

The Gospel of Judas



VOLUME 45

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John J. Collins

General Editor

THE ANCHOR YALE BIBLE

The Gospel of Judas

A New Translation with Introduction and
Commentary

DAVID BRAKKE



THE ANCHOR YALE BIBLE

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In memory of Dan Otto Via, Jr. (1928–2014)

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Preface

This book presents my second published translation of *The Gospel of Judas*; the first I made for the second edition of Bentley Layton's *The Gnostic Scriptures* in the Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (2021). The translation here differs from that earlier one in numerous places. Some of the modifications reflect the distinct purposes of the two volumes: my translation for *The Gnostic Scriptures* conforms to the vocabulary that Layton established for that collection, and the opportunity in this book to offer explanations and qualifications in the NOTES and COMMENTS has permitted me to make more debatable choices in translation and in the filling of lacunae. In many and possibly most cases, however, my mind changed after more extensive reading in and consideration of the primary and secondary literature.

In accord with the format of the Anchor Yale Bible, I do not offer a new text, but I do discuss the gospel's many text-critical problems, especially the restorations of lacunae and readings of illegible text, and I assess the proposals found in the several critical editions and other studies. Only rarely do I offer an entirely new suggestion, for in most instances previous editors and commentators appear to have exhausted the plausible options. The reader will need access to an edition of the Coptic text that includes the fragments that first appeared in late 2009 (Jenott 2011; Bermejo Rubio 2012; Devoti 2012; Nagel 2014; Brankaer and van Os 2019). I have relied primarily on Jenott, but I have consulted and taken into account all the published editions and often adopt one of their readings over that of Jenott. The text remains fragmentary, and even what survives is terse and allusive, rendering interpretation uncertain on many points.

I refer to the text of *Judas* (and of other works preserved in Coptic manuscripts) by manuscript page and line number(s). In the translation, because it is impossible to indicate every new line, I have inserted line numbers only at breaks in punctuation. Elsewhere I refer precisely to the relevant lines.

My transliteration of Coptic follows the system recommended by the *SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed., but normally separates bound groups and includes hyphenation according to the system in Layton 2011, in order to make transparent my grammatical analysis of the text. My transliteration of Greek likewise follows that in the *SBL Handbook*; I have chosen, however, to transliterate upsilon always with *u* in order to be consistent across the transliteration of Greco-Coptic and Greek words. Translations from the Septuagint are taken from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (2007), sometimes slightly modified, and those from the New Testament are the New Revised Standard Version, except when indicated otherwise. Because the authors and works discussed here held a range of views concerning the status of the god of Israel (and of other divine beings), I do not capitalize “god” except when I quote another modern translation without modification.

Despite its fragmentary and succinct character, this enigmatic work provides compelling new evidence for the early history of the gnostic school of thought and its teachings and for diversity, conflict, and the persistence of apocalyptic eschatology among Christ-worshipping groups in the second century. These are the themes that I explore most fully in this book. I completed and revised the first draft in the spring and summer of 2020, when early Christian philology seemed trivial even if it provided some welcome distraction; probably *The Gospel of Judas* and this book will always evoke for me the anxious uncertainty, profound sadness, and righteous anger of that time. I confess that, despite this gospel’s importance for the history of second-century Christianity, I find that it contains little of enduring spiritual worth, unless it inspires us to ask ourselves—apart from whatever god (if any) to whom we pray—what god we actually serve in our politics and economics and whose well-being we sacrifice in our devotion to that god.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the individuals, groups, and institutions who supported my research and writing. John Collins and the editorial board of the Anchor Yale Bible extended the invitation to write this book and demonstrated patient support as I worked on it. The Ohio State University provided the necessary time and financial resources, and the participants in OSU's Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean offered valuable discussion of my initial translation and my early thoughts about the gospel. I made substantial progress during a semester at Williams College as the Croghan Bicentennial Visiting Professor of Biblical and Early Christian Studies, an appointment facilitated by Denise Buell.

I presented my developing ideas to helpful audiences at Amherst College, Australian Catholic University, University of California–San Diego, Ohio State, Williams College, Wittenberg University, and Yale University, and at meetings of the American Academy of Religion, North American Patristics Society, Society of Biblical Literature, Westar Institute Christianity Seminar, and the Second International Congress of Patristic Studies at the Universidad Católica de Cuyo, San Juan, Argentina. I am particularly grateful to Margaret Mitchell and the Early Christian Studies Workshop of the University of Chicago for devoting two meetings to my work on *Judas*; to Einar Thomassen, Moa Airijoki, and the other participants in a Religions in Late Antiquity Workshop at the Norwegian Institute in Athens for discussion of a partial draft; to Lance Jenott for helpful conversations about various problems; to Christian Askeland, Michael Kochenash, and Einar Thomassen for providing advance copies of publications in press; and to J. Albert Harrill, Ellen Muehlberger, the two anonymous reviewers for Yale University Press, and John Kloppenborg of the Anchor Yale Bible editorial board for critical comments on the entire manuscript. Jessie Dolch and Susan Laity improved the manuscript considerably and guided it to publication.

Some of this material appeared in earlier forms in the essays listed as Brakke 2018 and 2020 in the Bibliography.

This book is dedicated to the memory of the New Testament scholar who introduced me to exegesis of early Christian writings, inspired me to go to graduate school in religious studies, and showed me and countless other students how to be faithful and skeptical at the same time.

Abbreviations and Editorial Signs

Abbreviations are those of *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd. ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

Ancient Works and Manuscripts

Allogenes	<i>Foreigner (Allogenes)</i> (NHC XI,3)
Ap. Jas.	<i>Apocryphon of James</i> (NHC I,2)
Ap. John	<i>Secret Book (Apocryphon) According to John</i> (BG 2; NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1)
Apoc. Adam	<i>Revelation of Adam</i> (NHC V,5)
2 Apoc. Jas.	<i>(Second) Revelation of James</i> (NHC V,4)
Athenagoras	
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Plea for the Christians</i>
<i>Ascen. Isa.</i>	<i>Ascension of Isaiah</i>
Barn.	<i>Epistle of Barnabas</i>
BG	Berlinus Gnosticus (p. Berol. 8502)
Bk. Thom.	<i>Book of Thomas: The Contender Writing to the Perfect</i> (NHC II,7)
1 Clem.	<i>1 Clement</i>
2 Clem.	<i>2 Clement</i>
Clement of Alexandria (Clem. Al.)	
<i>Exc.</i>	<i>Excerpts from Theodotus</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromateis</i>
CT	Codex Tchacos
Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts	
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
1QSa	<i>Community Rule</i>
4QTest	Testimonia
Did.	<i>Didache</i>
Diogn.	<i>Diognetus</i>
1 En.	<i>1 Enoch</i>
2 En.	<i>2 Enoch</i>
3 En.	<i>3 Enoch</i>

Ep. Pet. Phil.	<i>Letter of Peter to Philip</i> (NHC VIII,2; CT 1)
Epiphanius (Epiph.)	
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion</i>
Eugnostos	<i>Eugnōstos the Blessed</i> (NHC III,3; V,1)
Eusebius (Eus.)	
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
Gos. Eg.	<i>Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit (Egyptian Gospel)</i> (NHC III,2; IV,2)
Gos. Jud.	<i>Gospel of Judas</i> (CT 3)
Gos. Phil.	<i>Gospel According to Philip</i> (NHC II,3)
Gos. Thom.	<i>Gospel According to Thomas</i> (NHC II,2)
Gos. Truth	<i>Gospel of Truth</i> (NHC I,3; XII,2)
Herm. Mand.	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate(s)</i>
Herm. Sim.	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude(s)</i>
Ignatius of Antioch (Ign.)	
<i>Eph.</i>	<i>To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Magn.</i>	<i>To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Phld.</i>	<i>To the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Rom.</i>	<i>To the Romans</i>
<i>Smyrn.</i>	<i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>
<i>Trall.</i>	<i>To the Trallians</i>
Irenaeus (Iren.)	
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Against the Heresies</i>
Josephus	
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
Justin Martyr (Just.)	
<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>First Apology</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
LXX	Septuagint
Nat. Rulers	<i>Reality of the Rulers</i> (NHC II,4)
NHC	Nag Hammadi codex/codices
Philo of Alexandria	
<i>Aet.</i>	<i>On the Eternity of the World</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>On Giants</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>On the Creation of the World</i>
QG	<i>Questions and Answers on Genesis</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>On the Special Laws</i>
Plato	
<i>Tim.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>

Pol. <i>Phil.</i>	Polycarp, <i>To the Philippians</i>
P.Oxy.	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
Pr. Paul	<i>Prayer of the Apostle Paul</i> (NHC I,1)
Ps.-Clem.	Pseudo-Clementines
Hom.	<i>Homilies</i>
Steles Seth	<i>Three Tablets of Seth</i> (NHC VII,5)
T. Ash.	<i>Testament of Asher (Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs)</i>
T. Dan.	<i>Testament of Daniel (Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs)</i>
T. Levi	<i>Testament of Levi (Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs)</i>
Tertullian	
<i>Carn. Chr.</i>	<i>The Flesh of Christ</i>
<i>Praescr.</i>	<i>Prescription Against Heretics</i>
Theodoret of Cyrrhus	
<i>Haer. fab.</i>	<i>Compendium of Heretical Falsehoods</i>
Three Forms	<i>First Thought in Three Forms</i> (NHC XIII,1)
Zost.	<i>Zōstrianos</i> (NHC VIII,1)

Modern Sources

ATDan	Acta Theologica Danica
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BDF	Blass, Friedrich, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
BEHER	Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études: Sciences religieuses
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
EC	<i>Early Christianity</i>
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios bíblicos</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies

HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Coptic Studies</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JJP	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, <i>A Greek English Lexicon</i> (9th ed. with supplement; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968)
LTP	<i>Laval théologique et philosophique</i>
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OTP	Charlesworth, James H., ed., <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985)
PG	Patrologia Graeca [= Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca], edited by Jacques-Paul Migne (162 vols.; Paris, 1857–1886)
PLO	Porta Linguarum Orientalium
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
REAug	<i>Revue des études augustinienes et patristiques</i>
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SEAug	Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum
SecCent	<i>The Second Century</i>
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
StPB	Studia Post-biblica
TP	<i>Theologie und Philosophie</i>
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	<i>Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche</i>

Editorial Signs in the Translation

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Enclosed text restored without attestation in the manuscript. Presumably the omission of this text was an error.

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Lacuna in the manuscript. Enclosed text all or mostly restored.

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Enclosed words added by the translator for clarity.

INTRODUCTION

I.

The Testimonia to and Coptic Text of *The Gospel of Judas*

Evidence for a *Gospel of Judas* in antiquity consists of references by early Christian authors and the Coptic text of a work with that title in a manuscript from late ancient Egypt. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing around 180 CE, associated a *Gospel of Judas* with a group of “others” among “the multitude of the gnostics”; in the late 370s Epiphanius of Salamis repeated and revised Irenaeus’s report, as did Theodoret of Cyrrihus in the 450s. The manuscript that contains the Coptic *Judas*, now known as Codex Tchacos, was probably copied in the fourth century. The Coptic text most likely represents a translation of the work that Irenaeus mentioned (Wurst 2006), but it possibly was revised between its original circulation in the second century and its copying in the fourth.

A. Ancient Testimonia to a *Gospel of Judas*

Irenaeus refers to a *Gospel of Judas* in his massive work *On the Detection and Overthrow of Gnōsis, Falsely So-Called (or Against the Heresies)*, which he wrote around 180, during his account of a group of “others” among the gnostics. In the third part of Book I of *Against the Heresies* (1.23–31), Irenaeus exposes the diabolical origin of the school of “Valentinian” Christians by means of a genealogy of heretical individuals and groups that he traces back to Simon Magus (Acts 8:9–24) (Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 1:149–63). According to Irenaeus, Valentinus “adapted the fundamental principles of the so-called gnostic school of thought (*gnōstikē hairesis*) to his own kind of system” (1.11.1). Therefore, his genealogical account, which he probably adapted from an earlier work by Justin Martyr, culminates in a description of “the multitude of the gnostics” (*multitudo gnosticorum*) (1.29.1), the immediate predecessors of Valentinus and his school. That description presents the gnostics as having a

certain diversity among themselves, which Irenaeus probably based on various written works that he had read or about which he had heard. He introduces an initial account of god and creation with “some of them propose” (*quidam enim eorum . . . subiciunt*) (1.29.1); historians have recognized that much of this report matches the *Secret Book (Apocryphon) According to John*, which survives in four Coptic manuscripts from late antiquity (NHC II,1; NHC III,1; NHC IV,1; BG 2). Irenaeus then begins a longer account, which has agreements with and differences from the first one, by saying, “others relate” (*alii . . . loquuntur*) (1.30.1). At the end of this second narrative, Irenaeus seems to conclude his discussion of the gnostics by remarking that it is from such teachings that the “school of Valentinus” arose (1.30.15). Yet he immediately appends two short additional descriptions of teachings of “some” (*quidam*) and “others” (*alii*) (1.30.15, 31.1). Irenaeus then repeats his claim about their influence on the Valentinians, who came from “such fathers, mothers, and ancestors” (1.31.3). He concludes the first book by claiming to have exposed the origins of the Valentinian school of Christianity and announcing that he will refute their teachings in the following book. When he called the gnostics a *hairesis* (“school of thought”), Irenaeus attributed to them some degree of social cohesion, which may have ranged from isolated individuals or small groups that shared interest in the same ideas and mythological narratives to a sectarian community with its own leaders and rituals.

Irenaeus’s report has often been obscured by modern and ancient scholars’ inaccurate systematization of his remarks. Later editors and readers of Irenaeus divided his account of the gnostics among three sects, which they called “Barbeloites” (1.29), “Ophites” (1.30), and “Cainites” (1.31), names apparently derived from prominent or distinctive themes in the three allegedly separate reports: the Barbēlō aeon, a demonic snake (*ophis*) called “the *nun*,” and Cain, respectively. In fact, however, Irenaeus did not use these three names, nor did he present only three reports. As we have seen, he provided two substantial accounts of teaching of “the gnostics” and then two appended reports, each introduced as the teachings of “some” and then “others.” Irenaeus, therefore, did not describe three distinct sects but called attention to a certain diversity of teaching among “the multitude of the gnostics” or “the gnostic school of thought,” which he claimed influenced Valentinus (cf. Thomassen 2021, 7–8, 10 n. 20). Irenaeus’s reference to *The Gospel of Judas* appears in his final report of

what “others” say, and thus he attributed its composition or use to a subset of the gnostic school of thought. Later heresiologists like Epiphanius would assign the gospel or teachings about Judas to the group that they called Cainites.

The correspondences between Irenaeus’s accounts of the gnostics’ myth and the *Secret Book According to John* have allowed historians to attribute that work to the gnostic school of thought and to ascribe other surviving texts and testimonia to the movement (Layton 1995; Introduction II; Introduction IV.A). Just after 300 CE Poryphry of Tyre claimed that in the 260s Plotinus had interacted with and written against the gnostics and that among their writings were revelations to Zōstrianos and the Foreigner (*Life of Plotinus* 16). Two works with these titles are found in the Nag Hammadi codices (NHC VIII,1; NHC XI,3), and both share the mythology of Irenaeus’s report and the *Secret Book*, confirming their assignment to the gnostics. On the basis of shared mythology, scholars have added to the corpus of gnostic writings the following Nag Hammadi tractates: the *Revelation of Adam* (NHC V,5), the *Reality of the Rulers* (NHC II,4), the *Thunder—Perfect Intellect* (NHC VI,2), *First Thought in Three Forms* (NHC XIII,1), the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III,2; NHC IV,2), the *Thought of Nōrea* (NHC IX,2), *Melchizedek* (NHC IX,1), and *Marsanes* (NHC X), in addition to Zōstrianos and Foreigner. Moreover, the following patristic testimonia seem to refer to the same myth and thus the same sect: Irenaeus on Saturninos (*Haer.* 1.24.1) and Epiphanius on the gnostics (*Pan.* 25–26), the Sethians (*Pan.* 39), and the Archontics (*Pan.* 40). The shared mythology that forms the basis for this group of works is discussed more fully in Introduction IV.A. Most scholars have adopted Epiphanius’s nomenclature and refer to this sect or movement as “Sethians,” “Sethian Gnostics,” or “Sethian Christians.” I will sometimes conform to this scholarly convention to avoid confusion, but it is preferable to use the original terminology of Irenaeus and Porphyry (our earliest witnesses) and call the sect “the gnostics” or “the gnostic school of thought.” Although it cannot be shown that Irenaeus read any of these gnostic works other than the *Secret Book* (or one of its sources) and *The Gospel of Judas*, they can be used to assess the plausibility and reliability of what Irenaeus reports about the gnostics.

The teachings that Irenaeus attributes to the final “others” among the gnostics, with whom he associates *Judas*, differ from this hypothetical

gnostic corpus in some respects, but appear generally plausible:

And in turn others say that Cain was from the higher power, and confess that Esau, Korah, the Sodomites, and all such persons are of the same race as themselves; for this reason they were attacked by the creator, although none of them suffered harm. For wisdom (Sophia) would snatch up to herself out of them whatever in them belonged to her. And they say that Judas the betrayer thoroughly knew these things, and he alone knew the truth more than the others, and (so) accomplished the mystery of the betrayal. They say that through him all things terrestrial and heavenly were dissolved. And they bring forth a composed work to this effect, which they entitle *The Gospel of Judas*. (*Haer.* 1.31.1)

Taken in isolation from the following clause, Irenaeus's statement about Cain is ambiguous: "the higher power"—probably *hē anōthen authentia* (Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 1:312)—from which Cain originated might refer either to the realm of pure divinity above this world or to the highest power within this realm, that is, the creator (DeConick 2010, 657–58). The latter possibility is plausible, but the context and Irenaeus's terminology make the former more probable. Cain appears to be grouped with Esau, the Sodomites, and other biblical characters whom the creator god rejects or attacks in the biblical narrative. Irenaeus's phrasing might be intentionally ambiguous, but in gnostic literature, including the *Secret Book*, Cain appears as a negative figure whose true father is not Adam, but the chief ruler (Ap. John NHC II 24.8–26). Irenaeus's report of a positive view of Cain, then, does not find support in surviving gnostic works. On the other hand, his assertions that the gnostics could identify with biblical characters whom the creator attacked and that they taught that wisdom rescued what is hers from such characters are valid. In particular, several gnostic works either characterize the creator's attack on Sodom and Gomorrah as an attack on the gnostics' primeval ancestors or speak positively of Sodom and Gomorrah (DeConick 2010, 641–44; Burns 2019). In the *Revelation of Adam*, the creator's attempt to destroy "Those People" with "fire, brimstone, and asphalt" is foiled when agents from the higher realm descend and take Those People "above the aeons and the realms of the powers" (75.9–31). According to the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, the heavenly seed of Seth originated as "fruit as a wellspring out of Gomorrah and out of Sodom" (NHC III 56.9–11); when Seth "sowed his seed in the earth-born aeons, whose number is the infinite number of Sodom," he did so in "a pasture of the great Seth, that is, Gomorrah," and then he took a plant from Gomorrah and placed it "in the second location, which also was called Sodom" (NHC III 60.9–18; IV 71.18–30). By

expressing solidarity with the ancient Sodomites, the gnostics embraced a foreign, persecuted identity as “the truly righteous race” (Burns 2019, 131). It is plausible, then, that some gnostics considered both Cain and Judas as similarly righteous victims of the creator’s hostility.

Irenaeus’s description of *The Gospel of Judas*’s contents is brief, but intelligible. In line with these gnostics’ view that some of the characters of the Jewish scriptures whom the creator rejected were actually their righteous forerunners, Judas is characterized as more knowledgeable about the truth than the other disciples. The referent of “these things” (*haec*) that Judas knew thoroughly is not clear. Layton (2021, 233 n. 1.31.1e) suggests, presumably because Judas is a character in the gospels, that Judas knew about the true nature of the union of the anointed (Christ) and Jesus that Irenaeus reported a couple of paragraphs earlier. Irenaeus asserted that the disciples who saw Jesus after his resurrection, who would not have included Judas, “did not know that Jesus was united with the anointed,” nor did “many of his disciples” before the resurrection (1.30.12–14). Van Oort (2009b, 46) takes *haec* to refer to the immediately preceding sentence about wisdom’s efforts to resist the acts of the creator god. Probably, however, Irenaeus refers simply in general to the gnostic doctrines that he has reported. It is not clear whether Irenaeus means to say that Judas’s handing over of Jesus is a positive act in the gospel. Judas is called a *proditor* and his act *proditio*, usually negative terminology in the Christian works that mention him, but it must be on the basis of his superior knowledge that Judas accomplished what is called the betrayal’s *mysterium*, which appears to be the dissolution of earthly and heavenly things; the gnostics, like most other early Christians, anticipated such a dissolution as the fulfillment of the divine plan for this world (van Oort 2013, 2). The betrayal may have been a treacherous act that had a good result—a Christian teaching about Judas that resembles what one finds in the canonical gospels.

Commentators are uncertain whether Irenaeus claims that the gnostics composed *The Gospel of Judas* or only that they cited it and whether he had read the work or had merely heard about it. To be sure, the verb *adferre* (*prosperein*?) could mean only that the gnostics “adduce” or “present” the work, but his use of the term *confictio* (“composed work,” “composition,” probably *suntagma*) suggests that those who bring the gospel forth composed it. Later readers of Irenaeus understood him in this way (van Oort 2009b, 49; for the possible Greek, see Epiphanius’s statement below).

Theodoret of Cyrrhus in his summary of Irenaeus wrote, “And they produce even a gospel of his (Judas’s), which they composed (*suntetheikasin*)” (*Haer. fab.* 15; PG 83.368), and Epiphanius, as we shall see, followed his reference to *The Gospel of Judas* by saying, “And they (the Cainites) likewise create (*plattontai*) certain other works” (*Pan.* 38.1.5). Similarly, Irenaeus’s vague sketch of the book’s contents may imply only second-hand knowledge of the work (Perkins 2009, 122), but he immediately follows his sentence on the gospel with a statement that suggests a collection of gnostic works on the theme of “dissolution”: “And furthermore, I have also collected their writings (*conscriptiones*), in which they encourage one to dissolve (*dissoluere*) the works of the womb” (1.31.2). The implication is that *The Gospel of Judas* is among the writings about dissolution that Irenaeus collected and that he therefore had read it, certainly in Greek (van Oort 2009b, 49–52).

The fourth- and fifth-century references to a *Gospel of Judas* do not independently attest the work but come from authors who read and adapted Irenaeus’s treatise. In the intervening period heresiologists, above all Pseudo-Tertullian (*Against Heresies* 2.5–6), had developed accounts of “Cainites,” which featured teachings about Judas but did not mention a gospel named for him (DeConick 2010, 645–56). In his treatise on heresies from the 450s, Theodoret of Cyrrhus repeated Irenaeus’s report on the sectarians, whom Theodoret called Cainites; as we have seen, he explicitly attributed to them the composition of the gospel. Earlier, in the 370s, Epiphanius likewise used Irenaeus to create his own more elaborate account of the Cainites. He specifies that Judas “learned accurately the things concerning them,” that is, the information concerning Cain, Esau, the Sodomites, and the other representatives of “perfect *gnōsis*.” The Cainites, he says, “want him (Judas) to be their own kin and consider him to be superior in knowledge (*gnōsis*), so that they bring forth (*pherein*) even a little composed work (*suntagmation*) in his name, which they call *Gospel of Judas*” (*Pan.* 38.1.5). Here follows Epiphanius’s reference to other works that the Cainites have created. Epiphanius’s description of the work as little or short might indicate that he had actually seen the gospel, but his failure to offer any description at all of the work’s contents suggests otherwise.

