sent you.”

**Judas:** Now I said this is a different kind of gospel, with a more mystical gnostic message. According to this kind of gospel, salvation comes from knowledge, not faith, and knowledge helps us overcome the ignorance that hinders us and enslaves us. So when I confess Jesus like this in the Gospel of Judas, I use a term – Barbelo – that I know from Hebrew. It refers to the highest God, known from the holy, ineffable name, whose holy name, the ten commandments tell us, we should not take in vain.

The Gospel of Judas has Rabbi Jesus telling me all his secrets, giving me all his insight.

**Readers:** Jesus understood that Judas was contemplating the rest of the things that are lofty, and he said to him, “Move away from the others, and I shall explain to you the mysteries of the kingdom, not so that you will attain it, but you will go through a great deal of grief. For somebody else will take your place, so that the twelve disciples may be complete once again with their God.”

**Judas:** Ah, it claims that I will be replaced. In the Gospel of Judas my difficulties in this world are described in some detail. You already have heard what people have said about me, and you probably know that I was said to have been replaced in the circle of Jesus’ friends by another person. Well, these dark, gloomy times of mine in this world seem to
be used in the Gospel of Judas to teach people that something of the light and life of God is trapped in this world of mortality – this is often called the wisdom of God in this world – and we people, when we are in the know, understand that this light and life of God is within us. When we know, we overcome the darkness of our lives, we become enlightened, and we are free in the light.

Jesus goes on to teach me, it is written in the Gospel of Judas, all about the universe, from the creation of the light above to its evolution – or devolution – down into this world below.

Readers: Jesus said, “Come, that I may teach you about the things that no person will see. For there is a great and infinite realm, whose dimensions no angelic generation could see, in which is the great invisible Spirit, which no eye of angel has seen, no thought of the mind has grasped, nor was it called by a name.

“And a cloud of light appeared in that place. And he said, ‘Let an angel come into existence as my attendant.’ And a great angel, the self-generated one, God of light, came from the cloud. Four more angels came into existence because of him, from another cloud, and they served as attendants for the angelic self-generated. And he said, ‘Let angels come into existence, for adoration of him,’ and ten thousands without number came to be.

“Now, the multitude of those immortal beings is called ‘cosmos,’ that is, corruption, through the father and the luminaries and the eternal realms.

“But after these things it was said, ‘Let twelve angels come into existence to rule over chaos and the underworld.’ And look, from the cloud an angel appeared, whose face
blazed with fire and whose countenance was fouled with blood. His name was Nebro, which is interpreted as ‘rebel,’ but others name him Yaldabaoth. And another angel, Sakla, also came from the cloud. So Nebro created six angels, with Sakla, to be attendants, and these produced twelve angels in the heavens, and each one received a share in the heavens.

**Judas:** This sounds pretty dreadful, this life in a chaotic world ruled by cosmic bullies, and we may seem to be without hope of freedom and enlightenment, but that is not so, according to the Gospel of Judas.

**Readers:** Jesus said, “God caused knowledge to be brought to Adam and those who are with him, so that the kings of chaos and the underworld might not dominate them.

“And then the image of the great generation of Adam will be magnified, for before heaven, earth, and the angels, that generation from the eternal realms exists.”

**Judas:** And what happens to me? Jesus tells me, near the end of the Gospel of Judas, that I will hand over someone or something – but not the real, spiritual person of Jesus. The inner, enlightened Jesus will return to the light above, leaving his mortal body behind. And I don’t betray the real Jesus at all.

**Readers:** Jesus tells Judas, “You will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man who bears me. Already your horn has been lifted up, and your anger has flared up, and your star has passed by, and your heart has grown strong.”
**Judas:** The last I see of Jesus in the Gospel of Judas is Jesus in his glory, in a light cloud, and my star around the cloud leads the way, beyond the stars of the other friends of Jesus.

**Readers:** Jesus said to Judas, “Look, you have been informed of everything. Lift up your eyes and behold the cloud and the light that is within it and the stars that are circling it. And the star that leads the way is your star.”

Judas lifted up his eyes and beheld the cloud of light. And he, Jesus, entered it. Those who were standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud . . .

**Judas:** Exactly what the divine voice had to say you’ll probably never know, I’m sorry to say, unless we can find a fragment of papyrus to fill in the gap in the text of the Gospel of Judas.

As I said, it didn’t all happen just like this, but here in this gospel I am given some credit for being a good, thoughtful friend of Jesus.

Well, now you’ve heard all these stories. But how did these dastardly tales of my disloyalty and treachery and eventual demonization get started? Once they got going, these stories must have taken on a life of their own, fueled by suspicion and hatred toward Jews and by a fascination with the story of betrayal. But where did it start?

My best guess is that the story told of wicked me is another example of stories recounted in the literature of the world about betrayals, about friend turning against friend, brother against brother, sister against sister. Homer tells this kind of story about Melanthius the goatherd, who turned against Odysseus and paid the ultimate price. It
sounds like what some people have written about me, and a few scholars think this is the origin of the story of my betrayal.