Because they depend on Irenaeus and offer no new information about the work, neither Epiphanius nor Theodoret provides evidence for the continued circulation of a Greek *Gospel of Judas* in the late fourth and fifth

centuries. Instead, we can say only that a work with that title was known to Irenaeus around 180; that he attributed its composition to adherents of the gnostic school of thought with distinct ideas about Cain, Esau, the Sodomites, and similar characters in the Old Testament; and that the contents that he attributes to the work are plausible for a gnostic work of the second century.

B. The Coptic *Gospel of Judas*

The Coptic *Gospel of Judas* is the third of five known tractates in an ancient papyrus codex now called Codex Tchacos. It was purportedly “discovered sometime before 1978 by Egyptian farmers in a burial cave near the village of Qarara, across the Nile from the city of Maghagha, in the Al-Minya province about 180 kilometers south of Cairo” (Jenott 2011, 103–4, summarizing Krosney 2006). Although the account of its location, circumstance, and discovery is plausible, it is based on interviews conducted nearly three decades later with and about people who have been identified only by pseudonyms; therefore, one cannot be certain of its veracity (Jenott 2011, 104). Krosney (2006) narrates the codex’s complicated history and unfortunate treatment during the decades before it was acquired by Frieda Nussberger and then by the Maecenas Foundation, its current owner, and subsequently made available in photographs to scholars and the public in 2006 (see also Kasser et al. 2007, 1–25). The resulting destruction means that much of the codex is lost and even what survives is often difficult to read or illegible. The appearance of additional fragments in 2009 and their publication in 2010 (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010) filled many lacunae in the text of *Judas*, but perhaps a tenth of the text remains lost. Unless and until additional fragments come to light, some questions of interpretation will remain unresolved. Several recent editions of the text improve upon the original edition by including the new fragments (Jenott 2011; Bermejo Rubio 2012; Devoti 2012; Nagel 2014; Brankaer and van Os 2019). My translation relies primarily on the text in Jenott 2011, which provides the most comprehensive discussion of Codex Tchacos as an artifact, but it draws on all the published editions; the NOTES and COMMENTS discuss and evaluate the diverse readings and restorations that they provide.

It seems likely that the codex originated somewhere in middle Egypt during the fourth century CE. Christian Askeland (forthcoming) has

carefully studied the radiocarbon data and concludes, “Although a third or early fifth century date remains theoretically possible, the radiocarbon evidence favors the fourth century as the probable time of harvest for the papyri reeds which would eventually become the Tchacos Codex.” In handwriting, orthography, and dialect, it resembles the Nag Hammadi codices (Piñero and Torallas 2006, 26), which can be securely dated between the middle of the fourth century and the middle of the fifth (although each codex in that hoard was not necessarily copied at the same time and place). The original editors described the dialect as “Sahidic, the southern supralocal Coptic idiom,” with “regional orthographic variations typical of a local form of Sahidic found in Middle Egypt” (Kasser et al. 2007, 3); subsequent research has not significantly altered that assessment. Bosson (2008, 4–5) found some linguistic differences between the first two tractates on the one hand and *Judas* and the fourth tractate on the other. She characterized the dialect of *Judas* as mostly standard Sahidic, with (primarily superficial) peculiarities that are typical of Fayumic, Lycopolitan, and Bohairic (6, 21). In this respect, *Judas*, like many of the treatises from Nag Hammadi, represents a variety of Sahidic that awaits definition. Its “linguistic eclecticism,” Bosson suggests, could have resulted from “multiple interventions,” not only translation from Greek but also recopying and revising in Coptic and movement from one dialect to another; moreover, some of its peculiarities could reflect the original Greek. The scribe, she concluded, produced a unique text, what she noted Wolf-Peter Funk has called “a customized book” (22).

The complete contents of Codex Tchacos and its original context are unknown. The first two tractates, titled the *Letter of Peter to Philip and James*, have counterparts in Nag Hammadi Codices VIII and V, respectively. The title of the fourth tractate does not survive; the original editors called it *Book of Allogenes* because a figure called *allogenēs* (“foreigner, stranger”) functions as its protagonist; it is not identical to the work titled *Allogenēs (Foreigner)* preserved in Nag Hammadi Codex XI (Jenott 2020). It was followed by at least one more work, a Coptic translation of *Corpus Hermeticum XIII*, a dialogue between Hermes Trismegistus and his son Tat (Wurst 2007, 29–30). The remainder of the codex is lost. Jenott (2011, 108–17) estimates that Codex Tchacos contained more than 108 pages and perhaps as many as 140, making it an expensive book to produce. Scholars have offered diverse hypotheses concerning who

might have commissioned Codex Tchacos, who produced it, and why it contains the tractates that it does. The use of *nomina sacra*—abbreviated writings of holy names and terms like “Jesus,” “spirit,” and “Jerusalem”—and its embellishment with crosses suggest that the commissioner(s) of the codex and its producer(s) were Christians. Although historians sometimes claim that either or both must also have been monks, in fact Christians of a variety of social locations might have been interested in acquiring and capable of copying such works. Scholars have also discerned themes that might have motivated the commissioner(s) to collect these works into a single volume, including martyrdom (King 2009), access to divine power for protection (Jenott 2011, 125–29), information for a postmortem ascent of the spirit (DeConick 2008, 99), and “the experience of suffering, violence, and persecution in this world” (Devoti 2012, 85). Certainty on this point is unlikely, especially without knowing what other tractate(s) Codex Tchacos originally contained, if any.

The manuscript gives our work the title “The Gospel of Judas” at its conclusion (after 58.26). The Coptic *peuaggalion n-ioudas* almost certainly represents a genitive relationship in Greek: *to euangelion tou Iouda*. The title does not appear to make a claim of authorship, for the character Judas does not narrate in the first person; rather, it is the gospel concerning, about, or belonging to Judas. It is not certain from the manuscript that the author gave the work this title. Perhaps his title appears at the beginning as the incipit: “The secret report (*logos*) of judgment, in which Jesus spoke with Judas Iscariot during eight days prior to the three days, before he celebrated Passover” (33.1–6). This incipit resembles others from works of the second century, such as those of the *Secret Book According to John* and *Gospel According to Thomas* (COMMENTS 33.1–6). The incipit resembles the manuscript’s title by associating the work with Judas, even though Jesus speaks with the other disciples as well, and in its failure to ascribe authorship to Judas. Who composed this report is left unexplained.

The preserved work is what many modern scholars call a “dialogue gospel” (Introduction III.A). After an initial summary of Jesus’s ministry and calling of the disciples, Jesus engages in a series of conversations with the disciples (including Judas) and with Judas alone. These conversations address such themes as Jesus’s identity, the existence of another holy race, a dream about sacrifice reported by the disciples, and a vision of a great building reported by Judas. The final dialogue between Jesus and Judas

provides an account of the divine realm, the origin of this cosmos and its rulers, the origin and destiny of humanity, and the coming end of the current world order. During these conversations it becomes clear that Judas alone understands the true origin of Jesus and that the other disciples ignorantly worship a false god, the creator of this world, Saklas; Jesus reveals the truth about divinity, humanity, and this realm to Judas alone. At the conclusion of the dialogues, Jesus enters a luminous cloud. The gospel concludes with Judas outside “the guest room” in which Jesus is praying; he meets with Jewish scribes, accepts money from them, and hands Jesus over to them.

Nagel (2007, 217–19) provides convincing reasons to conclude that a Greek original lies behind the Coptic text. The text features what he calls “an unusually high” percentage of Greco-Coptic words—for example, nearly half of the words used as nouns or adjectives. By itself the frequent use of Greco-Coptic words is not a reliable indication of translation from Greek, but the Egyptian equivalents of several of the Greco-Coptic words used in our gospel are more usual in Coptic texts. For instance, our author uses the Greek *artos* for “bread” instead of the Egyptian *oeik* (34.2); the former is otherwise attested only once in Coptic literary texts. The text’s frequent alternation between Greek and Egyptian for the same words is also typical of Coptic translations from Greek. The text retains some Greek grammatical forms, such as the vocative (e.g., *Iouda* at 45.14 and 56.12–13) and adjectival endings that follow Greek rather than Coptic norms (e.g., *tgenea n-aphthartos* at 49.5–6, 10–11, rather than *tgenea n-aphtharton* as at 49.14–15). Finally, the author appears to have used Greek texts of New Testament works rather than Coptic; for instance, the author drew *kataluma* from the Greek text of Mark 14:14//Luke 22:11 (58.11), while Sahidic translations use *ma n-qoeile*. These arguments vary individually in their probative value, but together they constitute a strong case for a Greek original, which Nagel (2007, 219) concludes is “without doubt.”

C. The Correspondence Between the Coptic Text and the Testimonia

It is most likely that the Coptic *Gospel of Judas* in Codex Tchacos is a translation of the work known to Irenaeus in 180, but it is also possible that the fourth-century text does not match precisely its second-century form. Irenaeus knew a work with the title in the Coptic manuscript, *The Gospel of*

Judas (Iudae Euangelium), not *The Gospel According to Judas*. This point should not be pressed too far: the four Coptic manuscripts of the *Secret Book According to John* preserve both kinds of titles: “of (n-) John” (BG, NHC III) and “according to (*kata-*) John” (NHC II, IV). Nonetheless, the title of the Coptic text does match that in Irenaeus (Nagel 2007, 221–22), whose testimony suggests that the title became associated with the work very early and possibly was in fact given by the author. It is not certain, then, that “none of the Gnostic tractates entitled ‘gospel’ initially had that designation” (Perkins 2009, 108).

Irenaeus reports three things about the contents of *Judas*. First, Judas knew “these things”: as we have seen, it is not clear which of the many things Irenaeus has just described Judas knew. Some of the mythological motifs and stories Irenaeus narrates in the preceding sections are found in the Coptic *Gospel of Judas*, but many more are not, including the teachings about Cain and the Sodomites that Irenaeus attributes to the “others” (i.e., other gnostics) just before he mentions *Judas*. In general, the Coptic *Judas* presents a succinct account of the gnostic myth and does not retell the Genesis narrative after the creation of Adam and Eve. Second, Irenaeus says that “he (Judas) alone was acquainted with the truth more than the others, and (so) accomplished the mystery of the betrayal.” The Coptic *Judas* emphasizes Judas’s knowledge of Jesus’s true identity and the ignorance of the other disciples; Jesus reveals the nature of god and the origin of this cosmos to Judas alone; and the gospel concludes with Judas’s agreement to hand Jesus over to Jewish leaders. Third, Irenaeus reports that “through him all things terrestrial and heavenly were dissolved.” In the Coptic work Jesus tells Judas that Judas will sacrifice the human being that the savior inhabits; Jesus then announces that “[. . .] of the aeon have been [defeated, and] the kings have become weak, and the races of the angels have groaned, and the evils that [they sowed . . .] the ruler being destroyed” (57.4–10). Even in its fragmentary state this passage sounds very much like what Irenaeus describes—the dissolution of the present world order, both earthly and heavenly. Brief as it is, every point in Irenaeus’s description of *The Gospel of Judas* that circulated before 180 matches the Coptic work; he does not say anything about the work that rules out our gospel (Nagel 2007, 222–25; *pace* Perkins 2009, 122–23).

Commentators have offered reasons to doubt the identification, however. Works with the same title or very similar titles did circulate in ancient

Christianity (Gathercole 2007, 122): for example, at least two works known as the *Revelation of Peter* survive, both possibly from the second century, and Nag Hammadi Codex V contains two revelations attributed to James, the first of which appears also in Codex Tchacos. It seems less likely, however, that multiple Christians would have chosen to name a work for Judas Iscariot than for disciples like Peter and James. Some scholars have raised doubts based on what Irenaeus does not say about the gospel: he does not mention the sharp polemic against the eleven disciples and, by implication, the Christians who cite them as authorities (Schenke Robinson 2008, 79), nor does he describe the specifically Sethian mythological features that the Coptic work includes (Turner 2008, 228–29). It is difficult to know, however, what in the “heretical” documents that were available to him Irenaeus considered worthy of explicit mention. Because the mythology of the Coptic *Judas* resembles what Irenaeus attributes to the gnostics in the sections that precede his reference to the text (*Haer.* 1.29–30), his failure to discuss such details is not surprising; possibly *Judas* even served as one of Irenaeus’s sources for those accounts. Moreover, throughout Book I of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus’s descriptions of rival groups concentrate on mythological narratives, doctrines about god, the use—or, in his view, misuse—of scripture, and ritual practices. He summarizes the theology of the *Secret Book* without mentioning its connection to the disciple John (although he may have known a source for Ap. John rather than Ap. John itself). Skepticism based on Irenaeus’s silence about certain features fails to persuade because the features that he does mention correspond to the Coptic work. It is possible too that even if Irenaeus had “collected” the work (1.31.2), he might have read the work in Rome and no longer had a copy with him in Gaul.

Nonetheless, it seems likely that the fourth-century Coptic text does not represent precisely the version that Irenaeus must have known in Greek, even if one accounts for the inevitable differences that translation introduces. Textual fluidity appears to have characterized the ancient transmission of Christian texts in general and of those that survive in early Coptic manuscripts in particular (Layton 1981, 95–96; Nagel 2007, 225–27). Works preserved in multiple copies in Nag Hammadi and other codices (e.g., Ap. John and Gos. Eg.) display variations that go beyond mere translation differences, so much so that they can be considered different editions in modern terminology. The Coptic translation of the *Gospel*

According to Thomas differs in significant ways from the Greek fragments of that work. These examples suggest that the Coptic text of *Judas* may also differ significantly from the Greek version that circulated in the second century. Indeed, some recent scholarship has suggested that works that survive in Coptic in manuscripts from the fourth and fifth centuries should be studied primarily or even exclusively in the context of Christian Egypt at the time of the manuscripts' production, rather than as witnesses to Greek originals from earlier and geographically different contexts (Lundhaug 2017).

On the other hand, there may be reason for greater confidence that in this case we can use the Coptic text that we have to study *The Gospel of Judas* as a work of the second century. The high degree of variation found in at least some of the Coptic texts may reflect characteristics of those works that *Judas* does not share. For example, the *Gospel of Thomas* consists entirely of free sayings, with little dialogue or narrative; such material was particularly susceptible to revision. The *Secret Book According to John* appears to have gained an authority and enduring relevance that inspired or even required revision, but which *The Gospel of Judas* was unlikely to share. Our work's disparagement of the original disciples, lack of philosophical sophistication, and promotion of Judas Iscariot may not have commended it for widespread use and ongoing revision, even among gnostics; indeed, these features likely would have been prime candidates for later emendation. In fact, the gospel survives in a codex with works that present as authorities and recipients of Jesus's revelation Peter, Philip, and James—three of the very disciples that *Judas* so sharply criticizes. Moreover, although one can point to at least one abrupt transition (44.13–15), the text does not display any clear redactional seams, nor does it show any incoherence in its ideas (Wurst 2006, 135). Indeed, some scholars have discerned a clear and unified structure even in the long dialogues (Introduction III.B). Finally, nothing in the gospel is implausible for a second-century date (Introduction II). It seems possible, then, that the Coptic *Judas* is closer to the hypothetical second-century Greek work than these other examples would suggest. At least any substantive revisions would be very difficult to identify. My commentary treats the Coptic text of *The Gospel of Judas* as a probably imperfect witness to the Greek work known to Irenaeus when he wrote around 180 CE.

II.

The Date and Sectarian Context

The Gospel of Judas is a polemical work that sharply criticizes other Christians in the guise of the disciples whom they claim as authorities. Therefore, it invites the interpreter to consider carefully the factional context of its composition. In what setting does its polemics make sense? Against what forms of Christianity is it directed? What kind of Christian belief and practice does it advocate? I consider it most probable that the gospel was composed during the middle of the second century (sometime between around 130 and 170) in the midst of debates among Christ believers over the relationships between Jesus and the god of Israel and between Christian ritual and the Jewish tradition. The author was a gnostic, that is, an adherent of the gnostic school of thought that Irenaeus criticized and that produced other early Christian works, like the *Secret Book According to John*, *Revelation of Adam*, and *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*. The place of composition is impossible to identify, but Rome is a strong candidate.

Although Irenaeus's reference to the work provides reason to date *Judas* to the second century, it provides only a *terminus ante quem* of around 180 and leaves unresolved the questions of how early the work might be and where it might have originated. One path to answering these questions is to consider the other early Christian literature that it resembles or with which it shares ideas and imagery. On the one hand, the mythological content and core teachings of *Judas* show close parallels with other so-called Sethian works and similar patristic testimonia: at least one Sethian work (Ap. John) can also be dated to the second century in some form thanks to the evidence of Irenaeus. The gospel's teachings resemble those of Saturninos of Antioch, whom Irenaeus places in the early second century (*Haer.* 1.24.1). I turn to that material briefly in what follows and at greater length in Introduction IV.A. On the other hand, the gospel engages with ideas and imagery that can be found in *1 Clement*, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, the reported teachings of Basilides, and the works of Justin Martyr. These resonances and the author's use of the canonical gospels suggest that the

gospel may not be earlier than the 130s, and Irenaeus's knowledge of it suggests that it was likely circulating by 170 (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 33).

The gospel criticizes Christians who celebrate a "eucharist" over bread, who claim that their leaders have the authority of the original disciples, and who present their worship as being like sacrificial cult in a temple, led by priests at an altar. For some scholars such imagery suggests a date in the third or fourth century, not the second (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 258; Markschies 2009, 109; Perkins 2009, 122–23; Frey 2015, 37), but examples can be found in works from the second, even late first century. The author of *1 Clement* refers to Christian leaders as priests, equivalent to those of ancient Israel, and calls the church's rituals "offerings" and "sacrifices" (*thusiai*); he claims that bishops and deacons received their authority in succession from the original apostles (1 Clem. 40–42, 44.1–3). According to Eusebius, the second-century Christian Hegesippus followed "some statements about the letter of Clement to the Corinthians" (i.e., *1 Clement*) by saying, "When I was in Rome I made a succession list up to Anicetus . . . In succession and in each city [Corinth and Rome] it was exactly as the law, the prophets, and the Lord preach" (*Hist. eccl.* 4.22.2–3; Schott 2019, 206–7). Ignatius of Antioch grounds the bishop's authority in part in his exclusive right to preside at the eucharist, which he describes as taking place "within the altar" (*thusiastērion*), and he compares the bishops and presbyters to god and the apostles (*Magn.* 6.1; *Phld.* 4, 7.2; *Eph.* 5.2; *Smyrn.* 8.1; *Trall.* 7.2). Justin Martyr refers to the offerings of the bread and cup of the eucharist as sacrifices (*Dial.* 41.3); Christians are the true priests, from whose hands god accepts sacrifices (*Dial.* 116.3). In the latter passage and elsewhere, Justin makes polemical usage of Mal 1:10, to which our gospel may also allude (40.20–22). None of this language necessarily implies that the eucharist replicates Christ's death as a sacrifice; rather, it may be referring in a general way to Christian worship, meals, prayers, or ethical life as the true and pure sacrifices that god desires. The same might be true of *Judas*. This question will receive closer examination (Introduction IV.C), but the significant elements of the understanding of Christian worship and its leaders that *Judas* criticizes appear in these works that date from the 90s to the middle of the second century.

Dubois (2008, 2012a) has shown that some material in the gospel parallels teachings that Irenaeus attributes to Basilides, the Christian philosopher who was active in Alexandria in the early 130s and before.

According to Irenaeus, Basilides taught that the lowest of six primal divine beings (which is named “power”) engendered numerous “authorities, rulers, and angels”; these multiplied and created a set of 365 heavens that form a transitional zone between the divine realm and this world (*Haer.* 1.24.3). According to *Judas*, the revelation of seventy-two luminaries led to the formation of seventy-two heavens, for which there are 360 firmaments, which likewise constitute a zone between the divine realm and this world and with which are associated “a [great] angelic army” (49.9–50.10). Basilides’s 365 heavens and our gospel’s 360 firmaments, along with their angels, reflect interest in the solar calendar and fill similarly intermediate positions in their cosmologies (Dubois 2012a, 128). Both Basilides and *Judas* teach, although in different ways, that the divine presence or entity in Jesus did not suffer and die on the cross; according to Basilides, the crucified one was someone else, a substitute, Simon of Cyrene (*Haer.* 1.24.4), but in *Judas* “the human being who bears” Jesus is tortured and sacrificed, but the divine Jesus is unharmed (56.6–8, 20–21). The relationship between Jesus and his human being is akin to that between a soul and a body or between divinity and materiality in general (COMMENTS 55.23–57.15). Irenaeus goes on to say in his account of Basilides:

Therefore people who know these things have been set free from the rulers that crafted the world. One should not acknowledge the man who was crucified, but rather the one who came in the form of a man, was thought to have been crucified, was named Jesus, and was sent by the parent so that by this providential arrangement of events he might destroy the works of the craftsman of the world. Thus, he (Basilides) says, anyone who confesses the man who was crucified is still a slave and is still under the authority of the beings that created bodies; while anyone who denies him both is freed from them and has acquaintance with the unengendered parent’s providential arrangement of events. (*Haer.* 1.24.4; trans. Layton 2021, 614–15)

Dubois (2012a, 123) finds a reference to Peter in “anyone who denies him” and suggests that *Judas* plays a similar role in our gospel. When our author has the Jewish scribes address *Judas*, “What are you doing here? You are Jesus’s disciple” (58.21–22), he alludes to the Fourth Gospel’s depiction of the denial by Peter, who is asked, “You are not also one of his disciples, are you?” (John 18:25). Irenaeus attributes an interest in astrology to the followers of Basilides (*Haer.* 1.24.7), while the stars play a significant role in *Judas*. Finally, according to Irenaeus, Basilides taught that the parent sent Jesus to destroy the cosmic order that the craftsman god established; likewise, the mission of Jesus culminates in the dissolution of the present

world order according to both the Coptic gospel (57.4–10) and Irenaeus's summary (*Haer.* 1.31.1). These similarities do not make the gospel "Basilidian," for its concept of god (among other significant teachings) does not match either what Irenaeus attributed to Basilides or what is found in his surviving fragments, but they do suggest that its cosmology and Christology are at home in the early to middle second century.

As a Christian work written in Greek in the second century, *Judas* could have originated almost anywhere in the Roman Mediterranean, for Greek was the language even of Christians in western areas of the empire well into the third century. The copying of a Coptic translation in Egypt does not require composition there. Nagel (2010) has proposed that a first version of the gospel, without the so-called Sethian mythological discourse, originated in Asia Minor because sources from that region, such as the fragments of Papias (esp. Fragment 18 in Holmes 2007, 754–57) and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (1.2, 6.1–2), develop the theme of Judas the betrayer from the canonical gospels; such a provenance might explain as well Irenaeus's knowledge of the work, because he was born and spent much of his life in Asia Minor before moving west. The similarities with Basilides, according to Nagel, suggest subsequent revision in Alexandria, where evidence indicates that Sethian mythology was also known in the second century. In response to Nagel's hypothesis, one might object that our gospel's depiction of the betrayer does not require any source other than one or more of the New Testament gospels; that the teachings of Basilides and the so-called Sethians were known in several regions, including Gaul, during the second century; and that nothing in the gospel requires a multistage compositional history.

A more promising approach to this question focuses on the gospel's polemical context. Where did second-century Christians claim that their leaders were successors of the apostles, that Christian worship was sacrificial, and that those who presided over it were similar to priests or were actual priests? The kinds of claims against which *Judas* polemicizes appear in *1 Clement* and Justin's works, which originated in Rome; in a fragment of Hegesippus, who spent time in Rome; and in the letters of Ignatius, who sent a letter to the Roman Christians, presumably arrived in Rome for his martyrdom, and could have brought copies of his other letters with him there. Composition in Rome would also explain Irenaeus's knowledge of the work, for Irenaeus spent significant time in Rome before

going to Lyons, and he maintained communication with the Christians there. Second- and early third-century works that certainly or probably originated in Alexandria, such as the writings of Clement of Alexandria or the *Epistle of Barnabas*, lack the distinctive themes against which the gospel polemicizes (although each has content that resembles or illumines our work in other ways, as the commentary shows). *Judas* does not exhibit many connections with the philosophical Judaism associated with Philo; such parallels have suggested an Alexandrian origin for the *Secret Book According to John*, for example (King 2006, 13–17). The polemic in our work is strikingly bitter and suggests a clear distinction and strong hostility between the author’s community and other Christ believers; second-century Christian literature associated with Rome (Hegesippus, Justin, Irenaeus, even Marcion; cf. Thomassen 2004, 252–53) features a persistent interest in differentiating “orthodoxy” from “heresy,” while the meager evidence from Alexandria suggests a more fluid and less polarized situation (Roberts 1979, 60, 71–72; Jakab 2001). Rome seems like a more probable context for our gospel’s author (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 133–34) but must remain hypothetical.

Most commentators identify the Christians against whom the gospel polemicizes as “catholic Christians” (e.g., F. Williams 2008; Pearson 2017, 114) or “apostolic Christianity” (e.g., DeConick 2009c; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 38–39). This terminology makes some sense because the post-Constantinian imperial Catholic Church recognized Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, and the “Clement” of *1 Clement* as orthodox representatives of itself, which it claimed to exist from the days of the apostles. Likewise, these sources themselves claim fidelity to and even official descent from the original apostles, as do, it seems, the Christians our gospel criticizes. On the other hand, such a category can obscure the diversity among these second-century “proto-orthodox” authors, suggest that they represent a single form of Christianity that extended throughout the Roman Empire of their day, and render historical a continuity between them and later imperial orthodoxy that was as much rhetorical and constructed as it was factual (Brakke 2010, 5–18). The use of the term “apostolic Christianity” for the text’s interlocutors obscures the fact that Christians like Basilides, Marcion, the gnostics (if not the author of *Judas*), and the Valentinians also claimed fidelity to and continuity with the original apostles. Our author in fact does not use the word “apostle” but consistently identifies the earliest followers

of Jesus as “his disciples”; a more appropriate term for his opponents might be “the disciples’ Christianity.” Efficiency of expression may require the use of problematic terminology when speaking of the gospel’s polemical targets, but the context for *Judas* was most likely local and particular. Although numerous second-century Christian works from diverse regions engage with the themes and issues that appear in our gospel, we should not universalize the dispute it represents into an empirewide conflict between “Gnosticism” and “(Proto-)Orthodox Christianity” or “Apostolic Christianity.”

As we have seen (Introduction I.A), Irenaeus attributes *The Gospel of Judas* to “others” among the gnostic school of thought. His account of gnostic teachings allows us also to attribute the *Secret Book According to John* to the gnostic sect. Connections between these two works support the hypothesis that the author of *Judas* was an adherent of the same movement as that of the *Secret Book*, and thus his work can be understood to be a “gnostic gospel.” Introduction IV.A and the relevant sections of the commentary describe and assess the significant similarities to and differences from not only the *Secret Book* but also other works that contain versions of the myth that Irenaeus attributes to the gnostics. Along with these extensive connections to other gnostic works, Irenaeus’s explicit attribution of *Judas* to the gnostics supports the identification of the author as an adherent of the gnostic school of thought. Together, the *Secret Book* and our gospel suggest that this movement developed in close interactions with competing Christian claims to revelation and authority, claims in which literary depictions of the original disciples of Jesus figured prominently. Both works are revelation dialogues, closely related to apocalyptic literature (Introduction III.A). Theologically they participate in the lively debate among second-century Christians over how to relate the new revelation of Jesus to the Septuagint, the Jewish Law and ritual, and the god of Genesis—a debate that the teachings of Paul and the Gospel of John inspired and that Christians ranging from Basilides to Marcion to Valentinus and Justin took up with vigor. The *Secret Book* and *Judas*, then, may be the only surviving pieces of Christian literature that are accurately called “gnostic gospels.” Both were composed by gnostic Christians and take a recognized gospel form, the dialogue. In contrast, the other literary works that appear to have originated in the gnostic school of thought are not gospels, and the other apocryphal gospels that are often so labeled (e.g.,

those according to Thomas and Mary) did not come from gnostics. (The *Secret Book* and *Judas* are the only works among the thirteen that Parkhouse [2019, 14] includes in the genre “dialogue gospel” that come from gnostics.)

Ascription of *The Gospel of Judas* to the gnostic movement carries with it interpretive risks. King (2008, 184) especially has protested against assigning the gospel to a category called “Gnosticism” because in so doing one places it “within the system of categorization devised to protect a particular notion of ‘Christianity,’” and the result is that “the gospel’s social-historical context, meaning, and the evaluation of its truth and moral value are (pre)determined.” The historian then construes *Judas* as “another example of ‘Gnostic’ error” and defends the “currently hegemonic” accounts of true Christianity. Interpretation of the gospel becomes “tautological with its categorization as Sethian Gnostic.” She justifiably cites Wright 2006 as an example of this way of thinking. Even scholars who have studied Gnosticism or Sethianism more closely and sympathetically have tended to read into *Judas* what they already know about gnostics and/or Sethians. As King remarks, this still relatively new gospel will tell us nothing at all about early Christianity if we simply plug it into traditional categories and allow them to determine its meaning.

Nonetheless, the gospel’s openly polemical and sectarian character calls for contextualization within the diverse movements of second-century Christianity, as much as we can reconstruct them. And the interpreter need not puzzle over enigmas in the work without making use of other Christian works that apparently share the author’s views. Approaching the gospel from this perspective, we can assess possible interpretations and profitably contextualize some of its teachings through comparison with other gnostic works. But we must not expect the gospel to conform to some preunderstanding of what a gnostic could or could not believe, nor should we anticipate that gnostics agreed about everything, nor should we place *Judas* within an already constructed gnostic myth and its system and history. If we identify the gospel as Sethian or gnostic, we should allow its evidence to revise what we mean by those categories (Brakke 2018). Rather than assessing this author’s work against a modern template of what “Sethianism” or “Gnosticism” was (or should be), we should attend to what one gnostic Christian presented as the truth of the Christian message and as

the ways in which many of his fellow Christians had failed to understand and follow that message.

III.

The Literary Background

Nearly all scholars agree that *The Gospel of Judas* is a “dialogue gospel” or “revelation dialogue” (e.g., Painchaud 2006, 555; Gathercole 2007, 62; Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 258; T. Petersen 2009; Scopello 2009, 589; Bermejo Rubio 2009a, 484; 2012, 35; Parkhouse 2019, 48–49), even if it is a peculiar example of the genre or even subverts it (Thomassen 2008; Devoti 2012, 93). The work may be characterized more precisely as what Judith Hartenstein (2012) calls an “appearance gospel,” a genre that presents a “second teaching” that supplements or corrects widely accepted gospels. The appearance gospel can include within it the literary format of *erotapokriseis* (“questions and answers”), and it may be understood as closely related to or a variation of the apocalypse. Because ancient people do not name and describe such a genre, it is an etic concept, one that modern scholars have developed for their own analytical purposes; it collects a set of works that share formal features and conventions that authors appear to have observed and that possibly readers would have recognized. A work’s divergence from these conventions may shed light on its unique aims. In comparison to other appearance gospels, *Judas* is distinctive for its emphasis on judgment rather than on salvation (which motivates certain literary features that differ from those of other dialogues) and for its placement of its conversations before Jesus’s crucifixion rather than after his resurrection. In fact, the gospel renders opaque exactly how the conversations that it reports relate chronologically to the narratives in the standard gospels; the dialogues seem to take place in an alternative time and space that exist within the world of the implied reader as much they do within the milieu of Jesus and his original disciples. The overall structure of the gospel is simple, consisting of a prologue, followed by four appearances of Jesus, and concluding with a brief final scene. Within this simple structure, however, the author has woven a complex set of recurrent themes.

A. Dialogue Gospels and Other Genres

Although scholars had discussed a genre called “gnostic dialogue” or “gnostic revelation dialogue” earlier, the topic gained increased attention in

the wake of the publication, beginning in the 1950s, of the Nag Hammadi codices, which include several works that contain little or no narrative and in which a revealer figure, most often the risen Jesus, engages in extended conversations with one or more disciples. (For comprehensive discussions of the scholarship, see Hartenstein 2000, 5–19; and Parkhouse 2019, 13–30.) In a seminal article Kurt Rudolph (1968) assigned to the category the *Secret Book According to John*, *First Revelation of James*, *Gospel of Mary*, *Revelation of Paul*, and *Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, all of which he dated to the second century, as well as the *Books of Jeu* and *Pistis Sophia*, which he placed in the third century. Unlike the philosophical dialogues of Plato or even Cicero, the gnostic dialogue, he argued, does not represent a shared search for truth; rather, it is a dialogically structured teaching lecture, in which the disciples ask questions that the revealer answers or make assertions that the revealer endorses or corrects. He found its roots in *erotapokriseis* and in Hermetic writings. Rudolph (1968, 111–12) noted the stereotypical character of the frame narratives, which situate the dialogues after the resurrection of Jesus. He sketched a technical vocabulary that consists of formulas like “said,” “added,” “answered and said,” and “laughed and said,” and he catalogued the titles by which the interlocutors address the revealer: Rabbi, Christ, Savior, Lord, etc. Although Rudolph recognized affinities with Jewish apocalyptic works, he stressed Hermetic writings as the closest analogues and suggested that the gnostic dialogue had its origin in “the Hellenized Orient,” especially Syria, and shared an ancestor with the Manichaean teaching lecture.

During the 1960s and 1970s some historians saw the dialogue gospel as uniquely suited to Gnosticism, which was characterized by salvation by knowledge; the exchange of questions from the initiates and answers from the savior was an ideal way to convey such a message. Just as gospels of the Mark type uniquely suited a kerygma of salvation through Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection, so too dialogue gospels suited a kerygma of salvation through the *gnōsis* brought by Jesus the revealer. Koester (1971, 198), for example, argued that “this gnostic genre of the gospel, of course, has no inherent criterion by which to bind the revelations contained in it to the earthly Jesus” and therefore “became the ideal vehicle for gnostic thought and Christology.” Likewise, in her landmark 1980 monograph, Pheme Perkins reserved the term “gospel” for narratives of Jesus’s ministry and passion: “The revelation dialogue seems to have been as characteristic of Christian Gnostics as the Gospel was of orthodox Christians” (26).

Nonetheless, Perkins (1980) considered a much wider range of works than had previous scholars, and she moved beyond an exclusively Christological focus. She suggested that the main function of the gnostic revelation dialogue is apologetic: it “locates the Gnostic over against the wider religious milieu—usually to show that gnosis is the higher wisdom revealed at the source of the tradition in question” (36). For example, authors use the narrative setting to situate their teachings within a religious tradition and to tie them to authoritative figures and already known writings; the diverse ways in which they do so demonstrate that these dialogues neither came from a single setting nor share a single view of religious authority (58). Although the dialogues include much discussion of cosmology and doctrine, their primary interest is soteriology, for they seek to offer the reader a path to salvation not readily or explicitly available in alternative traditions (73). Perkins productively considered the dialogue genre in terms of its function in relation to other literary works and traditions. She emphasized also the dialogue’s close relationship to Jewish apocalyptic literature, which Rudolph had played down in favor of other sources. Perkins’s insights provide a fruitful perspective from which to interpret *Judas*, which connects its teaching to already authoritative literature within a context of religious pluralism and competition. Despite her appreciation for the diversity of revelation dialogues, however, Perkins, like other scholars of that time, labeled all such works “gnostic.”

The exclusive association of the dialogue gospel or revelation dialogue with Gnosticism eroded during the 1980s and 1990s. It had always been undermined by the *Epistula Apostolorum*, a work that most scholars have assigned to the second century. That writing follows the conventions of the gnostic dialogue, but in support of a protoorthodox, even antignostic theology. It was viewed, then, as “an orthodox attempt to use the same weapons as the Gnostics” (Perkins 1980, 202; cf. Hornschuh 1965, 4–8). But had the dialogue genre become so widespread and so clearly associated with “heretics” that the *Epistula* must be understood in terms of proto-orthodox appropriation of a gnostic genre? Moreover, the works assigned to the dialogue genre vary considerably in both their contents and their theologies. While some certainly borrow and revise materials from other known writings, such as the canonical gospels, others seem to work with oral or lost written sources, and still others must have been simply composed by their authors. Scholarship turned more to how dialogue gospels fit into the transmission of Jesus sayings and the wider development of gospel literature

(Koester 1979, 1990). From this perspective, but eschewing its interest in recovering primitive Jesus traditions, Julian Hills in 1990 (citations are to the second edition of 2008) produced a thorough analysis of how the author of *Epistula Apostolorum* uses the dialogue format to create not only “a theological manifesto,” but “more importantly, an earnest exhortation to a particular way of seeing and living the Christian religious life” (172). He found that the *Epistula* cannot be placed on one side of a conflict between “orthodoxy” and “heresy,” for it includes vocabulary and concepts that would come to be seen as “unorthodox” (170). Works like Hills’s, along with the deconstruction of “Gnosticism” as a monolithic category (Layton 1995; M. Williams 1996; King 2003; Brakke 2010), paved the way for fresh reconsiderations of the dialogue gospels and their variety.

In her 2000 book *Die zweite Lehre* Judith Hartenstein examined how most dialogue gospels use frames that narrate the appearance of the risen Jesus. She distinguished between gospels with such frames (e.g., the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* and *Gospel of Mary*) and dialogues that lack them and so obscure the speaker’s identity as the risen Jesus in particular (e.g., *Dialogue of the Savior*) (255–59). By 2012 she began to use the term “appearance gospels” (*Erscheinungsevangelien*) for those dialogue gospels that have appearance narratives, and she found that *The Gospel of Judas* belongs among the works in this category even though it situates its dialogue before the crucifixion and atypically gives a prominent role to visions and their interpretation (2012, 38; cf. Hartenstein 2013). Long before the appearance of *Judas*, Fallon (1979, 125) had noted that few “gnostic apocalypses” contain visions and that none contains “allegorical visions.” The disciples’ dream in *Judas*, however, contains such an allegorical vision. Hans-Josef Klauck (2003 English translation of 2002 German edition) made a distinction between types of dialogue gospels similar to that of Hartenstein, but he used the term “dialogue” for both kinds, using simply “dialogue gospels” for Hartenstein’s “appearance gospels” and calling works like *Dialogue of the Savior* “nonlocalized” (*ortlos*) dialogues.

The basic structure of Hartenstein’s appearance gospel is fairly simple and promotes the gospel’s particular theology as a “second teaching,” as the title of her 2000 book suggests; in 2012 she summarized and updated her hypothesis and applied it to *Judas*. The opening narrative frame of the appearance gospel introduces the place and the gathered persons—one or more of the disciples—and it gives attention to their existential condition: they may be confused or feeling sad or oppressed. Then the revealer appears,

and his remarkable visual appearance is described, along with accompanying signs, such as bright light. The disciple or disciples react, and the identity of the revealer is clarified. Then the dialogue proper can begin. There is usually some connection between the narrative frame and the dialogue, most frequently a list of questions that the disciples have. The concluding narrative element is less well defined, but usually Jesus disappears; the disciples react to his departure; their original condition of perplexity or sadness is addressed; and finally one or more of the disciples goes off to preach (2012, 39–41). As Hartenstein considers *Judas* within this model, she identifies 33.1–21 as something of a prologue; the opening narrative element is 33.22–36.10; the dialogue proper runs from 36.11 (“When morning came, he appeared to his disciples”) to 57.20; and the concluding frame story begins at 57.20 (“And Judas looked up and saw the luminous cloud”) (42–43). Our gospel lacks the wondrous elements that usually accompany Jesus’s initial appearance, and in the opening narrative frame the disciples start out seemingly content; it is their interaction with Jesus at the bread-breaking that unsettles them (34.18–22). There is a short set of opening questions at 36.13–22.

Hartenstein profitably compares *Judas* with the *Apocryphon of James*, in which Peter resembles Judas in his ambiguity. The opening narrative of the *Apocryphon* shows the disciples composing gospels, which indicates that it polemicizes against existing gospels (but cf. Brakke 1999, 206–7), while the opening of our gospel shows the disciples celebrating a eucharist, which indicates that it polemicizes against that ritual. The way in which the narrative frame alludes to the canonical gospels sets up the “second teaching” of the dialogue. Appearance gospels vary in how much of a contrast they make between the first teaching of the generally known gospels and their second teaching. According to Hartenstein (2012, 52–54), the *Apocryphon of James* and *Judas* lie on the more contrastive, polemical end of the spectrum, with *Judas* taking the genre’s aggressive posture to an extreme (cf. A. K. Petersen 2012). Hartenstein’s work builds on Perkins’s interest in how dialogues position themselves with respect to earlier traditions in a context of religious diversity.

Two more recent contributions prove illuminating for the study of *Judas* as well. First, Thomassen (2021, 12–13) argues that dialogue gospels emerged in part to reframe earlier mythological material that had been presented in a treatise in a form that granted that material Christian legitimacy. He posits that the mythic narrative in Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.29 that

parallels the *Secret Book According to John* was drawn from a treatise that the author of the *Secret Book* used in composing the dialogue; he points to the revision of the treatise *Eugnōstos* (NHC III,3; NHC V,1) into the dialogue *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* (NHC III,1; BG 1; P. Oxy. 1081) as another example. Hartenstein (2000, 313–14) considers *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* the earliest appearance gospel. *Judas* may represent another instance of this phenomenon, for it seems likely that the author drew from earlier written sources known also to the authors of *Eugnōstos* and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (COMMENTS 48.21–49.24, 51.3–52.14). Thomassen’s hypothesis provides additional support for Perkins’s and Hartenstein’s views that the dialogue genre serves to legitimate a work and its teachings by presenting them as supplementary to existing widely accepted gospels.

Second, Parkhouse (2019) recognizes many of the distinctions and source-critical perspectives of previous scholarship but argues for a more capacious definition of dialogue gospel. Genre, she suggests, is a construction of scholars to facilitate their analytical interests (67); in her case, she seeks to foster a wider range of comparisons and connections among the dialogue gospels and early Christian literature in general. Parkhouse employs an “open” genre of dialogue gospel, which requires only that a work included in it “contain two things: (1) Jesus as revealer on the verge of departure, and (2) dialogue with one or more disciples” (37–38). This definition collects thirteen works, including *The Gospel of Judas*, the earliest of which is the Johannine Farewell Discourse (John 13:31–17:1) (14), which “stands at the beginning of the genre” (39). Dialogue gospels contain diverse theologies and “demonstrate a network of connections that are non-linear, non-bifurcated, non-homogenous, and non-hierarchical” (51), but they share the general themes of the savior and eschatology. That is, they “depict a similar relationship between Jesus and his disciples,” in which “Jesus is the revealer and Saviour, and the disciples desperately need him to reveal the truths of their salvation before he leaves them”; and “the revelations of Jesus in the dialogue gospels are generally concerned with the broad concepts of eschatology and soteriology” (60), whether individual or collective or cosmic. These two interests—the departing savior as revealer and eschatology—manifest themselves in a variety of shared themes that dialogue gospels draw from the canonical gospels (especially John) and from the Pauline and deutero-Pauline letters, such as the mission of and hierarchy among the disciples, the nature of Jesus’s resurrected body (and thus of the

bodies of the saved), the fate of the cosmos, and the reservation of advanced teachings (“mysteries”) for mature believers (69–125). Parkhouse rightly encourages the exegete of *Judas* (or any other dialogue gospel) not to restrict the horizon of interpretation to “gnostic” works or even to other dialogues, but to explore intertextual connections with a wide range of early Christian writings in order both to place the work within the pluralistic context of early Christ believers and to discern the author’s distinctive teaching within that context. The present commentary attempts to work in the expansive spirit that Parkhouse’s more open genre of dialogue gospel fosters.

Nonetheless, Hartenstein’s concept of “appearance gospel” highlights our work’s supplementary and often critical approach to the shared narrative of the canonical gospels. Its placement of the dialogue within that narrative (rather than after the resurrection) and yet outside it at the same time creates an even more explicitly supplementary character than in many other dialogue gospels. In contrast to Hartenstein’s analysis, however, I suggest that the opening narrative frame or prologue extends only to 33.21 and that the dialogue section begins at 33.22–24 (“One day he came to his disciples”). The opening narrative consists of a seemingly neutral summary of Jesus’s ministry as found in the New Testament gospels: Jesus performed signs and wonders, sought to save people, called twelve disciples, and gave them teaching with theological and eschatological content. The closing sentence of the prologue—“But many a time he would not reveal himself to his disciples; instead, you would find him in the midst of the children” (33.18–21)—departs from the narrative world of the canonical gospels and marks a transition to a different manner of Jesus’s presence with (and absence from) the disciples. It may perform the function of describing *how* the conversational Jesus appears—sometimes to the disciples, often to the children—that Hartenstein (2012, 44–45) sees as missing from *Judas*.

The gospel then narrates a series of four appearances of Jesus. The beginning and end of each appearance are usually marked by statements about Jesus coming or appearing and then about him departing, but not always. The first appearance starts immediately after the prologue with the announcement, “One day he came to his disciples in Judea” (33.22–24), and concludes with, “But when he (Jesus) had said this, Jesus left him (Judas)” (36.9–10). The second appearance immediately follows, beginning with, “When morning came, he appeared to his disciples” (36.11–13). The conclusion of this appearance does not include a statement of Jesus’s departure but describes the disciples as confused and at a loss for words

(37.17–20). Yet the beginning of a third appearance is marked with, “Jesus came to them on another day” (37.20–21). This appearance eventually shifts from including the disciples to including Judas alone—“And when Jesus had said these things, he left and [took] Judas Iscariot with him” (42.22–24)—but, after an exchange between the two, it decisively concludes: “After Jesus said these things, he departed” (44.13–14).

The fourth and final appearance does not begin with an announcement of Jesus’s arrival or appearance and is more complicated than the first three. It begins abruptly with Judas reporting that he has seen “a great vision” that he wants Jesus to hear (44.15–18). This awkward transition between dialogues resembles John 14:31–15:1 (Sandul 2011, 62). From here there is a dialogue that appears to take place between Jesus and Judas alone; the absence of the disciples may explain the lack of a statement about Jesus “coming” or “appearing,” language that the gospel may reserve for Jesus’s conversations with the disciples. The discourse with Judas consists mostly of a mythic narrative that includes a description of the immortal realm, the origin of this world and its rulers, the creation of humanity, and the fate of human beings and the end of this realm. This final appearance concludes with Jesus entering a luminous cloud: “And Judas looked up and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it. Those standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud, saying, [‘. . . the] great race [. . .’] And Judas no longer saw Jesus” (57.22–58.7). These sentences indicate a definitive end to the series of appearances and dialogues that began after the prologue: Jesus has entered a luminous cloud, and Judas no longer sees him. People are standing nearby, and a voice comes from the cloud: doubtless the reader is to be reminded of the transfiguration scene in the New Testament gospels (Matt 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36). We return to the more familiar, so to speak, matter-of-fact tone of the prologue, now with Jesus in the guest room and Judas betraying him; that is, we are back in the narrative world of the canonical gospels and have left the more dreamlike world of the four appearances.

The dialogues in *Judas* take place in an indeterminate time and space (which somehow includes Judea) distinct from the narrative world that the New Testament gospels create. In this alternative world, Jesus comes and goes at will, with only vague references to time (“one day,” “morning,” “another day”). Here the disciples celebrate the eucharist (33.26–34.6), even though Jesus has not yet observed the Last Supper (Brankaer 2013, 582)—or, rather, chronological correspondence with (before/after) events in the known gospels does not apply. Likewise, in this time and space, the disciples

have a dream that shows them acting as priests, making sacrifices, and leading many people, a dream whose imagery resonates with Christian language for church leaders and worship in writings from the late first century and first three-quarters of the second century (Introduction II). Although this time and space seem to be situated after the resurrection, even during the period of the nascent church, in fact we seem to be in a time and space simply apart from the narrated time of the gospels. Most commentators are not certain what to make of the time sequence reported in what appears to be the incipit: “The secret report of judgment, in which Jesus spoke with Judas Iscariot during eight days prior to the three days, before he celebrated Passover” (33.1–6). Despite their seeming precision, these words leave obscure the relationship between the timing of this “secret report” and the canonical gospels’ chronologies of the Passover and the passion narrative (COMMENTS 33.1–6). Indeed, Jesus’s statement to Judas that “*tomorrow* the one who bears me will be tortured” (56.6–8) appears to contradict the most obvious understanding of the opening statement. There is no certain logical relationship between the suspended time of the dialogues and the past time of Jesus’s ministry in the gospels. The dialogues take place in a timeless present, exemplified by the use of the “tenseless” aorist in the sentence that introduces them (Layton 2011, §337): “But many a time he would not reveal/is not revealing/does not reveal himself (*maf-ouonh-f*) to his disciples; instead, you would find/are finding/find him (*šak-he ero-f*) in the midst of the children.”

In this respect the dialogues in *Judas* resemble Klauck’s “nonlocalized” dialogues, the type against which Hartenstein defines the appearance gospel (Dressler 2012, 66). As examples of nonlocalized dialogues Klauck (2003, 176) cites *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III, 5; “Dial”) and the *Book of Thomas: The Contender Writing to the Perfect* (NHC II,7; “LibThom”). Not only are these dialogues nonlocalized, they also seem nontemporal:

[T]here are no framework passages, a constitutive element of the genre “dialogue gospel,” and it is a matter of conjecture whether these works intend to relate conversations with the *risen* Jesus. At most, the mention of the ascension in LibThom points in this direction; in Dial, on the other hand, a number of elements suggest rather that the conversations take place during the life of the earthly Jesus. It is, however, also possible that Dial ultimately aims at the kind of supra-temporal quality which is typical of EvThom [*Gospel of Thomas*].

Dressler (2012, 69) ultimately rejects the identification of *Judas* as nonlocalized because of both the mention of Judea (33.22) and the elaborate time scheme in the incipit, which she admits is “singūlar.” Nonetheless, the

dialogue portion of the gospel conforms to the nonlocalized, supratemporal quality that Klauck sees in *Dialogue of the Savior*. The overall structure may be that of an appearance gospel in Hartenstein's vocabulary (a dialogue gospel in Klauck's), but the contrast it creates between the widely shared teaching of Jesus and its "second teaching" results in a nonlocalized dialogue that suggests contemporaneity with the implied reader in the second century.

Between the incipit and prologue that open the work (33.1–21) and the handing over scene that concludes it (58.6–26), the gospel exhibits many of the features that Hills (2008, 15–28) has characterized as "the rhetoric of dialogue" in his study of *Epistula Apostolorum*, a work of the same time period as *Judas* (cf. Rudolph 1968, 111–12). In general, characters' statements are repeatedly introduced by the simple formula "he said" (*peča-f*) or "they said" (*peča-u*), with or without the name of the speaker(s) (Judas, Jesus, or the disciples) and regardless of whether the speaker makes a statement or asks a question. In the case of the revealer Jesus, five times we find the variation "he answered (*af-ouōšf/af-ouōšb*) and said" (34.6–7; 45.12–13; 46.7–8, 18–19; 55.16–17). Three times "Jesus said" occurs not in response to something Judas or the disciples have said, but as a continuation of Jesus's own speech (39.18, 41.1, 47.1–2). As in other dialogue gospels, the disciples and Judas normally address Jesus as "Teacher" (*sah*) (34.4, 11; 36.13; 37.22; 42.4; 44.15; 45.11; 46.5; 55.15) and only once as "Lord" or "Master" (*čois*) (36.19). Characteristic of the genre as well are Jesus's announcements that he will tell or teach his interlocutor something (35.23–26, 46.8–9, 47.2–3) and that he has done so (45.24–46.2, 57.16), all of which Jesus addresses to Judas alone.

Apart from short descriptions of Jesus's initial arrival and definitive departure (33.22–34.2, 57.22–58.6), narrative asides are limited almost entirely to Jesus's intermediate arrivals and departures (36.9–13, 37.20–21, 42.22–24, 44.13–14) and to descriptions of how Jesus, the disciples, or Judas reacts to what someone else has said or thought (34.18–23, 35.21–23, 36.22–23, 37.17–20, 44.18–19, 46.14–15). The former passages usually include some variation on the pattern "when Jesus had said these things," and the latter, "when his disciples/Judas/Jesus heard these things." The single passage of lengthier narrative (35.7–14) briefly describes and contrasts the reactions of the disciples and of Judas to Jesus's challenge to "bring forward the perfect human being and also stand before my face" (35.2–5), as preparation for Judas's confession of Jesus as having come from the Barbēlō

aeon (35.14–21). By means of this exceptional, if still brief, bit of narration, the author places special emphasis on Judas’s identification of Jesus.

As another emphasizing strategy, the author introduces some of Jesus’s statements with the formula “Truly I say to you,” familiar from the New Testament gospels (Hills 2008, 24–27). Six instances use a single *hamēn* in the pattern of the Synoptic Gospels (34.15–16, 37.1, 39.7–8, 42.17–18, 44.8–9, 56.8–9). In four cases, we find the Greek *alēthōs* instead (54.16–17, 55.26–27, 56.12–13, 57.1), which occurs in the formula only in Luke in the New Testament (9:27, 12:44, 21:3). All four of these instances are found in the mythological discourse, possibly lending support to the hypothesis that it was originally composed separately; on the other hand, an instance of *hamēn* appears in the discourse as well (56.8–9). The last three instances of *alēthōs* (all with singular “you”) come in Jesus’s response to Judas’s final question, where they divide that response into three units that make three contrasts (COMMENTS 55.23–57.15). In one case *auō on* (“and even more,” “and also,” “and moreover”) precedes “I say to you” (39.11–12) as a way of extending an immediately preceding *hamēn* statement (39.7–11). This pattern is found only in Matthew in the New Testament (18:18–19, 19:23–24) (Gathercole 2012, 298). The formulaic nature of the expression may account for the three instances in which the plural “you” occurs in the phrase “to you” (*nē-tn*) when Jesus is speaking to Judas alone (44.8–9, 54.16–17, 56.8–9). According to Hills (2008, 26), the author of *Epistula Apostolorum* uses this literary device to preface “a saying traditional in form and content.” In *Judas* the formula introduces statements of warning or (eschatological) judgment. Four times Jesus warns that “no race from the people among you (the disciples),” or “no offspring of this aeon (and others),” or “[no ruler] or angel [or] power,” or “no hand of a mortal human being” will gain acquaintance or accomplish what they seek to do (34.16–18, 37.2–8, 44.9–13, 56.9–11). Other instances of the formula introduce a pronouncement of judgment against figures in the disciples’ dream (39.8–17), an announcement of the coming end of the present world (54.17–18), and a prophecy of eschatological destruction (42.18–22, 56.13–14). In two cases the content of Jesus’s statement is lost in a lacuna (56.1–4, 57.1–4). The statements that are highlighted with the *hamēn* formula exemplify the gospel’s character as a “secret report of judgment” (33.1–2).

That character finds confirmation also in the specific features of how the revealer Jesus addresses his interlocutors. Hills (2008, 22–24) found that in *Epistula Apostolorum* Jesus (1) “rebukes the disciples for their failure to

understand”; (2) “*invites* the questions of the disciples”; (3) expresses “*approval* of the recipients of revelation”; and (4) offers “occasional *general exhortation*” not directly relevant to the topic at hand (emphasis original). The rhetoric of our gospel’s Jesus exhibits only the first of these forms clearly: Jesus rebukes either the disciples or Judas at least six times (34.14–15, 24–25; 36.24–26; 39.6–7; 42.6–7; 44.20–21). Jesus’s statement that he will “put up with” Judas if Judas relates his vision (44.22–23) might be interpreted as an invitation to speak, but only a very grudging one at best. Likewise, Jesus may express approval of Judas as a recipient of revelation at the conclusion of the dialogues (56.22–25, 57.20–21); otherwise, Jesus does not commend his listeners for their faith or understanding, nor does he offer them general exhortations to faith or moral living. In turn, unlike the recipients of revelation in other dialogue gospels (Hills 2008, 27–28), neither Judas nor the disciples offer deferential apologies or explanations for their questions, nor do they express approval of Jesus’s revelation. One suspects that if anyone is meant to approve and accept what Jesus teaches, it is the reader.

The work, then, conforms to the genre of the dialogue gospel, and specifically of Hartenstein’s appearance gospel, but it lacks some features of other examples of the genre. The absence of these features suggests that none of Jesus’s interlocutors in the dialogues models a fully appropriate recipient of revelation (Thomassen 2008). Rather, the disciples receive a revelation of judgment, and Judas receives facts about his specific role in the cosmic drama that Jesus narrates. The reader should receive personally relevant information about salvation from these disclosures. This last point becomes clear in the last section of the dialogues, which takes the form of *erotapokriseis*, that is, questions and answers. While in the preceding dialogues Judas and the disciples had interspersed statements among their questions, in this section Judas asks six questions of Jesus (46.5–7; 53.8–10, 16–17; 54.13–15; 55.15–16, 23–25)—or seven, if one counts 46.14–18, which appears to be something of a follow-up question to the first one on whether Judas’s seed dominates the rulers (or vice versa). It is this first question about Judas’s seed and the rulers that prompts Jesus’s lengthy explanation of the rulers’ origin and their dominance over humanity. One might compare the revelation dialogue in Nat. Rulers 93.2–97.1, which is structured by four questions of Nōrea to Ēlēlēth (Layton 1974, 392–93). As in *Judas*, it is a question about the rulers (“Who created them and their power?”) (94.1) that prompts a lengthy narrative of the rulers’ origin. Judas’s

remaining five questions come toward the end of the discourse; they address problems of anthropology and the fates of human beings and receive shorter answers. Likewise, in *Reality of the Rulers* Nōrea's final two questions concern anthropology and future salvation (96.17–19, 31–32) and receive briefer responses. Similarly, in the *Secret Book* the disciple John interrupts the savior's long mythological discourse about the entirety, the origin of the rulers, and the creation of humanity with questions only three times (NHC II 13.17–18; 22.9–11, 21–22), but then a more rapid series of seven questions and shorter answers concerns anthropology and the fates of human beings (NHC II 25.16–27.33). The dialogue gospel and the more unambiguously didactic literary format of *erotapokriseis* should not be identified; as Kaler (2013) rightly argues, the narrative frames of dialogue gospels perform diverse functions that differentiate them from question-and-answer literature, strictly speaking. Nonetheless, the authors of *Judas*, the *Secret Book*, and *Reality of the Rulers* employ *erotapokriseis* toward the ends of their dialogues to inform readers about the implications of the mythological discourse for human salvation in general and diverse human destinies in particular. In these sections their goal, like that of the question-and-answer genre, “is to provide apologetic and/or explanatory discussions of an authoritative work or system” (Kaler 2013, 44), that is, of the authoritative myth that they have narrated. In these works the literary format of *erotapokriseis* functions as the equivalent of the modern “Frequently Asked Questions.”

Although scholars agree that *Judas* is a dialogue, the term “gospel” is more controversial. Perkins (2009, 117–18) accepts as accurate many aspects of Hartenstein's “appearance gospel,” but she rejects the use of “gospel” as retaining “genre ambiguity.” The dialogues, Perkins claims, do not “paraphrase and expand on familiar narratives about Jesus”; instead, they frequently contain philosophical, mythological, and liturgical material “with no ties to Jesus tradition.” In general, Perkins argues, “Gnostic texts routinely reject narrative and the illusions of the sensory world.” Thus, “‘gospel’ is an inappropriate designation for the set,” and something like “revelation dialogue” is more suitable. In this respect Perkins continues to adhere to the affinity between Gnosticism and the dialogue that she and Koester had articulated earlier. In response, one might note the presence of long sections of narrative in works like the *Secret Book* and *Judas*, even if what they narrate are the unfolding of the ultimate divine principle or the primordial events of Genesis. Our gospel does in fact paraphrase and revise

familiar narratives about Jesus, and not only in the frame narrative (COMMENTS 33.22–36.10). Moreover, these works’ strategy of positioning themselves as supplementary to the works conventionally designated “gospels” justifies understanding them as a particular variation on the genre of gospel. Although it is true that a work’s title does not describe its genre (Perkins 2009, 106), the designation of our work as a “gospel” is attested as early as it is for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that is, by Irenaeus, around 180 CE.

On the other hand, it is arguable that our work should be classified simply as an apocalypse, for the dialogue gospel as an independent genre has been called into question, most recently and effectively by Dylan Burns (2020). He offers as an example of a (Sethian) gnostic apocalypse the *Secret Book According to John*, which Hartenstein categorizes as an appearance gospel. As his analysis shows, the *Secret Book* matches—as does *Judas*—John Collins’s (1979, 9) now classic definition of the apocalypse as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world.” Moreover, *Judas* shares themes and motifs with, for example, Enochic literature, including an interest in angels, guiding stars, and visions of temples. At times Jesus functions like an interpreting angel in an apocalypse (Scopello 2008b, 2010). Burns (2020, 68) concludes, “Formally speaking, there is then no difference between the ‘Gnostic dialogue’ and an ‘apocalypse without heavenly journey,’ since the risen Christ constitutes a very otherworldly being transmitting heavenly knowledge.” On the other hand, the *Secret Book*, *Judas*, and other appearance gospels share certain key features—above all, placement of the dialogue in relation to the world of the canonical gospels by means of the frame narrative—so that they may best be thought of as a particular subset of gospels and, in some cases, of apocalypses. It is the dynamic of “second teaching” (supplementation of or contrast to existing gospels) that Hartenstein’s genre of appearance gospel captures so well for understanding our work. As Burns (2020, 69) notes, these genres are “modern scholarly constructions” that should facilitate comparison and the recognition of distinct features. Placing *Judas* among other dialogue or appearance gospels allows us to make formal connections with similar works that are not normally classified as apocalypses, such as the *Apocryphon of James* and

Epistula Apostolorum. The content of the work’s teaching, rather than the dialogue form in which it comes, is what makes *The Gospel of Judas* gnostic (cf. Burns 2020, 68).

B. Structure

Even if most commentators have identified *The Gospel of Judas* as a dialogue gospel, they have reached no consensus on its structure. The simplest option, which has been sketched already above, follows from Hartenstein’s identification of the work as an appearance gospel and considers the transition from the opening narrative frame to be marked by the sentence, “But many a time he would not reveal himself to his disciples; instead, you would find him in the midst of the children” (33.18–21). The core of the gospel, then, is a series of appearances, instances in which Jesus reveals himself to his disciples, marked by his arrivals and departures:

Incipit	33.1–6
Prologue: The Earthly Ministry of Jesus	33.6–21
First Appearance	33.22–36.10
Second Appearance	36.11–37.20
Third Appearance	37.20–44.14
Fourth Appearance	44.15–58.6
Epilogue: Judas Hands Jesus Over	58.6–26

The weak points of this scheme include the abrupt transition between the third and fourth appearances (44.14–15), in which Jesus’s arrival is not narrated, and the considerably greater length and complexity of the dialogue in the fourth appearance, which transitions to *erotapokriseis* at 46.5.

In a manner similar to this approach, Painchaud (2006, 556) originally suggested a structure determined by changes in Jesus’s interlocutors:

Title	33.1–6
Narrative preamble	33.6–22
First dialogue of Jesus with his disciples	33.22–35.14
First dialogue of Jesus with Judas	35.14–36.11
Second dialogue of Jesus with his disciples	36.11–37.20
Third dialogue of Jesus with his disciples	37.20–43.11
Second dialogue of Jesus with Judas	43.11–47.1
Protogonic revelation of Jesus to Judas	47.1–53.7
Resumption of the dialogue between Jesus and Judas, and Judas’s ultimate fate	53.8–57.26(?)

Narrative epilogue

58.1(?)–26

Final title

58.27–28

The 2010 fragments would slightly correct the last portion of this outline: Devoti (2012, 87–88) accepted this structure and could remove the question mark after 57.26; he also added the three references to days or morning (33.23–24, 36.11, 37.21) as markers of the beginnings of the first, second, and third dialogues with the disciples. These divisions by interlocutor(s) could be introduced as subsections to the four appearances, although it would be preferable to mark the transition to *erotapokriseis* as well.

At least two proposals attempt to find some correspondence between the “eight days” mentioned in the incipit (33.4) and the structure of the dialogues (cf. Kasser 2006, 1574–75). For example, Nagel (2007, 228–32) discerns thirteen sense units in the complete gospel, the tenth of which he calls “the great instruction of Judas” (47.1–55.22); he suggests that the eight days of secret teachings that the incipit mentions correspond to eight units within that “great instruction.” It is not clear, however, why the “great instruction” should end at 55.22, for the content of the following pages (56 and 57) continues the eschatological themes of 54.15–55.22. And, in fact, Nagel (2014, 292–304) later extends the great instruction to 58.6, resulting in more than eight units within it. Schenke Robinson (2008, 74; 2009b, 77–92) suggests that the entire dialogue section is divided into eight days, but her scheme depends on imagining or reconstructing references to new days in lacunae, which leaves it vulnerable to new discoveries. For example, her 2009 reconstructed transition from the sixth day to the seventh day at 53.4–5 (2009b, 85) was ruled out by one of the fragments that appeared later. The divisions among her proposed sixth, seventh, and eighth days break up the logically continuous *erotapokriseis* between Jesus and Judas (47.1–58.6). The numbers of days in the incipit, whether three or eight, do not appear to function as signposts to whatever structure the dialogues might have.

Frank Williams (2008, 372–76) argues that the gospel’s polemic against other Christians determines its structure. Because Jesus appears multiple times, all before his resurrection, and because the distinction between the narrative frame and the dialogues is “blurred,” Williams rejects the identification of *Judas* as a dialogue gospel and instead assigns it to “the genre of religious polemic,” in which he includes also the *Testimony of Truth*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, and *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* from Nag Hammadi (cf. Koschorke 1978). In his view, then, the introductory summary

of Jesus's ministry is followed by four sections, each of which is meant to replace or substitute for an event in the canonical gospels: the meal in Judea replaces the Last Supper (33.22–36.9); Jesus's subsequent withdrawals from and rebukes of the disciples substitute for the events in the Garden of Gethsemane (36.9–37.26); the disciples' dream about a temple and the scenes that follow from it replace Jesus's visits to the temple in the last week (38.1–44.14); and finally, the "Sethian salvation history presented as an apocalypse" substitutes for the Synoptic apocalypse (44.15–57.15). Then the gospel concludes (374–75). On the one hand, the gospel's polemical stance against rival Christians is undeniable, and this proposal highlights some intriguing resonances with the canonical gospels; for example, as Williams suggests, "fruitless trees" (39.16–17) may allude to the barren fig tree of Matt 21:18–19//Mark 11:12–14. Nonetheless, especially Williams's division between 37.26 and 38.1 seems forced, for at 37.22–24 the disciples announce the dream that they begin to narrate at 38.1. In distinction to the gospel's harsh polemic against rival Christians, its engagement with and polemic against the canonical gospels is more subtle and less rigid than this scheme suggests.

Bas van Os (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 13–16) finds the identification of the work's genre as "a redeemer dialogue" inadequate and instead discerns a structure of "three layers" between the incipit and the title. The outer layer consists of "the gospel framework" (33.6–22, 58.6–26). The middle layer, so to speak, consists of a "polemical drama" or "tragedy" in three acts, marked by the disciples' thanksgiving over the bread, their dream, and Judas's vision; van Os uses Aristotle's understanding of plot and character in tragedy as the key to understanding how this polemical drama and its three acts unfold and how the characters develop (21–41). The innermost layer is "the Sethian teaching," which van Os considers abbreviated in a way that assumes familiarity with Sethian concepts (49). My earlier analysis of the dialogical rhetoric suggests that van Os is correct that *Judas* differs from other dialogue gospels in ways that suggest its character as a discourse of judgment, but I argue also that it conforms to the genre by limiting narrative in the dialogues almost entirely to reactions to what other characters say or do, which provide a thin basis for discerning any kind of plot. The disciples, van Os argues, "start out as foolish and weak, and will end up as wicked" (31), but this development, if we can call it that, reflects Jesus's gradual revelation of information about them during his conversations with them; it does not reflect any shift in character due to plot elements. What changes is

what the disciples learn about themselves (and thus what the reader learns about them), not the character of the disciples. In their final certain appearance, the disciples appropriately respond to what they learn by asking to be cleansed of their sins and to receive help from Jesus, requests that Jesus appears to turn aside (41.9–42.22). To be sure, dialogues and eschatological revelations do not lack elements that we might call dramatic, such as suspense as to what will happen in the future and surprise over new revelations, but, with the exception of the narrative frame, nothing really happens in this gospel. Scenes are set (e.g., the disciples giving thanks or reporting a dream), dialogues follow, and then Jesus departs. After the third appearance the repentant disciples just disappear from the scene; if they are among “those standing on the ground” after Jesus enters the luminous cloud, the author does not say so (57.24–25), and even their presence in the guest room receives no mention.

More promising is the identification of *inclusios* (textual units with clear openings and closings usually marked by repeated verbal elements) and other rhetorical features that might indicate a compositional plan for the dialogues; two proposals along these lines reach precisely opposite conclusions about whether the gospel has a redactional history and thus whether the mythological discourse is a secondary addition to the work. Turner (2009, 124–29) identifies two *inclusios*. The first begins with Jesus saying to Judas, “Separate from them, and I will tell you the mysteries of the kingdom” (35.23–25) and concludes at 46.4 after Jesus says, “I have taught you (Judas) [about the] error of the stars” (46.1–2); and yet it resumes at 54.13, when Jesus asks about “those races” and then definitively concludes somewhere on page 56. The second *inclusio* begins at 47.1–3, when Jesus says to Judas, “[Come,] and I will teach you about the [. . .],” and ends with Jesus’s statement about acquaintance being given to “Adam and those with him” so that they might not be ruled by the lower powers (54.8–12). In Turner’s view the second *inclusio*, which includes “the Sethian theogony, cosmogony and anthropogony,” was secondarily inserted within the original first *inclusio* in order to explain the existence of the different races discussed in the first *inclusio*. Turner’s two *inclusios* have clear literary signs that a rhetorical unit has begun (“I will tell you,” “I will teach you”) but weak indications that the unit has concluded; for example, the conclusions do not repeat words or phrases from the openings. Therefore, it does not seem that Turner has identified *inclusios*, strictly speaking; rather, he has noticed that large units that contrast a saved “race” (*genea*) with other races run from

36.7 to 47.1 and then again from 54.13 to 55.13 and perhaps farther. In his view, the material between 47.1 and 54.13 interrupts these discussions of races with different content. And yet, as Turner admits, that different material explains the origin of the contrasted races (127), and in fact the term “race” (*genea*) appears regularly throughout the allegedly inserted Sethian discourse. What is more, the series of questions that Judas asks at 53.8–10, 53.17, and 54.14–15 form a logical progression, even as they transgress the division between Turner’s two hypothetical inclusios, which were allegedly originally independent.

Although, as we have seen, Painchaud (2006, 556) originally proposed a simple structure based on shifts in Jesus’s interlocutors, he later proposed a *dispositio* (rhetorical arrangement) based on repetitions of words and expressions more persuasive than what Turner suggested (Painchaud 2013 in English, 2017 in French). Unlike Turner, Painchaud depends on close or precise verbal repetitions. For example, he identifies inclusios marked by the repetition of the phrases “tell the mysteries of the kingdom” (35.24–25, 45.25–26) and “I am not laughing at you” (34.7–8, 55.17–18). A less persuasive inclusio is marked by repetition between “What more (*ou pe pehouo*) have I received because you have separated me from that race?” (46.16–18) and “What is the maximum (*aš pe pehouo*) that a human being will live?” (53.8–10). It is unlikely that *houo* translates the same Greek word in these two questions; the former may be *polus* or *pleiōn*, the latter probably *pleistos*, as the different specifiers that open the questions (*ou* and *aš*) suggest (Note on 53.8–10, *What is the maximum . . .*). In any event, the result is a complex structure of overlapping inclusios with a concentric pattern, in which 46.5–13 forms the center or “hinge” between two roughly equal parts that mirror one another (2013, 283). The central section highlights the fate of Judas and his “seed,” and the gospel’s bipartite composition creates a tension that reflects its dualism and deployment of binary oppositions. This structure serves the work’s goal of dissuading readers from participating in the cult that other Christians offer to the creator god Saklas. Moreover, Painchaud argues that the necessity of each part to the scheme suggests that the Sethian discourse was not a secondary addition and that the extant text has been tightly composed and most likely represents its original form.

The precision and intricacy of Painchaud’s *dispositio* are its strength and weakness. On the one hand, as I noted, some of the proposed repetitions are less convincing than others. According to the proposal, the passages that

correspond to one another in the bipartite scheme should echo or illumine one another. For example, the disciples' dream (and its interpretations) (37.22–44.14) corresponds to the emergence of Nebrō, Saklas, and their rulers and angels and the creation of Adam and Eve (50.22–53.7); but, as Painchaud (2013, 282) admits, these two passages “do not immediately reveal comparable echoes,” even if the reader learns that the god of this world, presumably worshiped by the disciples in their dream, is Saklas. On the other hand, Painchaud's analysis reveals that the vocabulary, content, and style of the gospel are remarkably consistent, with distinctive vocabulary, themes, and rhetorical elements that recur throughout the work. It is certainly possible that the author used preexisting materials, such as a treatise concerning theogony and cosmogony known also to the author of the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (COMMENTS 51.3–52.14), but he has thoroughly integrated such traditions into his work and has presented them in his own style. Composition in two phases, separated by decades and accomplished by different authors, appears unlikely after Painchaud's analysis.

Although these alternative proposals shed light on various aspects of the gospel, the present commentary works with the simple structure of narrative frame and four appearances outlined above, further divided by shifts in interlocutors within the appearances, by changes in topic, and by Judas's questions in the *erotapokriseis*. This approach follows the explicit markers of transition by which the author guides the reader through his “secret report of judgment.”

IV.

Major Themes in the Interpretation of *The Gospel of Judas*

The interpretation of *The Gospel of Judas* as a whole revolves around four critical problems: (1) the place of its theogony and cosmogony in the development of “gnostic” or “Sethian” mythology; (2) the significance of the vocabulary of “race” (*genea*) for its anthropology and soteriology; (3) the context and reference of its polemic against other Christians, represented by the eleven disciples; and (4) the character and role of its titular figure, Judas Iscariot. Here, I present overviews of these issues and my perspectives on them; much of the discussion that follows both anticipates and depends on the closer analyses of specific passages in the commentary, which justify many of the claims made here. Uncertainty characterizes interpretation of the gospel’s positions on these matters in part because of its fragmentary survival and terse style, but also because its emphasis on judgment and polemic overshadows the few hints of the author’s message of potential salvation. Despite the sectarian dualism of the author’s contrast between the holy race and all other races, he creates a mythic world of ontological and moral ambiguity.

A. Aeons, Angels, Rulers, and Stars: The Gnostic Myth(s)

The author of *The Gospel of Judas* will certainly remain unknown, but most scholars have agreed that he or at least his work belonged to or was associated with a sect, movement, or literary tradition that they have called “Sethianism” or “Sethian Gnosticism.” Yet the gospel’s divergence from some important features of the Sethianism that modern historians have reconstructed has provoked disagreement about how it should be placed within that tradition, especially whether it comes from early in the development of that tradition or represents a later degenerate form of the Sethian myth. Still other scholars have questioned whether this discussion

has viewed Sethianism too statically and rigidly (Jenott 2011, 71–74). The appearance of *Judas*, they argue, requires a reconsideration of the category “Sethian Gnosticism” and its history (DeConick 2010, 658–59), possibly even its replacement by a restricted tradition called, in accord with Irenaeus’s terminology, the gnostic school of thought or the gnostics (Brakke 2018). It is the myth that Jesus narrates in the final portion of the dialogues that appears Sethian or gnostic; its similarities to and differences from other versions of the gnostic myth suggest greater variety in that myth within that tradition than some scholarship has traditionally allowed.

The current scholarly categories of Sethianism and the Sethian myth were born in 1974 when Hans-Martin Schenke published an essay titled “The Sethian System According to the Nag Hammadi Manuscripts.” The discovery of so-called gnostic manuscripts near Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945 had brought a flood of new data for scholars of Gnosticism to examine. They could compare these new primary sources with the accounts that the ancient heresiologists give of so-called gnostic groups, which include descriptions of “Sethians.” Schenke noted that the heresiological descriptions of the Sethians, which first appear in the third century, are contradictory, although they share the assertion that the Sethians celebrated their connection to Seth, Adam and Eve’s third son. Moreover, none of the newly discovered Nag Hammadi texts precisely match the church fathers’ accounts of Sethians. Therefore, Schenke concluded, our category of Sethianism cannot be that of the church fathers.

As the earlier discussion of Irenaeus has already sketched, Schenke then noted that several writings from Nag Hammadi likewise share a preoccupation with Seth, and that several of them speak of god’s elect, the truly saved religious people, as “the seed of Seth” or descendants of Seth. Moreover, several of these works seem to narrate, refer to, or presuppose the same mythological system. In his original article of 1974 and his expanded discussion of 1981, Schenke developed a list of mythological motifs and characters (and other connections) that he considered not only characteristic but also distinctive of the Sethian system (see esp. 1981, 593–94). These include such immortals as the invisible virgin spirit, the Barbēlō (forethought), and the self-originate aeon and its four attendant luminaries; the identification of the saved as the seed of Seth; and a baptismal ritual of “five seals.” The myth in which these elements appear has been described as unfolding in four acts (Layton 2021, 12–18). First, the invisible spirit, the

remote and unknowable first principle, unfolds into a series of emanations, starting with the Barbēlō, which is followed by the self-originate, the four luminaries, and their associated aeons, which form a structure of twelve; wisdom is the lowest aeon, so to speak. Second, a lower craftsman god, which is arrogant and imperfect, creates this material universe as a flawed replica of the divine realm. Third, the craftsman and its angelic associates form human beings, who gain divine power from above, thanks to the higher immortals. Fourth, the lower rulers oppress humanity, causing people to lose awareness (*gnōsis*) of their divine origin, until a savior comes to awaken them and provide liberation. The saved are often referred to as descendants of Seth, Adam and Eve's third son, and Sethian works refer to them as experiencing a baptism of "five seals."

Schenke recognized that these motifs and characters could occur in works that were not Sethian, just as, say, the Christian characters Jesus and the Virgin Mary might appear in the Qur'an or other Muslim texts, but it was *how* such motifs and characters function within an overall mythological system that was decisive. Moreover, Schenke admitted that few if any Sethian works would feature *all* of the listed motifs. For reasons of genre and purpose, no Sethian work would necessarily feature the entire system, just as we would not expect every writing produced by a Presbyterian theologian or group to contain the entire body of Presbyterian doctrine and practice. In the case of *Judas*, we should not conclude that the author or his community lacked a positive message of potential salvation because little of it appears in a "secret report of judgment" against rival groups and hostile cosmic rulers. The works classified as Sethian are listed in Introduction I.A; nearly all of them constituted the "Classic Gnostic Scripture" in Layton's *The Gnostic Scriptures* of 1987 (and its second edition of 2021).

Schenke included in his list of Sethian evidence not only writings from Nag Hammadi and other manuscripts, but also testimonia from contemporary critics that appear to describe the same mythological system: Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.1–2, 1.29–31; Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 25–26, 39–40. Of the heresiological reports that Schenke included, only Epiphanius of Salamis attributes the system to a group called "Sethians," and Schenke did *not* include other descriptions of so-called Sethians because the systems they report did not match his reconstructed Sethian mythology. The touchstone of what is genuinely Sethian is the

system found in Schenke's text group, not the reports of ancient authors about Sethians.

For Schenke (1981, 589) the value of creating this constellation of works and testimonia was twofold:

The texts of this group shed light upon one another if compared synoptically; and the proportion and relationship of common, shared material to special, unique material permits a process of deduction that leads to considerable insight not only into the development of the teaching they contain, but also into the history of the community that transmitted them.

In other words, first, at the level of the individual work, placement in the text group allows the reader to solve exegetical difficulties and simply to understand the story better through reference to other works in the group. Someone will understand and appreciate the *Revelation of Adam* more if she or he has read the *Secret Book According to John*. Second, as a group the texts give us access to the religious community that produced and transmitted them and allow us even to reconstruct its history. The Sethian group of *texts* gives us access to a Sethian group of *people*.

Only very few scholars have questioned the basic textual group that Schenke created (Wisse 1981; van den Broek 2013, 28–29). There have been and doubtless will continue to be debates about whether specific texts should be included and whether and how the text group should be related to other text groups and individual works. But nearly all scholars of Gnosticism have recognized the utility of Sethianism for illuminating the frequently puzzling mythological details in individual works, including even the scholars who have been most critical of the prevailing concept of Gnosticism, such as Michael Williams (2008) and Karen King (2003, 158–62).

There has been more substantial disagreement about the extent to which we can move from the text group to a religious community that existed in the second and third centuries. Irenaeus's terminology ("school of thought") may indicate merely shared commitment to certain doctrines and authoritative literary works rather than a social group. Schenke was very optimistic that his text group reflected the beliefs, experience, and ritual life of an actual gnostic community, and he believed that he could trace the history of that community, albeit sketchily. Other scholars, however, are less sanguine about the reconstruction of a second-century religious group from pseudepigraphic works of mythology that primarily discuss the nature of god and events before the great flood of Noah, or they are skeptical of

the entire project of assigning ancient works and people into reified social groups. Such scholars may be more comfortable speaking simply of a literary tradition (M. Williams 2008), which may have originated among like-minded individual authors who riffed off each other's writings, much as authors of fan fiction do today (Scott 1995). Most historians, however, have agreed that despite the mythological character of the works, the Sethian text group must have come from a religious community of some kind. They point to such features as sectarian self-identifying language and references to a shared ritual of baptism (Brakke 2010, 86–88). Our gospel's sharp polemic against other Christians and its frequent references to a "holy race" suggest a community defining and defending its beliefs and practices against alternatives.

A standard view of Sethian origins and development has emerged, based on Schenke's own hypothetical reconstruction of the sect's history. The orthodox scholarly narrative of Sethian history has had a crucial effect on how historians understand the origin and character of the gnostic myth and its relationship to Christianity (Schenke 1981; Turner 2001), and it has played a significant role in how they have interpreted *Judas* and placed it in their histories of Christianity and Gnosticism. The Sethians, most scholars agree, did not originate within Christianity; rather, Sethianism most likely first emerged among Hellenized Jews in the late first century or early second century CE. For political and/or philosophical reasons, these learned Jews became disenchanted with the god of Genesis and speculated instead about a higher divinity and its relationship with Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve. After they had developed their basic mythology and a baptismal ritual, they encountered Christian teachings about Jesus. The Sethians then incorporated Jesus and other Christian elements into their system. This Christianization of Sethianism brought the sect to the attention of Christian leaders like Irenaeus of Lyons, who had available to him a version of or a source for the *Secret Book According to John* when he wrote *Against the Heresies* around 180.

By the late second century, according to this account, the Sethians were one among the many groups that might be called Christian, but the Christian character of Sethianism was mostly superficial and did not really transform the essentially non-Christian heart of its mythology. It was, rather, Valentinus and his students who created the first genuinely Christian gnostic myth. Meanwhile, the work of bishops like Irenaeus helped to

promote an emerging “proto-orthodoxy” among Christians, and the Valentinian school of Christian thought provided gnostically inclined Christians with a much more fully Christian form of mythological gnosis. By the middle of the third century, therefore, Sethians had turned away from Judaism and Christianity and engaged more with mystical forms of non-Christian Platonism connected with Plotinus and others. Sethian works from this period (e.g., *Zōstrianos* and *Foreigner*) emphasize modes of mystical ascent to contemplation of God and play down the biblically inspired mythology of earlier works. By the fourth century, people with Sethian interests likely dispersed into various countercultural or mystical movements of the post-Constantine era (desert monasticism, theurgic Neoplatonism, and the like), although a few Sethian Christians may have survived in Egypt to give us the Nag Hammadi codices.

Scholars argue about details of this account, but most agree on Sethianism’s non-Christian origin and essence. They agree that Christian elements of Sethian mythology, such as references to Jesus and the apostles, were secondary, added after the development of Sethianism’s basic ideas. Thus, the Sethians easily shed them when being “Christian” became less viable or attractive. This hypothesis holds great explanatory power at the level of the text group, for it enables scholars to place Sethian works in a rough chronological order, and it invests their unity in mythological features that undeniably appear throughout the text group, in which, however, the prominence of indisputably Christian motifs conspicuously varies. Moreover, this hypothesis liberates Gnosticism from its identity as a Christian heresy (perhaps to become a Jewish heresy). Sethian Gnosticism does not represent a rebellion against specific Christian doctrines but arises, on the one hand, from a profound sense of alienation from the created world as it is, including its political structures and its god, and, on the other, from a profound confidence in the divine nature of humanity and in the solidarity of the ultimate god with human beings.

Nevertheless, Christian motifs do appear in nearly all of the Sethian works; most importantly, they appear in the *Secret Book According to John*, which must be one of the earliest works in the text group because Irenaeus knew some version or source of it in 180. Thus, an originally non-Christian Sethianism requires source criticism, the detection of sources or layers in certain texts in the group that would reflect the community’s origin in Hellenized Judaism and subsequent Christianization. In the case of the

Secret Book, this surgery is fairly easy to perform, for the most explicitly Christian elements occur only in the frame story. The *Secret Book* opens with the disciple John confused and dismayed over the crucifixion of Jesus. After John has a short conversation with an unsympathetic Pharisee, the Savior, presumably Christ, appears to John. The Savior's lengthy revelation to John is interrupted by questions only a few times. It covers the complex nature of the godhead, which includes a divine figure called the anointed or Christ, and it retells the events in the first six or so chapters of Genesis, without any references to Jesus or unambiguous citations of or allusions to explicitly Christian literature (so it is argued). The frame story returns at the conclusion of the Savior's discourse, and in two of the four manuscripts the author proclaims that Jesus is the Christ. Most scholars have concluded that an editor has taken an originally non-Christian mythological discourse based on Genesis, Plato's *Timaeus*, and other non-Christian works and secondarily framed it with a dialogue between Jesus and the disciple John. This hypothesis finds further support in Irenaeus's summary of part of the *Secret Book*, which mentions neither Jesus as the revealer of the myth nor John as its recipient. The placement of a non-Christian gnostic discourse within a Christian frame would reflect the Sethians' origin as a non-Christian movement, which then later became Christianized. Other Sethian works, such as the *Revelation of Adam* and *Three Tablets of Seth*, lend themselves to this kind of source analysis, especially if the historian seeks to reconstruct a highly precise literary and thus social history of Sethianism.

Several scholars, however, have criticized persuasively both the standard narrative of Sethian history and the source-critical analyses that support it (e.g., Rasimus 2009; Burns 2014). For example, some have challenged the interpretation of the *Secret Book* that identifies the frame story as secondary and the revelation discourse as lacking Christian elements (Pleše 2006; Dubois 2012b). At the level of social and religious history, all three ancient non-Sethian authors who (according to the hypothesis) show knowledge of Sethian mythology or literature (Irenaeus of Lyons, Porphyry of Tyre, and Epiphanius of Salamis) identify the writers and readers of this literature as Christians—false Christians, say Irenaeus and Epiphanius, but Christians nonetheless. No external evidence confirms the existence of a non-Christian Sethian community. Finally, one of the most distinctive features of Sethian mythology is that it does not depict the god of Genesis, the god that created this universe, as merely a lower demiurgic deity, inferior to the ultimate first

principle, as nearly all philosophically inclined Jews and Christians of the first centuries of our era did. Rather, they identify that god as an evil, malicious, and ignorant being, named Ialdabaōth or Sakla(s)—that is, as satanic. It seems unlikely that thoughtful Jews, no matter how influenced by Platonism or how discouraged by political events, would make this kind of identification. It is more plausible to imagine an intermediary step toward such a conclusion, such as the proclamation of the temporary nature and inferior status of the Law in the letters of Paul (Galatians and Romans) or the sharp contrast between Moses and Jesus found in the Gospel of John (1:17), in which Jesus tells skeptical Jews that their father is the devil (8:44). I conclude, then, that the gnostic school of thought (“Sethians”) emerged as one of the diverse movements that adapted (or rejected) the Jewish biblical tradition in light of the Jesus event, that is, as one of the movements that we now label “Christian” (Brakke 2010, 83–86; Thomassen 2021, 34–36).

Scholars noticed the Sethian features of *The Gospel of Judas* as soon as it appeared (Meyer 2006; cf. D. Kim 2014), but they just as quickly identified important ways in which it differs from other Sethian works (Turner 2008, 196–97; 2009, 96–101). Moreover, *Judas* is unmistakably Christian; unlike the *Secret Book*, Christian elements pervade both the narrative frame and the dialogues, while the allegedly non-Christian “Sethian discourse” is rather short and serves as a kind of climax to the preceding dialogues. No scholar who has examined the gospel’s place in the history of Sethianism has found that it undermines the standard narrative of Sethian history. Indeed, the example of another seemingly non-Christian revelation discourse placed within a Christian story has only confirmed the superficial relationship between Christianity and Sethianism. But scholars have disagreed markedly about how to fit *Judas* into the historical development of the Sethian myth. Its Sethian character appears to be either underdeveloped or merely tacked on; therefore, the options seem to be that the gospel originated either very early in Sethian history or late.

On the one hand, Meyer (2009) argued that the gospel originated early in the history of Sethianism or, as he put it, “when the Sethians were young.” He accepted that Irenaeus knew a work very similar to the Coptic text and concluded that the revelation discourse comes from Sethianism’s origins outside Christianity, in what he called “Jewish Gnosis.” Its underdeveloped version of the Sethian myth, moreover, suggests that it may be even older

than what we find in the *Secret Book*. Both works, however, show how the Sethian myth was secondarily Christianized—and quite early.

On the other hand, Schenke Robinson (2009b) and Turner (2009) have claimed that *Judas* was originally Christian but was secondarily Sethianized in the third century. Both, then, must posit that *The Gospel of Judas* known to Irenaeus in 180 cannot be what the Coptic text translates; rather, Irenaeus must have known an earlier version of the gospel or even a different work altogether. As we have seen (Introduction I.C), they make this claim partly on the basis of what Irenaeus does *not* say about the gospel; that is, both argue that if Irenaeus had known in Greek the text that we have in Coptic, he would have summarized and/or criticized certain features about which he is silent. These include the gospel's highly negative portrayal of the disciples other than Judas and the specifically Sethian aspects of the gospel's mythology.

Turner (2009) dates *The Gospel of Judas* to the second quarter of the third century. He suggests that in the history of Sethianism the gospel's highly charged criticism of clergy who make claims to apostolic succession indicates that it comes after Sethian works, such as the *Revelation of Adam*, which criticize the baptism and Christology of other Christians. And yet it must come before works like *Zōstrianos*, which originated in the middle of the third century, when the Sethians turned away from Christianity to pagan Platonism. Turner does not attempt a precise account of the literary sources and stages of the gospel, except to say that the current gospel must be a revision of a non-Sethian work that depicted Judas's handing over of Jesus in the way Irenaeus describes it.

Schenke Robinson (2009b, 89), in contrast, presents a detailed hypothetical history of the gospel's redaction. I leave aside the source-critical details here; rather, the most important point is this:

The *Gospel of Judas* is a distinctive Christian-Gnostic, albeit anti-orthodox, text, whereas Sethianism was basically a non-Christian, Jewish-Gnostic movement. Although Sethianism did come in contact with Christianity, and its texts were subjected to various degrees of Christianization, its focal point or main thrust never had a specifically Christian-Gnostic perspective; it was always more typified by an inner-Jewish tension. Sethian writings generally deal with notorious Old Testament figures by means of reinterpreting their purpose and function in the Hebrew Scriptures, and reassessing their reputation in Judaism; they do not employ New Testament characters. Non-Sethian Christian-Gnostics, in contrast, favor personages who are marginalized in the orthodox church and give them a different role and meaning—as, for instance, the case with Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*. Hence rather than being a document whose Sethian themes are not yet fully developed, the *Gospel of Judas* in its present form appears to be a quite late and distant offshoot of Sethianism.

Schenke Robinson reaches the exact opposite conclusion from that of Meyer: *The Gospel of Judas* does not represent underdeveloped Sethianism, as Meyer claims, but a “late and distant offshoot of Sethianism.” Nonetheless, Schenke Robinson and Meyer, along with Turner, attempt to fit *Judas* into the history of Sethianism as scholars already know it, that is, into the history of a community that originated in non-Christian Judaism; that subsequently had a brief, highly conflicted, and yet ultimately superficial relationship with Christianity; and that finally became alienated from increasingly orthodox Christianity and drifted into pagan mystical Neoplatonism. In this history, the deeply Christian and less deeply Sethian *Gospel of Judas* must come rather early—at the start of the Sethians’ contact with Christians—or rather late—as that contact was coming to a bitter end.

Neither position, however, takes seriously the constructed nature of Sethianism, its myth, and its history. Sethianism is a modern category, a text group that historians have created. By “the Sethian myth” scholars usually mean either the myth found in the *Secret Book According to John* or their own ideal myth reconstructed from the *Secret Book* and other works in the text group. That the Sethian works belong together, that they can be placed in a chronological order, that they reflect a single myth, and that they reflect the religious history of a specific group of people are all ideas that scholars have invented. These are powerful ideas, which have made the surviving sources easier to understand and contextualize, but the appearance of *Judas* suggests that a rethinking of this category is in order (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 71). In this case we should consider carefully how our gospel’s myth compares with other versions of the Sethian or, rather, gnostic myth. In comparison to the myth of the *Secret Book*, for example, *Judas* features a similar structure of the divine realm, includes the same major immortals, and shares a similar understanding of the human being; but *Judas* differs in the vocabulary or idiom in which it articulates the myth and in its account of the transition from the divine entirety to this created cosmos. Comparison with not only the *Secret Book* but also the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* suggests that the author drew on shared literary resources for the myth at a time roughly contemporary with the composition of the *Secret Book*.

The close correspondences between *Judas* and the *Secret Book* on the structure of the divine realm and its primary characters, the major lower

rulers and their cohort, and sectarian terminology leave no doubt that both belong to the same mythic tradition, whether one calls that tradition “Sethian” or, with Irenaeus, simply “gnostic” (Introduction II; De Wet 2019). That tradition belongs among the individuals and groups that we gather under the umbrella of “early Christianity,” that is, those who honor Jesus of Nazareth as the definitive agent of divine salvation for humanity. In both works an unknowable great invisible spirit expands to a second principle (Barbēlō or luminous cloud) and then to a third, the self-originate, forming a triad at the heart of divine reality. The self-originate receives four attendants and stands at the head of a set of twelve aeons. Divine archetypes of human beings exist within the upper realm: archetypes of Adam and the descendants or race of Seth appear in both works; an archetype of Seth appears in the *Secret Book* but may be lost in a lacuna in *Judas*. The lower rulers too are similar, led by a figure named Ialdabaōth (and also Nebrō in *Judas*) and a set of twelve assisting angels. Finally, both works use terminology of a “race” (*genea*) associated with Seth and “the perfect (*teleios*) human being” to refer to the community of the saved. These resemblances justify interpreting our gospel’s myth as a version of the gnostic myth.

Nevertheless, the distinctive character of *Judas*’s version should not be assessed as a variation on a standard version of the myth, whether that version is derived simply from the *Secret Book* and Irenaeus or represents a scholarly reconstruction based on multiple works. Comparison with especially the *Secret Book* remains helpful, however, because that work is the one most likely to represent another version of the myth that can be dated to the second century. Such comparison reveals that the most significant distinctive features of our gospel’s myth are the idiom of heavenly lore, a less dualistic separation of the higher and lower realms, and the attribution of the origin and character of the lower rulers to divine creation and angelic rebellion rather than to the error of the aeon wisdom.

The author of *Judas* uses the vocabulary of the heavens and their denizens (“aeon,” “cloud,” “angel,” “star,” and the like) to talk about realms and divine beings in a way that relativizes the distinction between the divine region and the corruptible cosmos. For example, clouds (*kloole*, *qēpe*) belong primarily to the upper realm, but at least one may be visible to and adjacent to the lower. The Barbēlō seems to be called “a luminous cloud,” from which the self-originate emerges, while the four attendants

emerge from “another cloud” (47.14–24). Adamas exists in a cloud of light (48.22–23), which may be the cloud in which Eve is called Life (52.19–21). The placement of “the cloud of knowledge” (*tqēpe n-tegnōsis*) is more ambiguous (50.22–51.1). On the one hand, its appearance in an aeon with the race of the first human being (presumably Adamas) suggests location in the upper realm. On the other hand, the most straightforward reading of the narrative is that it is the cloud of knowledge from which the lower rulers Nebrō and Saklas come forth (51.8–9, 16–17). And it may be the cloud that Jesus invites Judas to see and that Jesus enters at the conclusion of the dialogue (57.16–27), even though it is surrounded by stars, which suggests a position at least partially in the lower realm. This cloud seems to hover at the boundary between the divine realm and this one.

The term “aeon” (*aiōn*) likewise functions imprecisely to refer to any domain in which rule is exercised and from which beings can originate or derive their character. Sometimes the demonstrative article (“this”/“these”) makes clear the reference to one or more domains in this cosmos in which human beings now live (36.21, 37.2, 43.4), but other such occurrences lack that article (37.15?, 46.4, 55.13, 57.5). Aeons of the upper realm are sometimes specified: “the aeon of the Barbēlō” (35.18), “the aeons on high” (44.7), “the aeon with the holy angels” (45.23–24). In the mythological discourse *aiōn* refers to regions or aspects of the divine (48.10–11, 17; 49.19, 21; 50.9, 18, 22) or to the higher realm in total (“great and infinite aeon”; 47.5–6). Aeons are places of rule, whether they belong to the higher realm or the lower: Judas’s star “will rule over the thirteenth aeon” in this cosmos (55.12–13), while luminaries rule over the twelve luminous aeons in the higher realm (47.26–48.18). Even the disciples have aeons in which they rule (37.15–16); these may be areas of rule that are more earthly (social or communal) than metaphysical or heavenly, if such a distinction applies. There are, then, multiple aeons within this cosmos and above it, and they are domains of rule. Aeons function similarly in the *Revelation of Adam*: the higher realm of true divinity is “the great aeons” (71.13), and yet Sakla is “the ruler of the aeons and the powers” (64.21–22); human beings in this world live “within the aeons over which your (Sakla’s) domination rules” (74.20–21). In contrast, the *Secret Book* sometimes identifies individual immortals as aeons: for example, the four luminaries of the self-originate are also aeons, with three “additional aeons” for each. These added aeons form “the twelve aeons that stand before the offspring of the

great self-originate anointed” (NHC II 8.22–23). That is, in the *Secret Book* aeons can be actors as well as domains, regions, or extents of time; they can “stand.” In contrast, *Judas* uses other terms (“god,” “angel,” “star,” “ruler”) for individual suprahuman actors.

The appearances of “god” (*noute*) reflect the problem at the heart of the author’s difference with other Christians: the status of the god of Israel, whom the rival Christ believers worship as the god of Jesus but the author identifies as the lower angel Saklas. The gospel refers to that god almost always with a qualifier that labels that god not as *the* god, but as the god that the disciples acknowledge as theirs—“your god” (34.10–11, 25), “our god” (34.12–13), “their god” (36.4)—or that is worshiped by them—“the god that you serve” (39.21). Only once does the term “god” appear absolutely in reference to Saklas: “Lo, god has accepted your sacrifice from the hands of a priest” (40.19–22), an announcement made by the ruling stars that attend Saklas. Other references to “god” without qualification denote a higher, true divinity (43.6–7, 53.19, 54.8). Although this true god could be the great invisible spirit, which “has not been called by any name” (47.8–13), it is more likely the self-originate, which is called “the god of light” (47.20–21) and is the only character (other than Saklas) explicitly given the title “god.” The word *noute* in the sense of “divine” applies to immortals in the higher realm (48.25–26). The irony or sarcasm of calling Saklas a “god” characterizes some of the terms used for his worshipers, who are described as “training for godliness (*mntnoute*)” (33.25–26) and called “the races of the pious (*eusebēs*)” (40.6–7).

Without such irony “angel” (*angelos*) identifies any divine being, whether an immortal in the higher realm or an oppressive ruler in this cosmos (cf. Scopello 2018). On the one hand, in the upper realm, the self-originate is (in addition to “god of light”) a “great angel” and “angelic” (47.16–21), and its four attendants are angels (47.22–23); angels serve the luminaries that rule the twelve luminous aeons that the self-originate calls into being (48.5–21). An angel in the same aeon as the cloud of knowledge is probably named Ēlēlēth (50.25–51.1). Other references to angels or “angelic” indicate such higher beings (45.24, 49.4–5). On the other hand, in the lower realm, Nebrō/Ialdabaōth, Saklas, and their twelve colleagues are “angels” as well (51.5–52.4). Saklas can be referred to simply as “the angel” (53.5), and his angels assist him in the creation of humanity (52.15). Additional references to angels or “angelic” indicate such lower rulers

(37.4–5; 41.5–6, 12–13; 44.9). Likewise, the “races of the angels” seem to consist of lower angels or human beings who are affiliated with them (54.7–8, 57.6–7). Possibly the “angelic race” and “angelic eye” that cannot see the extent of the great and infinite aeon or the invisible spirit (47.7–10) belong to both the lower and the higher class of beings—that is, no angel of any kind can see these things. This use of “angel(ic)” suggests basic ontological continuity between the immortals of the higher realm and the lower gods of this world. An innumerable angelic army provides glory and service within the 360 firmaments that mark the transition from the realm of true divinity to that of corruption (50.5–7). In this respect *Judas*’s usage resembles the vocabulary that Irenaeus attributes to Saturninos: “a single parent, unrecognizable to all,” made “angels, archangels, powers, and authorities”; “some seven of these angels” created this world, and angels also made the first human being; Satan too is an angel (*Haer.* 1.24.1). In our gospel (as possibly in Saturninos’s thought) Nebrō, Saklas, and their entourage are not of a nature different from that of the self-originate, the four attendants, and their entourage; rather, they have rebelled against the higher authority of the invisible spirit and their fellow angels and now exercise tyrannical domination over human beings.

Unlike angels, “stars” (*siou*) belong solely to the lower realm; they might be angels as well, but as stars, they are beings who have conspicuously gone astray, now lead others astray (*planē*), and exert direct influence on people and events. Jesus sums up much of what he teaches *Judas* as “the error of the stars” (46.1–2), and he laughs at the error of stars, which are destined for destruction (55.18–20). The stars rule or dominate events in this cosmos, so that freedom from the stars’ domination characterizes the salvation or holiness of those who are saved (37.4–5, 42.17–22). In contrast, the ignorant people make up “the races of the stars” (39.13–14). Because the sun and moon do not rule the place that is kept for the holy ones (45.20–21), it seems likely that they too are stars or at least belong to the same class of beings as the stars. The stars will have a prominent role in the events of the end times: they will bring everything to completion, present their deceived sinners to Saklas, and announce Saklas’s acceptance of a final sacrifice—and yet they will be put to shame on the last day (40.7–26, 54.16–24). As authoritative rulers in their own domains, the disciples have a special affinity with the stars (41.5); each disciple has his own star (42.7–9); their number, twelve, may correspond to the Zodiac, and thus the

deficit created by Judas's separation from them requires replacement (36.1–4). Judas also has his own star: on the one hand, his star can deceive him by showing him a vision of a heavenly temple that he cannot enter (45.13–14); on the other hand, in the final days Judas's star will move up into the thirteenth aeon, where it will rule and become the leading star. This ascension indicates that Judas should play his role in the eschatological drama and that Judas will himself enjoy a leading position in the transformed cosmos (55.12–13, 56.24, 57.20–21). (It has been suggested, but not persuasively, that Judas's star is the sun [N. Förster 2009]). Stars, then, do not differ much from the angels of the lower realm, but the author highlights their deceptive influence on human beings and events. They are untrustworthy rulers.

This view of the stars' effects is certainly indebted to astrology, but that debt does not support the conclusion that the gospel teaches "astral determinism" (*pace*, e.g., Adamson 2009; Cazalais 2016; D. Kim 2018, 212; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 160), if by that one means that the stars control the actions and fates of human beings to the extent that human beings lack any freedom to choose among options and thereby to affect their ultimate destinies. According to this interpretation, the gospel "offers no hope of redemption and salvation of humankind," for "everyone born under the control of the archons and destined by the erroneous stars is doomed" (Schenke Robinson 2018). To be sure, the numbers in the gospel's theology and cosmology (12, 24, 72, 360) originate in astronomical and calendrical lore (DeConick 2009a; S. Kim 2008, 298–303; D. Kim 2018, 209–10). The use of astrological numbers and cosmological structures, however, does not necessarily mean that the author possessed a deep knowledge of astrology or subscribed to any particular astrological ideology (cf. Greenbaum 2016, 164 n. 27). Our work does not display the complex and sophisticated integration of astrological materials that characterizes the *Secret Book According to John* (Pleše 2007). Rather, Lewis (2013, 169–70) persuasively argues that astrological references are underdeveloped in *Judas*, which does not use the technical terminology of astrology; instead, the gospel's close association of the stars with angels reflects "sectarian Jewish apocalyptic teachings." She suggests comparison with Revelation in the New Testament, which features "heavily astrologically tinged language" but does not espouse astrological ideas. So too the author of *Judas* "used astrology as a sort of veneer or intellectual overlay to give his essential

ideas concerning the depravity of second-century Christianity particular authority or potency” (Lewis 2020, 562). It is unlikely that our author envisions that horoscopes rigidly determine how people act or what they will become; he connects time and the calendar with death, and he shows no interest in when people are born.

On the other hand, as cosmic rulers, the stars do exert perplexing influence over human beings and events. Each of the twelve disciples, including Judas, has his own star; other early Christian works, including Revelation (21:10–14), appear to correlate the twelve disciples with the twelve Zodiacal signs (Ps.-Clem. Hom. 2.23; DeConick 2009a, 250–53). But it is not certain or even likely that all other individual human beings have their own stars as well. It is probable that different races have particular stars (54.17–24), just as some Jews and Christians believed that different nations had their own guiding angels. Judas’s star can lead him astray, but that does not mean that Judas must follow; presumably, the magi in Matthew 2 could have stayed home. To be sure, the stars rule this cosmos, guide at least some of the events that happen in it, and dominate human beings through their control of time, but even astrological beliefs did not necessarily imply complete determinism: as Peter Brown (1978, 75–76) writes, “the influence of the stars was not ineluctable, but baffling,” a complex and confusing interplay of opposing forces that required professional expertise to understand and from which some religious rituals like Christian baptism promised to set people free (cf. M. Williams 1985, 132–33). As one early Christian put it, “fate (*heimarmenē*) is a conjunction of numerous and opposed powers”; thus, “the stars and the powers are diverse—working good or working evil, on the right or on the left, the combination of which is what is produced” (Clem. Al. *Exc.* 69.1, 71.3). Diverse cosmic powers may have held mysterious sway over other people, but Christians proclaimed freedom from such confusion and offered instead the clarity of a single divine providence (*pronoia*) (Lewis 2013).

Once again, comparison with the *Secret Book According to John* on this point is instructive (cf. Pearson 2017, 107–8). Unlike Jesus in our gospel, the savior in the *Secret Book* uses the term “fate” or “destiny” (*heimarmenē*) and ascribes its creation to Ialdabaōth and his fellow authorities: fate is, he says, “the last and varied bond, which is of diverse sorts, for they (the authorities) differ from one another” (NHC II 28.15–17). The bond of fate, therefore, is neither monocausal nor direct—it is, as the

ancients long complained, bewilderingly variable (Tardieu 1984, 335–36)—but it does produce sins, violence, ignorance, anxieties, and general blindness to the existence of the higher divinity and its realm. The savior in the *Secret Book* does not mention the stars but does say, “Because of the bond of forgetfulness, their (created beings’) sins became hidden (to them); for they had been bound with measures, time, and seasons (*kairos*), because it presides over the entirety” (NHC II 28.29–32). Without any astral references, “measures, times, and seasons” suggests not astrology as such, but calendrical time, just as *Judas* locates the rulers’ domination in the limitation of human life by time: “And the [angel] said to him (Adam), ‘Your life shall be measured out by time, along with your children’” (53.5–7). Lewis (2013, 95 n. 31) plausibly refers to Paul, who considered certain calendrical observances a form of enslavement to the “elemental spirits” (*stoicheia*): “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, that you have come to know God, . . . how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? You are observing special days, and months, and seasons (*kairoi*), and years” (Gal 4:8–10). According to the *Secret Book*, the bond of fate “presides over the entirety” (*o n-čoeis ačm-ptēhr-f*), just as in *Judas* “the lord who gives orders” (Saklas) is the one who “presides over the entirety” (*o n-č(oei)s ečn-ptēhr-f*) (40.23–25). In other words, in *Judas* the stars act as the rulers do in the *Secret Book*—they dominate and limit human beings by time—but the effect of their rule is not described as fate (*heimarmenē*). And even though the *Secret Book* does use that term, it does not suggest that human beings have no freedom at all, so that, for example, they cannot be praised or blamed for their actions; rather, “fate imposes upon human beings certain constraints that render them vulnerable to wrong choices” (M. Williams 1995, 207; cf. Lewis 2013, 97). The stars (and angels) in *Judas* do not force people to do things; rather, they lead people astray or deceive them (41.10–12).

Because the angels and stars act similarly, they both appear to be included in the term “ruler” (*arkhōn* = *archōn*). Although luminaries in the immortal realm exercise rule in their aeons (48.1–18), only the lower angels and stars that dominate human beings are named rulers, as *Judas* refers to them collectively (46.7). The twelve angels that Nebrō and Saklas create (51.17–19) are subsequently referred to as “the twelve rulers” (51.24).

Saklas is called simply “his (Adam’s) ruler” (53.15–16), and he is likely “the ruler” that will be destroyed at the end time (57.9–10). As an activity, ruling characterizes beings at every ontological level—from immortal luminaries, to lower angels and stars, to the human disciples—but only the oppressive angels and stars deserve the title “rulers.”

The term “kingdom,” however, resembles “aeon” in its flexibility (cf. Painchaud 2008b; Jenott 2011, 192); it occurs only five times in the surviving text. After Judas reveals that he has knowledge superior to that of the other disciples, Jesus separates him from them and promises to tell him “the mysteries of the kingdom” (35.24–27), and then later Jesus announces that he has told Judas “the mysteries of the kingdom” (45.25–26). The phrase is taken from Matt 13:11//Mark 4:11//Luke 8:10, and Jesus tells Judas that he will not “go there” but instead will groan. This kingdom, then, must refer to the higher realm to which Judas will not go (46.25–47.1), and it should be identified with the kingdom that will provoke Judas to groan when he sees it (46.11–14) (*pace* Turner 2009, 101). Between the two references to mysteries of the kingdom, Jesus tells Judas about salvation for the holy race (42.22–44.13) and explains to Judas that the building in his vision is the “place that is kept for the holy ones” (45.17–19); although the sun and moon will not rule in that place (45.20–21), the higher realm is not without any kind of rule, as we have seen. Nonetheless, also in this section Jesus refers to the time when people die as “when they have completed the time of the kingdom” (43.17–19), which anticipates how Jesus later refers to human mortality: “Adam received his time measured out, along with his race, in the place where he received his kingdom measured out, along with his ruler” (53.11–16). This kingdom exists in the lower realm, where Adam and his descendants have their own kingdom or domain of rule, perhaps based on Gen 1:28 (“fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule”). Although the title “ruler,” like “star,” is limited to the lower region, the term “kingdom,” like “angel” and “aeon,” crosses the divide between the divine realm and the corruptible cosmos.

This survey of mythological vocabulary suggests at least two distinctive characteristics of *The Gospel of Judas* in comparison to other gnostic works, especially the *Secret Book According to John*. First, its language draws from heavenly lore and apocalyptic Judaism, without much influence from philosophical traditions. Higher beings are gods, angels, and stars that dwell or rule in aeons and clouds. With the exception of “self-originate”

(*autogenēs*), *Judas* does not give its mythic characters names that are philosophical abstractions, such as “forethought” (*pronoia*), “prior acquaintance” (*prognōsis*), or “afterthought” (*epinoia*) (e.g., Ap. John BG 27.10–11; NHC II 5.15–16, 8.11). Rather, it uses names that are vaguely biblical or Semitic, such as Nebrō, Saklas, or Adōnaios. Or, as in the case of the four attendants of the self-originate, the gospel provides no names at all. Likewise, the author eschews analogies or philosophical explanations for the processes of emanation that it describes, such as an overflowing spring or self-contemplation; the problem of why a single principle would unfold into multiplicity simply does not present itself. Second, beings superior to human beings are angels, whether they belong to the immortal realm or exist as rulers in the corruptible world; there is greater ontological continuity from immortality and divinity to corruption and chaos and less dualistic differentiation. This aspect of our gospel should caution against a rigid understanding of the moral and ontological meaning of a term that I did not include in this discussion—*daimōn*, which is applied to only one being, Judas (44.21), whose status receives examination below (Introduction IV.D).

These two features of the gospel—heavenly, apocalyptic terminology and ontological continuity between the higher and lower realms—characterize its major difference from the mythic narratives found in the *Secret Book* and in Irenaeus’s reports about the gnostic school of thought: the nature of this realm and how its rulers came into being. The accounts in the *Secret Book* and Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.29.4, 30.3–5) attribute the origin of the lower craftsman, Ialdabaōth, to the aeon wisdom’s mistaken attempt to conceive a thought without the cooperation of her male consort. Ialdabaōth’s paradoxical combination of divine power and ignorant arrogance arises from this error, and wisdom casts him into the lower realm, which is clearly “outside” the divine entirety (Ap. John NHC II 10.11–12). By contrast, *Judas* features a transitional zone of seventy-two heavens and 360 firmaments; the seventy-two heavens seem to belong to the higher region and the 360 firmaments to the lower, but the firmaments unfold from the heavens. The lower region is not a distinct region “outside” the divine realm, but a corruptible devolution from it or the detritus of its expansion. The lower craftsman, Nebrō, also called Ialdabaōth, is deliberately called into being, almost certainly by the angel Ēlēlēth. His divine power reflects his origin in a higher cloud (probably the cloud of knowledge), but his

hostility and wrath appear to result from his rebellion against higher divinity: Nebrō is an apostate, just as the author claims the etymology of his name indicates (51.14). The lower rulers behave like the rebellious angels that populate Jewish apocalyptic works. While historians have suggested that the author of *Judas* suppresses the role of wisdom or consciously rejects the account found in the *Secret Book*, a close reading of the gospel and comparison of it with the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* suggests that it is simply an alternative explanation of how this world relates to the higher realm and how its rulers came to be. The authors of *Judas* and the *Holy Book* probably both drew on a written source, which would place this version of the myth as early as that of the *Secret Book*. Irenaeus's description of Saturninos's myth also lacks wisdom's error and may provide further evidence for the antiquity of this version (*Haer.* 1.24.1). The error of wisdom should not be identified as *the* gnostic myth or as "an indispensable part of the Sethian system" (Schenke Robinson 2018); instead, early gnostics developed two accounts of the emergence of a flawed, arrogant craftsman of this cosmos. (For detailed analysis see COMMENTS 49.25–51.3, 51.3–52.14.)

The author of *The Gospel of Judas* was aware of the existence of other versions of the sacred story that he told: he writes that the first angel to emerge in the lower realm "has [the] name Nebrō . . . but others call him Ialdabaoth" (51.12–15). Nonetheless, the more systematic and elaborate versions of the gnostic myth found in the *Secret Book According to John*, the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, and Irenaeus's report did not constitute a gnostic "Bible," elements of which the author of *Judas* borrowed, condensed, adapted, or rejected. When scholars characterize the gospel's Sethianism as "truncated" (Schenke Robinson 2009b, 88) or "abbreviated" (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 49), or when they suggest that "certain technical terms in Sethian mythology seem to be misapplied" (Turner 2009, 103), they appear to think that a fully formed, standard, even canonical Sethian mythology and terminology existed, to which the writer of the gospel adhered or from which he deviated. Instead, we should imagine a tradition in development or in process, continually being constructed and reconstructed. In his genealogy of heretics, Irenaeus pairs Saturninos of Antioch and Basilides of Alexandria as early successors of Simon and Menander (*Haer.* 1.24.1–2). Dubois (2008; 2012a) has identified several ways in which *Judas* resembles Basilides; but we should notice also

the gospel's similarities to Saturninos, whom scholars assign to the Sethian or gnostic data set (Layton 1995, 343). These include the identification of all higher beings, both good and evil, including the god of Israel, as angels derived from the highest god; the absence of an error committed by an aeon named wisdom; the division of human beings into "races"; and the destruction of the lower rulers through the advent of Jesus. The teachings of *Judas* thus fit comfortably in the 130s or 140s.

The Gospel of Judas originated in the middle of the second century, closer to the beginning of the gnostic sect's history than to its end. Its mythic narrative does not represent a deviation from Sethianism or "the gnostic myth"; rather, it suggests that the origin and development of that myth was complex and varied, just as Irenaeus's account of the gnostic school of thought reports variety within that movement (Introduction I.A). As scholars attempt to reconstruct the early development of gnostic (and Valentinian) mythology (e.g., Thomassen 2021), *Judas* provides important evidence for that history, as early as that of the *Secret Book According to John* and Irenaeus.

B. The Mighty and Holy Race: Ethnic Reasoning and Soteriology

The term *genea* ("race," "generation," "family," "class," "kind") appears in *The Gospel of Judas* at least forty-eight times, a remarkable number for such a relatively short work. Although other gnostic and non-gnostic Christian works use the language of race or kinship to characterize and differentiate religious communities, *Judas* stands out for the density and consistency of such terminology. Like the prominence of stars, this feature of the gospel has suggested to many interpreters that it teaches a "severe soteriological determinism" (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 148; cf. Devoti 2012, 93–97): each individual person has been born into a *genea*, and there is nothing he or she can do to change the destiny to which that *genea* has been assigned. Considering also that *Judas* appears to lack any character who can be identified with certainty as saved, including its title character, one might conclude that the work contains no soteriology at all. Rather than good news ("gospel"), it should be described as "bad news" ("dysangel") (Turner 2008, 227) or as a "pseudo-gospel" (Pearson 2017, 114). On the other hand, Jesus tells Judas that "god caused acquaintance to be brought to

Adam and those with him, in order that the kings of chaos and Hades might not rule over them” (54.8–12), and even the disciples demonstrate recognition of their sins, for which they ask cleansing and help (41.9–13, 42.1–5), modeling an appropriate response to a “report of judgment” (33.1–2). A soteriology that is not severely deterministic probably lies behind the harsh judgment that the gospel levies.

Several considerations suggest one should be cautious in concluding that any Christian work of the second century teaches a rigid determinism, whether based on racial identity or attributed to other factors such as stars. In general, there is little evidence for a sharp contrast between “determinism” and “free will” during this period: even philosophers most fully committed to a strong notion of divine providence and its control of all events, such as the Stoics, held people responsible for their moral choices and considered progress in virtue possible (Bobzien 1998). On the other hand, few if any authors appear to have taught that people’s choices are completely free and undetermined by character and circumstance, including ethnicity, cosmic forces (possibly represented by the stars and planets), personal history, and the like; this observation applies even to someone like Origen, who emphasized the free will of all rational beings (Gibbons 2015, summarizing much literature in the history of philosophy). Paul Linjamaa (2019) demonstrates how an either/or approach to the question of determinism/free will has distorted interpretations of Valentinian literature; his analysis of the *Tripartite Tractate* shows that a Christian form of determinism could support a robust ethical teaching and an openness to conversion and change. More specifically, drawing on both theoretical and historical scholarship on race and ethnicity Denise Buell (2005, 2) has developed the concept of “ethnic reasoning” to describe early Christian “modes of persuasion” that sometimes “include the use of a specific vocabulary of peoplehood” and that Christians deployed “to legitimate various forms of Christianness as the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity,” as well as “to define themselves relative to ‘outsiders’ and to compete with other ‘insiders’ to assert the superiority of their varying visions of Christianness.” For diverse purposes such rhetoric could attribute to peoplehood or race “fixity” (“some inherent, eternal core”) or “fluidity” (“change and transformation of cultural phenomena”) or both even within the same work (Buell, 2005, 7). Because ancient concepts of “race” (*genos* or *genea*) included not only blood relations, but also

shared customs, institutions, and religious practices, they were especially open to such shifting deployments. *Judas* features ethnic reasoning for all the purposes that Buell outlines, and interpreters should expect a strategic oscillation between fixity and fluidity.

Even before Buell's work and the appearance of *Judas*, Michael Williams (1985) argued that such epithets as "the immovable race" and "the seed of Seth" in gnostic works do not entail soteriological determinism. Examining especially the *Secret Book According to John*, the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, *Zōstrianos*, and the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, Williams (1985, 184) concludes that membership in the immovable race indicates the achievement of perfect humanity, that is, "membership in the ideal Human family, for which therefore all humans are potential candidates." The lengthy discussion of different kinds of souls in the *Secret Book* (NHC II 25.16–27.30) teaches that inclusion in the immovable race is possible for everyone, albeit to some people after multiple reincarnations; only apostates from the gnostic community appear to be consigned to eternal destruction (Williams, 1985, 166–67). Passages in the *Holy Book* and the *Secret Book* suggest incorporation into the seed of Seth through baptism (162, 192–93). Williams perceptively points to the language of birth or rebirth in several New Testament works (John 3:3, 1 Pet 1:23, Jas 1:18) (163). Scholars of early Christianity, confronted with passages in, say, the Gospel of John that suggest fixed origins and classes of human beings with predetermined fates (3:3, 8:42–44) tend to play down such language and assume an openness to conversion and moral change, when in fact one could argue for a more literal reading of such passages (Trumbower 1992). Scholars have been less inclined to grant the same benefit of the doubt, so to speak, to gnostic and other "heretical" works, but they should.

As we turn to *Judas*, we must ask first whether the English "race" is in fact the best translation of *genea*, which can have a range of meanings having to do with descent and kinship groups in ancient Greek literature. Some translators have preferred "generation" (Kasser et al. 2007; DeConick 2009c; cf. Devoti 2012 ["generazione"]; Bermejo Rubio 2012 ["generación"]). That choice reflects the meaning of *genea* in the Synoptic Gospels, where it occurs frequently. The numerous instances of *genea* in the Synoptics likely inspired our author to use it rather than *genos*, which some other early Christian authors use for "race" (e.g., Diogn. 1.1, Just. *Dial.* 116.3). In contemporary English, however, "generation" suggests

“temporality or periodization,” especially a particular age cohort (“Generation X”), a connotation that does not apply to *genea* in *Judas* or to many (and perhaps most) instances of it in other gnostic works (M. Williams 1985, 160; Townsend 2012, 150). The gospel does include genealogical descent from one or more ancestors in its concept of *genea*: Adam’s “children” (*šēre*) appear to be the equivalent of his *genea* (53.6–16). *Genea*, however, does not refer in the singular to an age cohort or in the plural to multiple such cohorts over time, but to a class or classes of human beings united by kinship and religious practice and persistent through history. (In at least one instance, it may identify a class of angels; cf. 47.5–8.) Alternative translations such as “family” or “kin” would exaggerate the role of descent from an ancestor in the work, and those such as “kind” or “sort” would minimize that role. It must be significant that the author uses *genos* once (44.3–4) and possibly a second time (43.6–8) in close proximity to instances of *genea*; therefore, *genos* possibly carries the more general sense of “kind” or “sort.” Buell (2005, 13–21) persuasively and eloquently argues against eschewing the use of the term “race,” even though it threatens to import modern conceptions into ancient works and carries a highly charged meaning especially in the twenty-first-century United States. The term can productively expose the constructed nature of race in both antiquity and modernity and reveal the role of early Christian literature in contributing to the development of diverse understandings of race.

The gospel primarily uses *genea* in its ethnic reasoning to differentiate between, on the one hand, the single ideal or saved group of human beings associated with the author and, on the other, multiple “outsiders,” a category that includes the criticized “insiders,” that is, Christ believers who worship the wrong god. Instances of *genea* in the plural always refer to outsiders (“all the races,” “the races,” “the races of the human beings”); a couple instances of the singular include a plural term as well (“race of/from the human beings”; 34.15–18, 37.10–11). Except for these latter cases and a few others discussed below (e.g., 42.11–14, 56.4–6), *genea* in the singular always refers to the saved people. The contrast of the singular race with the plural “races of the human beings” (and the like) echoes biblical language that contrasts the single people or nation (*laos*) of Israel with “the nations” or “the peoples” (*ethnoi*). The singularity of the true people of god connotes its sacred nature and fidelity to the one true divinity. In *Judas* that single

race is “great” (36.19–21, 41.17–21, 57.10–15, 58.1–2), “holy” (46.25–47.1), “incorruptible” (49.12–16), “great and holy” (36.16–17, 44.11–13), “mighty and holy” (36.24–26), “mighty and incorruptible” (42.11–14), and “great undominated” (53.22–25). The outsiders, however, belong to the multiple stars and angels (39.11–15, 54.5–8, 55.4–6, 57.6–7), which are the false gods to which they wrongly devote themselves, making them, ironically (or even sarcastically), “the races of the pious” (40.2–7). This form of ethnic reasoning resembles that of other Christian works like 1 Peter, in which the saved form a single “chosen race (*genos*)” or “holy nation (*ethnos*),” which demonstrates virtuous living and devotion to the one god while living among the multiple “nations” (*ethnoi*) (2:9–12). This rhetoric of ethnicity highlights moral virtue and proper worship of the one true god rather than descent as the defining features of the holy race.

Only in a few passages does the gospel define the races in terms of descent from or spiritual solidarity with an ancestor, and these instances suggest an ambiguous distinction between those who are saved and those who are not. An immortal being (probably Adamas) reveals “the incorruptible race of Seth” in the higher realm (49.5–7). This immortal race almost certainly functions as the divine archetype of the community of the ideal human beings, but the human being Seth plays no role in the work, which does not narrate the primeval history of Genesis after the creation of Adam and Eve and the imposition of mortality upon them. There is no contrast between descendants of Seth and descendants of Cain, Abel, or anyone else. There are three references to a race belonging to Adam. The first occurs at the imposition of mortality upon human beings. Saklas tells Adam, “Your life shall be measured out by time, along with your children” (53.6–7). In response to Judas’s question about the maximum life span of a human being, Jesus replies that “Adam received his time measured out, along with his race, in the place where he received his kingdom measured out, along with his ruler” (53.11–16). In this case, all subsequent human beings must be included in Adam’s race: not only are they all his children, but even the saved people live for only a limited time in this realm (referred to as “the place where he received his kingdom measured out, along with his ruler”). The subsequent passage suggests that most subsequent human beings receive their life-giving spirits only temporarily from Mikhaēl (“as a loan”), while the people belonging to “the great undominated race” receive the spirit and the soul permanently from Gabriēl (53.18–25). The lacunae in

the following lines make this statement difficult to interpret, but the two gifts given by the two angels (if they are angels) cannot be easily mapped directly onto two groups of people (“the great undominated race” vs. all other races) because Jesus has revealed earlier that the life-giving spirit departs even from someone in the saved race at death (43.16–23). That is, even the great undominated race receives the spirit “as a loan.” The race or children of Adam who face mortality imposed upon them by Saklas and his angels in this realm include all human beings, but god has made *gnōsis* available to “Adam and those with him” as a means of becoming free of the rulers’ domination (54.8–12). Therefore, one can anticipate a division among the descendants of Adam between those who take advantage of that *gnōsis* and those who do not.

That division in Adam’s race appears at the end of the dialogues. In his response to Judas’s final question, Jesus begins his answer with the destruction of “the entire race of Adam, the earthly man” (56.4–6) and concludes it with the exaltation of the fruit (possibly) of “the great race of Adam” (57.10–12). While the former race belongs to the human being who is “earthly” and “mortal” (56.10–11), the latter race, which is “prior to heaven, the earth, and the angels, . . . exists through the aeons” (57.13–15). The former remains enslaved to the mortality that results from Adam’s creation from earth by Saklas and his angels, while the latter will be exalted thanks to its solidarity with the immortal race that has existed in the upper realm from before the creation of this cosmos and its ruling angels. The former is likely “the corruptible race,” while the latter is “the mighty and incorruptible race” (42.11–14). Nonetheless, both of these races are “of Adam” because both of their fates are potential in the first human being, who was molded from earth by the lower angels but who embodies the promise of participation in the heavenly Adamas, “the perfect human being” (35.3–4). That twofold potential comes to expression in the prologue: Jesus “performed signs and great wonders for the salvation of humanity” even as “some were [walking] in the way of righteousness and others were walking in their transgression” (33.7–13). Genealogical descent from Adam—that is, membership in his race—does not determine beforehand the ultimate fates of individual human beings; rather, it makes the two differing fates available to them during their limited life spans. Not without reason, then, does one modern commentator call the race of Adam

a “third” or “intermediate” group between the holy race and the races of human beings (Devoti 2012, 120–21).

Among other gnostic works, the racial terminology of the *Revelation of Adam* most closely resembles that of *Judas*. Unlike our gospel, however, the *Revelation* elaborates a narrative of primeval times that differentiates religious groups by genealogical descent from separate ancestors, and yet it too includes the possibility of movement from one race to another. In the *Revelation* the saved people or their primordial counterparts are “the great race (*genea*)” (65.8), the “other race,” “the race of these people” (71.19–24), “the undominated race” (82.19–20), and “the race of Those People” (83.1). Outsiders are “the races” (70.18) and “all the races of the human beings” (85.9). In *Judas* the races of the stars misuse Jesus’s name and sin in his name (39.11–17, 55.10–11), and we read in the *Revelation* that “all the powers’ angels and races will make use of the name (of Seth?) deceitfully” (77.19–22). The author of the *Revelation of Adam* traces the origins and descents of these diverse races from Seth, Noah, and the sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japhtheth), providing genealogies for Jews (Shem), Gentiles (Ham and Japhtheth), and contemporary gnostics (Seth). Yet birth is not wholly determinative for racial identity and thus for salvation or damnation because four hundred thousand people leave the descendants of Ham and Japhtheth and become sojourners with “the undominated race,” that is, become descendants of Seth by adoption. The adoption metaphor does not disrupt the work’s ethnic reasoning of racial descent, but finds the possibility of fluidity within its rhetoric of genealogical fixity (L. Martin 1990; Brakke 2002, 52–54).

Unlike the *Revelation of Adam* (and the *Secret Book According to John* as well), *The Gospel of Judas* lacks any narrative of or references to lines of genealogical descent to support a genetic or highly fixed understanding of the races of which it speaks. It refers to descent from Adam in a way that suggests the potential for both mortality and salvation among his race or children. A race that belongs to Seth exists only in the higher realm. The more strictly biological term “seed” (*sperma*) appears in a reference not to a “seed of Seth,” but to a seed belonging to Judas (46.5–7). It is unlikely that this seed indicates a claim to or attribution of descent from Judas; probably it suggests similarity to Judas, being of the same (mortal) kind as he.

As Buell’s work and the gospel’s polemical emphasis on judgment would lead us to expect, however, fixity is not absent from the gospel’s ethnic

reasoning. In one fragmentary passage, Jesus appears to differentiate the great and holy race from other races in terms of its origin: “[that race] does not come from . . . but it is from the race of . . .” (37.8–16). When the disciples ask to be cleansed of their sins and helped by Jesus, Jesus responds with parabolic sayings that restrict the possibility of salvation to the elect, and he asserts that he was sent “not to the corruptible race,” but only “to the mighty and incorruptible race” (41.15–42.14). He goes on to suggest to Judas in a highly fragmentary passage that “the remaining races of the human beings” result from the sowing of corruptible wisdom by the rulers, so that their salvation is “impossible” (43.25–44.7). These passages, which occur during Jesus’s conversations with the disciples or follow upon them, deploy more fixed conceptions of race possibly to exclude from salvation completely the disciples, the leaders that they represent, and their most zealous followers. Like the elect in other Jewish and Christian works of apocalyptic eschatology, the members of the holy race represent the only beneficiaries of divine aid, while the damned are closely tied to the doomed cosmic enemies of true divinity. The rhetoric of fixity serves the purpose of judgment: those who have worshiped Saklas and other ruling deities have demonstrated their flawed character and will not receive salvation.

In general, however, *genea* functions in a broad and sweeping way to distinguish between the single “holy race” that rightly worships the one true god and the multiple “races of the human beings” that wrongly sacrifice to the false god Saklas and his angels. Religious practice rather than biological descent defines these races. The gospel pronounces stern judgment on the corrupt races, their human leaders, and their angelic and astral rulers, but the readers of the gospel are not left without the possibility of change. They can obey Jesus’s command and “desist from [sacrifices of animals]” (41.1–3), that is, stop worshipping Saklas.

C. Eucharist, Sacrifice, and Priesthood: Intra-Christian Polemic

In addition to pronouncing judgment on wayward cosmic rulers and sinful human races, *The Gospel of Judas* fiercely criticizes the disciples of Jesus other than Judas. The true objects of that criticism, however, are the leaders of other Christian groups in the author’s milieu. Despite references to Judea (33.22) and to the suffering of the human Jesus as occurring “tomorrow”

(56.6–8), the dialogues take place in an indeterminate space and time of uncertain relationship to the basic narrative of Jesus’s ministry and death shared by the generally known gospels (Introduction III.B). The disciples observe a meal referred to as a eucharist, and in their dream they see themselves presiding as priests over a multitude making sacrifice in a temple. These scenes find their context within the practice of some Christian communities of the second century rather than in the ministry of Jesus. Similar anachronisms in the canonical gospels (e.g., Matt 18, John 9) allow historians to hypothesize how the authors of those works addressed their social and religious contexts. Likewise, our gospel’s negative portrayal of the disciples invites consideration of precisely what our author found objectionable in the beliefs and practices of other second-century Christians. Although it is possible that our author criticizes enthusiasm for martyrdom, it seems more likely that he rejects the observance and understanding of the eucharist as a sacrifice offered to the god of Israel, analogous both to the sacrifices once offered in the Jerusalem temple and to the sacrificial death of Jesus. Most historians are skeptical that first- and second-century Christians who used the language of sacrifice, priesthood, and altar in connection with the eucharist actually considered it an atoning sacrifice that repeats the sacrifice of Jesus, but *Judas* suggests that their rhetoric could be understood that way. Our author rejects a sacrificial eucharist made in Jesus’s name as offered to the wrong god and thus as spiritually deadly to its participants.

The elements of the gospel’s criticism of the disciples cluster around their ritual(s) and their god. The disciples’ eucharist of bread-breaking, which appears to be “training for godliness,” is ridiculous because it blesses a false god (33.22–34.11). The disciples do not have the correct knowledge (*gnōsis*) of Jesus, and their ignorance makes them irritated, angry, and foolish (34.11–25). Nonetheless, in their dream they act as priests, presiding over sacrifices in a building that bears Jesus’s name. Although they fast and act deferentially to one another, they commit a multitude of sins, including murder of children and sex with other men. In so doing, they lead astray their followers, who are the true victims of their sacrifices (38.1–40.2). Each disciple has his own star among those deceptive rulers (42.7–9), and as a group they rule over certain domains (“aeons”) (37.14–16). To be sure, the depiction of the disciples is not entirely negative. After Jesus’s condemnation, they appropriately ask to be cleansed of their sins and to be

helped by Jesus, but Jesus appears to turn away their requests (41.9–42.22). After this point the eleven disciples disappear from the gospel, except for a likely reference to them as “those who offer sacrifice to Saklas” in Jesus’s discussion of the end times (56.13–14) and their possible presence at Jesus’s final ascent into a luminous cloud (57.24–25). Within the gospel’s narrative world, these elements suggest that because the disciples worship Saklas, the god of Israel, rather than the invisible spirit, the true god that sent Jesus, they participate in and administer the rule of Saklas, his lower angels, and the stars. Their sacrificial worship of Saklas causes their followers to die rather than live. Less certain is how this depiction corresponds to the second-century author’s social and religious context.

Some commentators have suggested that the author criticizes the valorization of martyrdom as a sacrifice to or for the creator god as the father of Jesus Christ (Irsinchi, Jenott, and Townsend 2006; Pagels and King 2007; Creech 2012; Moss 2012, 161; Niederer Saxon 2017, 110–19; cf. Devoti 2012, 105). In the most complete statement of this position, Pagels and King (2007, 49–50) argue that *Judas* condemns not martyrs or martyrdom itself, but the idea that god commands the deaths of Jesus and his followers as a sacrifice to him. The disciples’ dream reveals “a stunning contradiction: that while Christians refuse to practice sacrifice, many of them bring sacrifice right back into the center of Christian worship—by claiming that Jesus’ death is a sacrifice for human sin, and then by insisting that Christians who die as martyrs are sacrifices pleasing to God” (59). In support of this view, Pagels and King point to Ignatius of Antioch’s hope that, when he is martyred, “I will be found to be god’s sacrifice (*thusia theou*)” (*Rom.* 4.2), and to his comparison of his destroyed body to the bread of the eucharist (*Rom.* 4.1) (53–54). They cite also the responses that Christians such as Irenaeus and Tertullian offer to Christians who do not share their enthusiasm for martyrdom; the existence of such Christian critics of martyrdom is confirmed by the Nag Hammadi works *The Testimony of Truth* and *Apocalypse of Peter* (55–56, 71–74). According to *Judas*, the crucifixion of Jesus is not a sacrifice to an angry god that must be appeased, but a demonstration that “the death of the body is not the end of life, but only a step into the infinite” (82). When Judas hands Jesus over, he is “only giving over to the angelic rulers what already belongs to them,” that is, the body, which is not the true self (King 2009, 37). This line of interpretation contextualizes the gospel’s antisacrificial rhetoric within

second- and third-century debates among Christians over the value and significance of martyrdom, in which some authors depicted martyrdom as a sacrifice that both imitates Jesus's sacrificial death and conforms to the sacrifice of the eucharist.

Several considerations argue against the martyrdom hypothesis, however, or at least against martyrdom as the gospel's primary concern. According to the disciples' dream, leaders of the church are not sacrificed; instead, they preside over the sacrifices of their followers, among whom women and children are highlighted. Yet church leaders (e.g., Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Pothinus of Lyons) were prominent targets for persecution, and child martyrs appear to have been rare, even unknown during the second century (van Os 2009, 375–78; Nicklas 2013, 137–38). The Roman government is completely absent from the gospel, and the Romans' role in the crucifixion of Jesus goes unmentioned. In general, no outsiders persecute Christians; instead, the disciples persecute Judas, according to his vision (van Os 2009, 369; Nicklas 2013, 137). The dream's depiction of a "multitude" going to their deaths, so that the altar is full or ablaze, does not correspond to the sporadic nature of persecution in the second century; it inflates the number of those killed and exaggerates the martyrological zeal of Christian leaders, who expressed ambivalence about excessive enthusiasm for martyrdom, especially volunteering for it (van Os 2009, 375; Nicklas 2013, 134–37). Such exaggeration of persecution is typical of apocalyptic works (e.g., Revelation in the New Testament), and the great number of sacrificial victims in the disciples' dream more likely reflects the author's view of his rivals as the "majority church" rather than absolute numbers of people. Yet it still suggests that nearly all participants in the rival communities were in danger of death—except for their leaders. If martyrdom was the author's polemical target, then he could have shaped the dream's imagery and Jesus's interpretations of it far more effectively. To be sure, the author doubtless would reject an interpretation of martyrdom that valued it as a sacrifice to the god of Israel, but the gospel's symbolism does not suggest that martyrdom was his primary interest. That interest, most commentators agree, appears to have been Christian ritual, especially its sacrificial meaning, its leadership, and the god to which it was directed.

That consensus still leaves open which ritual is in view and to precisely what about that ritual the author objects. Van Os (2009, 379–83), for instance, argues that the work concerns baptism, which Judas asks about

specifically and refers to as being performed in Jesus's name (55.23–56.1; cf. Acts 2:38 etc.), just like the sacrifice in the disciples' dream. According to Paul, believers die in baptism, which he associates with Jesus's death (Rom 6:4–5, Col 2:12). Moreover, polemic concerning baptism is generally more frequent in Valentinian and so-called gnostic literature than that concerning the eucharist or prayer (Koschorke 1978, 142–48). The *Revelation of Adam* (84.17–23) provides a vivid example of gnostic criticism of the baptismal practices of other Christians, and Epiphanius reports that the fourth-century Archontics, who appear to have taught a version of the gnostic myth, “curse and reject baptism” (*Pan.* 40.2.6).

Despite these and other arguments, however, most scholars agree that it is rather the eucharist that is in view: it too is mentioned by name; the disciples are portrayed as sharing a meal; and second-century authors use sacrificial terminology to refer to it and explain it. Interpreters nonetheless disagree about the gospel's specific objection(s) to the eucharist. Possibly, the author considers his opponents' eucharist as being too Jewish when it should construct “a new and holy race that supersedes that of the Jews” (Townsend 2012, 163–65). Or it is offered to the wrong god by corrupt ministers (F. Williams 2008, 376). The gospel may be attacking the sacrificial ideology that some Christians associated with the eucharist (Dunderberg 2016, 504–5). Alternatively, a sacrificial theology may not be in view, but simply the misdirected giving of thanks to the creator of this world (Schmid 2012a, 108; Nicklas 2013) or an improper invocation of “the divine Name” (Rouwhorst 2010, 624). The author may oppose the separation of the breaking of and thanksgiving over the bread from a regular meal and the corresponding development of a “sacramental understanding” of the bread ritual (Heininger 2010). Perhaps the problem is not the eucharist itself or any particular interpretation of it, but “the clergy's claim to unique authority in the churches” based on their alleged succession from the apostles (Jenott 2011, 55–56, 69). Lying behind some of these different hypotheses is the question of whether second-century Christians understood the eucharist to be a sacrifice, especially one associated with the death of Jesus, and whether *Judas* reflects and opposes such an understanding. For example, in the gospel the term “eucharist” appears only in reference to the disciples' meal of bread during Jesus's first appearance; should that meal (“eucharist”) be identified with the sacrificial scene in the disciples' dream, or are they two separate rituals? Certainty and precision

are difficult to derive from a terse, allusive narrative and a symbolic dream, but we can make a start by turning first to the question of whether and how the eucharist, sacrifice, Jesus's death, and priesthood fit together in the gospel itself.

Several features suggest that the disciples' dream of sacrifice both looks backward to their eucharistic meal and looks forward to Judas's sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus in fact offers two interpretations of the dream's symbolism: the first, in the present tense, applies the dream to sacrifices that the disciples currently perform (39.7–40.2); the second, in the future tense, applies it to a sacrifice during eschatological events leading to “the last day” (40.2–26). At both the eucharist and the dream the disciples exhibit behavior that can be characterized as spiritual exercises—“training for godliness (*mntroute = eusebia*)” (33.25–26) and prolonged fasting (38.14–15)—and in Jesus's eschatological interpretation the sinful people are ironically characterized as “the races of the pious” (<n>*genea n-[n]eusebēs*) (40.6–7). The disciples respond both to Jesus at the eucharist and to the dream by becoming agitated (*štortr*; 34.24–25, 39.6–7). Jesus's criticism focuses on “your god” (34.10–11) or “the god that you serve” (39.22). The activities of sacrifice and eating go together, for the former usually entailed the latter. The opening eucharistic meal may look like a “harmless incident,” but in the dream it “is expanded into a horrific vision of where the service the disciples render to their inferior god will ultimately lead” (Dunderberg 2016, 504). Likewise, the disciples' dream of sacrifice to Saklas anticipates or is analogous to Judas's sacrifice of the human Jesus. In Jesus's eschatological interpretation of the dream, it signifies end-time events that include the acceptance of a single sacrifice from the hands of a single priest (40. 18–22), which may refer to the sacrifice of the human Jesus, which Jesus later describes as occurring among the events of the end (56.6–22). In that later description, Jesus places in parallel positions “those who offer sacrifice to Saklas” and “you,” that is, Judas, “for you will sacrifice the human being who bears me” (56.13–22). These clues indicate that the sacrificial activity in the disciples' dream has two references: in its contemporary meaning it refers to the eucharist, in which Christians give thanks to god and share bread; in its eschatological meaning it refers to events at the end, which include the crucifixion of Jesus's human bearer. The author criticizes an understanding of the eucharist as a sacrifice made to the god of Israel, over which leaders who claim to be both priests and

successors to the disciples preside, and which takes its meaning in part from the death of Jesus.

A consensus of historians of early Christian worship, however, holds that Christians did not combine into a single eucharistic theology the concepts that the eucharistic elements are a sacrifice, that the eucharistic sacrifice repeats or reenacts the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and that the presiders over the eucharist are priests until the third century, when Cyprian of Carthage (among others) exemplifies this understanding (Rouwhorst 2010; Schmid 2012a, 85–86; Bradshaw 2004). Nonetheless, sources from the first and second centuries contain the ingredients for such an understanding, and *Judas* suggests either that its author saw it as an implication of attested rhetoric or that some Christians did hold such a view, even if other surviving sources do not put all the pieces together in as explicit a manner as Cyprian does. Paul, the earliest attested Christian author, understood Christ's death as an atoning sacrifice (Rom 3:24–25; *pace* Stowers 1994, 206–15) but subordinates that theme to the defeat of sin, death, and other cosmic powers. Paul knew the tradition that just before his death Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, through which Christians “proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:23–26). The so-called narrative of institution may not have been recited at all or even any eucharists of the first two centuries, but it is widely attested and was therefore doubtless widely known (Matt 26:26–28//Mark 14:22–24//Luke 22:19–20; cf. Rouwhorst 2010, 613). The first-century author of Hebrews, whom many early Christians took to be Paul, depicted Christ's death as a sacrifice analogous to and superior to those made in the destroyed Jerusalem temple (9:23–10:18). By the end of the second century the author of the *Acts of Peter* portrays Paul as celebrating the eucharist, referred to as “the sacrifice” (*sacrificium*), and telling a sinful Christian that when she receives the eucharist, she is “approaching god's altar (*altarium dei*)” (2.1–3). *The Gospel of Judas* and its polemic against a sacrificial eucharist lie along one of the meandering paths that led from the Paul of 1 Corinthians proclaiming Christ's death in the Lord's Supper to the Paul of the *Acts of Peter* offering the eucharist as a sacrifice at an altar. The sparse evidence does not permit historians to reconstruct all those paths; we can only glimpse surviving points along some of them.

One of the earliest such points is the *Didache*, whose author writes, “When you have gathered (*sunachthentes*) on the Sunday of the Lord, break

bread and give thanks (*eucharistēsate*), having confessed your faults beforehand, so that your sacrifice (*thusia*) might be pure” (14.1). The language here closely approximates that used of the disciples in our gospel’s meal scene: Jesus finds them “gathered, seated, and giving thanks over the bread” (33.22–34.2). According to the Didachist, the participants should settle any quarrels, lest “your sacrifice” be defiled, and he identifies the eucharist as the “pure sacrifice” that god requests in Mal 10:11–14 (Did. 14.2–3), the earliest of several early Christian invocations of this passage, to which *Judas* probably alludes as well (40.19–22). Although some scholars have argued that the Didachist refers to the bread (and thus the implied wine and/or water) as the assembly’s sacrifice, others claim that he has in mind only the prayer of thanksgiving. More likely the author does not limit the idea of sacrifice to any particular item or aspect of the meal but considers the entire event of gathering, breaking bread, and giving thanks to constitute the pure sacrifice that god desires (Niederwimmer 1998, 196–97; McGowan 2012, 197). This passage does not connect the sacrifice to Jesus’s death, nor does it have a propitiatory character; rather, it depicts the eucharist as continuing the sacrificial activity of the Jerusalem temple and as maintaining the purity of the community (McGowan 2012, 197–98). That purity depends not only on confession of sins and reconciliation with neighbors, but also on the integrity of leaders: “Therefore” (*oun*), the author continues, “appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord” (15.1).

Such leaders are important as well to the Roman author of *1 Clement*. He claims that bishops and deacons are priests when they “make the offerings” (40.4–5); worthy bishops are “those who have offered the gifts blamelessly and in a holy manner” (44.4). This work was “unique within Christian literature of the first two centuries” in its priestly and sacrificial imagery (Bradshaw 2004, 86)—until the appearance of *The Gospel of Judas*. The author’s rhetoric does not work metaphorically or analogically, despite what some modern readers have suggested (Schmid 2012a, 94–95): he never uses “like” or “as”; he simply invokes the Bible’s assignment of specific tasks to “the high priest,” “the priests,” “the Levites,” and “the layperson” (*laikos anthrōpos*) (40.4–5). The basis for the identification of the bishop as a priest lies in the Septuagint, where *episkopos* is sometimes used for priests, especially leading ones (Num 4:16; 2 Chr 34:12, 17; 2 Esd 21:9, 22) (Bobertz 1992, 185). Pseudo-Clement elsewhere invokes the Psalms’ use of

sacrifice to refer to “a broken spirit” or “praise” (18.16–17, 35.12, 52.3–4, quoting Pss 49[50]:14, 50:19[51:17]; cf. Barn. 2.10). But he calls also Christian communal rituals sacrifices: “Not offered anywhere, brothers, are sacrifices of perpetuity, or of prayers, or concerning sin and transgression, but in Jerusalem alone, and even there it is not offered in every place, but before the sanctuary, at the altar, when what is offered has been inspected for blemishes by the high priest and the previously mentioned ministers” (41.2). These sacrifices are not simply prayers, a contrite spirit, or a holy lifestyle, but site-specific rituals that take place under the supervision of a high priest. The bishops and deacons were originally appointed by and now are the successors of the apostles, just as the successors of Aaron were appointed by Moses (chs. 42–43). Although some historians have claimed that the offerings of chapters 40 and 44 refer not to worship but to charitable activity, “the distinction between the cultic and the economic does not apply in the formative period of Christianity, because the liturgy is a point at which economic goods are delivered” (Stewart 2014, 62). To be sure, Pseudo-Clement did not write his letter to articulate a sacrificial theology of the eucharist; rather, he sought to promote good order in response to factionalism in the church at Corinth (Schmid 2012a, 94–95; Nicklas 2013, 143). But he did draw upon an ideology of the community’s ritual identity for that purpose; that ideology included “a conscious patterning of the hierarchy after traditions of the Temple and priesthood of ancient Israel,” along with the concepts “of sacred space (the altar), the personal holiness of priests, and the necessary performance of sacrifice” (Bobertz 1992, 189). We do not know how many Christians beyond the author’s individual community in Rome shared that ideology—the later Roman Justin Martyr may not have—but it could have been familiar to the author of *Judas*.

As Ignatius of Antioch made his way to Rome for his anticipated trial and martyrdom, he wrote letters that apply sacrificial imagery to Christian worship in general and the eucharist in particular. In his epistle to the Christians in Rome, he prayed that through his martyrdom “I might be found to be pure bread (*katharos artos*)” and “god’s sacrifice” (*theou thusia*) (Rom. 4.1–2), implicitly equating martyrdom, eucharist, and sacrifice. Even more relevant to *Judas* are his references to a single “altar” (*thusiastērion*) in his exhortations to unity with the one bishop and the bishop’s worship community (Eph. 5.2, Mag. 7.2, Trall. 7.2, Rom. 2.2,

Phld. 4.1). For example, “Let no one be deceived: unless someone is within the altar (*entos tou thusiastēriou*) he lacks the bread of god (*artos tou theou*)” (*Eph.* 5.2); “Take care, therefore, to participate in one eucharist, for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup for unity of his blood, one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the presbyterate and deacons” (*Phld.* 4.1). Because a worshiper should be “within the altar” (cf. *Trall.* 7.2), Ignatius does not use the term to refer to a table at the eucharist, but to the community or to their shared ritual space (cf. Bradshaw 2004, 87–88; McGowan 2012, 199; Schmid 2012a, 95–96; Nicklas 2013, 143–44). The terminology of sacrificial worship was flexible in its application to ritual that took place not in a specially constructed temple, but in private buildings: according to *Judas*, the altar that the disciples see in their dream is their god (39.20–22). And yet ancient people knew what happened at an altar—sacrifice. Ignatius insists that the bread and wine of the eucharist really are Christ’s body and blood (*Phld.* 4.1, *Smyrn.* 6.2, *Rom.* 7.3), but he does not explicitly identify the eucharist as a sacrifice of that body and blood; the possibility remains only implicit in his references to an altar and in his association of martyrdom with sacrifice, the eucharist, and imitation of Christ’s death in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

In Rome itself Justin Martyr’s famous description of Christian worship in his *First Apology* lacks the priestly and sacrificial imagery of *1 Clement*, but something closer to it appears in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, where he connects the eucharist to the suffering of Jesus. In the *Apology* Justin does report that the term “eucharist” refers to the food (*trophē*) that Christians eat at the ritual; when that food has been “eucharistized,” it is the flesh and blood of Jesus and provides nourishment to those who consume it. He repeats a short version of the so-called words of institution, taken from the apostles’ “memoirs,” and says that Jesus “eucharistized” the cup when he said, “This is my blood” (*1 Apol.* 65.5, 66.1–3). It seems reasonable to think that the “presider” (*proestōs*) said these words as well when he eucharistized the elements (*1 Apol.* 67.5). This passage’s understanding of the eucharist appears incarnational and nutritional, so to speak: just as the Son transformed himself into flesh and blood, so too the bread and wine in the eucharist transform the Christian’s flesh and blood. Matters are somewhat different in the *Dialogue*, where Justin deploys Mal 1:10–14 to argue that god no longer accepts the sacrifices of Jews, but now receives the pure sacrifice of the Christian eucharist. The bread and cup of the eucharist,

Justin writes, are “sacrifices” (*thusiai*) that gentile Christians offer in every place (41.3, 117.1); Jesus required Christians to perform these sacrifices “for the remembrance of the suffering (*eis anamnēsin tou pathous*) that he endured for the souls of the people who are cleansed from all wickedness” (41.1). At the eucharist Christians partake of “solid and liquid food, in which is also remembered the suffering that the son of god endured on their account” (117.3). Because they make such sacrifices, Christians constitute “the true high-priestly race (*genos*) of god,” who “receives sacrifices from no one, except through his priests” (116.3). For Justin the eucharist is a sacrifice in which Christians remember the suffering of Jesus (cf. Schmid 2012a, 97–98), which is admittedly only one aspect of Justin’s understanding of the ritual. It seems a fine distinction to argue that “it is the suffering not the sacrificial death as such that is recalled” (Bradshaw 2004, 84), when the suffering that one remembers at the eucharist led to that death and was on behalf of people who are cleansed of their sins.

Irenaeus of Lyons considered Jesus’s death to be a sacrifice for sin (*Haer.* 4.5.4), but his soteriology played down atonement through the Son’s death in favor of recapitulation and the granting of immortal life and incorruption to mortal and corrupt human beings through the Son’s incarnation. Therefore, although Jesus “redeemed us through his blood” and the cup of the eucharist is “communion with his blood,” the eucharist primarily grants “regeneration” and “incorruptibility”; Christ’s body and blood “nourish” (*auget*) the body and blood of those who commune (5.2.2). Nonetheless, Irenaeus was eager to demonstrate the goodness of the material creation and the continuity between the Old and New Testaments in response to his gnostic and Valentinian opponents, and thus he too cited Mal 1:10–11 to argue that the eucharist is the pure sacrifice that god accepts in place of and in fulfillment of those that the Jews used to offer in the temple (4.17–18). It is an offering of “first-fruits,” a demonstration of gratitude and abundance and as such “based in the abiding cycles of nature itself, as well as being a successor to the more historically-specific Israelite offerings” (McGowan 2012, 203). Irenaeus, then, stresses the created materiality of the sacrificed bread and wine (and the flesh and blood they are) but spiritualizes the more cultic elements of sacrificial imagery: incense is “the prayer of the saints” (4.17.6), and the altar is “in heaven” (4.18.6). The altar appears also when he writes, “In fact, priests are all the disciples of the Lord who inherit here neither fields nor houses, but always serve (*serviunt*) god and the altar”

(4.8.3). Although the statement seems general in scope, Irenaeus is commenting on the story of Jesus's disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1–8 parr.) and thus appears to have in mind specifically the original disciples. This passage sounds more like our gospel, in which the disciples are priests who “receive the offerings at the altar,” which Jesus identifies as “the god that you serve (*šmše*)” (39.18–22) (Nicklas 2013, 144).

No early Christian work from the first or second century contains the complete package of eucharist, sacrifice, priesthood, apostolic succession, and Jesus's death against which *The Gospel of Judas* polemicizes, but all the pieces of its vision can be found in the literature that I have surveyed. The eucharist as a sacrifice, its leaders as priests and successors to the original disciples, orientation to an altar, the death of Jesus, and all this directed toward the god of Israel in a manner analogous to sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple—these elements appear in Christian works, most of which share a connection with Rome (*1 Clement*, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, even Irenaeus). Therefore, the gospel's polemic can be understood as directed at all of these elements together and not, for example, limited only to the clergy's claims to exclusive leadership or to the direction of worship to the god of Israel. Nor is it necessary to assign the gospel to the third or fourth century. The sacrificial understanding of worship that *Judas* criticizes did not characterize all Christians in all places (and probably not even most Christians in most places); rather, it belonged to Christians in the author's context, whether that was Rome or some other location. Or at least so he thought: possibly the author himself put these elements together from his reading of works like the ones I have discussed, although the vehemence of his rhetoric suggests personal contact with his opponents. My interest here has been in establishing the plausibility of and context for the sacrificial theology and ritual that *Judas* portrays, but this relatively new piece of evidence may suggest also reconsideration of the scholarly consensus about sacrifice, priesthood, and the eucharist in the second century.

D. The Thirteenth Demon: The Character and Role of Judas

The Gospel of Judas begins with the announcement that Jesus spoke with its titular character, Judas Iscariot, who presumably received secret information about judgment, and it ends with the report that Judas took

money and handed Jesus over to Jewish scribes, whom he answered “as they wished.” These two activities of Judas—receiving information from Jesus and handing Jesus over—must be linked. That is, the dialogues that Jesus has with Judas explain his final act: why Judas had to do it, why he was the person to do it, and what the consequences of his doing it will be. This framing means that Judas’s act of betrayal and thus Jesus’s death can scarcely have no significance. These questions preoccupy the earlier gospels’ depictions of Judas and his act as well, but the author of *Judas* must have considered their perspectives incomplete or simply wrong. Certainly, the disciples and the later Christians whom they represent appear to have misunderstood the death of Jesus and Judas’s role in it, for they have formed communities devoted to sacrificing to the false god Saklas in the name of Jesus. Instead, our gospel teaches that the sacrifice of the human being who bears Jesus was the sinful but necessary final sacrifice that leads to the dissolution of the current world order and the destruction of the lower angels and stars that rule it. Judas was chosen to perform it because, unlike the other disciples, he understood Jesus’s true identity and source. To prepare him for his task and its consequences, Jesus reveals to Judas “the mysteries of the kingdom” and “the error of the stars” (45.24–46.2). Judas’s role means that he will be separated from the other disciples, will be persecuted and cursed by them and others, will not enter the higher realm with the members of the holy race, and will instead rule the reorganized cosmos in its leading thirteenth position. Despite the gospel’s title, this is not good news for Judas, but an occasion for groaning.

Before and after the publication of this gospel, scholars have offered detailed studies of the character of Judas in the gospels of the New Testament, in early Christian literature, and in medieval and modern culture (e.g., Paffenroth 2001; Gubar 2009). Several studies of *Judas* provide thorough analyses of the differences among the canonical gospels’ presentations of Judas as the background to the new gospel (e.g., Ehrman 2006, 13–34; Pratscher 2010; Devoti 2012, 25–46). Much of the earliest scholarship on *Judas* made the role and character of its title figure the gospel’s primary features; interpreters debated especially whether the gospel rehabilitates and presents as knowledgeable and virtuous a figure whom the earlier gospels and other Christians vilified. The gospel does seem to assume that readers know what Judas Iscariot did, and its polemical rhetoric relies in part on the already existing negative view of him among

Christians; the incipit, for example, pairs “judgment” and Judas in a way that would have made sense to potential readers. Still, appreciation of the gospel requires knowledge of only the basics of Judas as a New Testament character. According to Mark, Jesus the Son of Man must suffer, die, and rise again, “as is written for him”; yet there is still “woe” for the one who betrays him: “It would have been better for that one not to have been born” (14:21). Nonetheless, Mark provides no explicit motive for Judas’s betrayal of Jesus, nor does he report what happened to him. Matthew and Luke filled those gaps: in Matthew, Judas wants money (26:14–16) and later commits suicide in remorse (27:3–10), while in Luke–Acts Satan enters Judas (Luke 22:3), who later falls and bursts open, expelling his internal organs (Acts 1:18). In all three Synoptic Gospels Judas receives money (cf. Mark 14:11, Luke 22:5), as he does in our gospel (58.24–25). Satan enters Judas in the Fourth Gospel as well, but it is Jesus who orchestrates all the events of arrest, suffering, and death, including the work of Judas, whom Jesus exhorts, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Judas then leaves the room where Jesus and the disciples were eating and goes out into the night (John 13:26–30)—where the reader finds him in the epilogue of our gospel (Emmel 2008, 34–35).

As wicked as they consider Judas’s betrayal of Jesus to have been, the authors of the canonical gospels still give him a lesser role in Jesus’s arrest and execution than they give to Jewish leaders; the chief priests, the scribes, and/or the Pharisees are those who take the lead, even more so than Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who actually had Jesus executed. The same is true of our author, who recycles passages from the earlier gospels to create a brief concluding narrative that sounds very much like theirs (58.6–26). Here too Jewish leaders take center stage, as a disturbance among “the Jews” introduces the chief priests grumbling and some of