**Readers:** Homer, The Odyssey:

Melanthius, herder of goats, crept into
Odysseus’s chamber through the clefts in the hall,
And from there took out twelve shields, twelve spears,
Twelve bronze-tipped helms with thick horsehair crests;
And he left with them, and gave them at once to the Suitors. Odysseus’s knees and heart trembled when he
Saw them donning arms and brandishing long spears
In their hands, so great did the task appear to him.

When Melanthius, herder of goats, crossed the threshold,
They sprang upon him and seized him. Dragging him in by
His hair, they threw him to the ground, on the floor, despairing
In soul, and bound together feet and hands with a heartrending
Bond, hogtying him well – no escape;
And they fastened a twisted rope to him and hoisted
Him up to a high column, all the way to the rafters.

They led out Melanthius through the gate and the courtyard.
They lopped off his nose and ears with pitiless
Bronze, sliced off his balls – to throw raw to the dogs – and
Chopped off his hands and his feet, fuming with fury.

Judas: In Buddhist lore, Gautama Buddha’s cousin, named Devadatta, turned against the
Buddha and tried to do him harm.

Readers: A story about the betrayal of the Buddha: Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha,
became a member of the religious order of the Buddha, but his heart grew envious of his
cousin, and he determined that he would kill the Buddha.
Devadatta got thugs to try to assassinate the Buddha, but the plot failed. Then he tried to make a rock fall on the Buddha, but the rock broke and the Buddha suffered only a minor injury. Then he caused a drunken elephant to attack the Buddha, but the beast bowed down in humility before him. Finally he sowed seeds of dissent among the monks, but the plan to break up the harmony of the assembly came to naught.

Devadatta was distressed, became sick, and repented. Nonetheless, he died while being brought to see the Buddha, and in the end, it is said, he was drawn down into hell.

**Judas:** Within the Jewish cultural sphere – my world – a poet wrote about a close friend who turned against him, and the author of the Gospel of John actually quotes a part of this poem to tell my story.

**Readers:** Psalm 41:

> All who hate me whisper together against me;  
> They imagine the worst about me.  
> They say, “A horrible malady has come upon him;  
> He will never again arise from where he lies.”  
> Even my close friend, whom I trusted,  
> Who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

**Judas:** There are more texts like this in the Jewish Scriptures. But the story of betrayal closest to me comes from Jewish traditions that are familiar to almost everyone. I’ll bet
that if you asked a person on the street in first-century Jerusalem or some other town in Israel who the worst betrayer of all time might be, that person would say Judas – but wouldn’t mean me. The Judas – Yehuda, Judah – in mind would most likely be Judas – Judah – the son of Jacob, or Israel, who betrayed his brother Joseph for money.

Readers: Genesis chapter 37: Joseph, a young man seventeen years old, was tending the flock with his brothers, and he brought back a negative report about them to their father. Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age, and he made a fancy robe for him. When his brothers noticed that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him, and they had nothing good to say to him.

One day Joseph followed his brothers and found them at Dothan. They saw him a long ways away, and before he reached them, they plotted against him in order to kill him.

Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped his fancy robe from him, and they took him and threw him into a dry cistern.

Judah – Yehuda, Judas – said to his brothers, “What good will it do us if we kill our brother and conceal his blood. Let’s sell him to the Ishmaelite merchants and not lay our hands on him, for he’s our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers were in agreement. So, when the merchants came by, they hauled Joseph up out of the cistern, and they sold him for twenty shekels of silver. The merchants took Joseph to Egypt.

Then the brothers took Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the fancy robe back to their father. Jacob recognized it as Joseph’s robe. He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth, and he mourned for his son for many days.
Judas: There you have it: there’s Judas, betrayal of a brother, pieces of silver, and loss of a son. The story of my supposed treachery may well be the retelling of this story of the most famous – or infamous – betrayer in the Jewish Bible: Judas, the Judas or Judah whose name becomes that of a tribe and a territory of Israel. Whose name comes to mean Jew. Whose name is my name. It should not be a surprise if a passage or story from the Jewish Bible would be used as source material for my story. That is the writing technique that is used throughout the gospels to tell the story of Jesus. And if such is the case for me, Judas Iscariot, we’ll have to start thinking fresh thoughts about what we’re going to do with my story, and the story of my friend Rabbi Jesus, in the Bible and beyond.

Singer or reader(s): Bob Dylan, “With God on Our Side”

Oh my name it is nothin’
My age it means less
The country I come from
Is called the Midwest
I’s taught and brought up there
The laws to abide
And the land that I live in
Has God on its side.

In many a dark hour
I’ve been thinkin’ about this
That Jesus Christ
Was betrayed by a kiss
But I can’t think for you
You’ll have to decide
Whether Judas Iscariot
Had God on his side.

So now as I’m leavin’
I’m weary as hell
The confusion I’m feelin’
Ain’t no tongue can tell
The words fill my head
And fall to the floor
If God’s on our side
He’ll stop the next war.

Judas: The words of Bob Dylan’s song strike home even today. Yes, I too am weary as hell, and confused. But now you know more about me. And you’ll have to decide whether I had God on my side.

Peace be with you.

Judas exits.
Bibliography:


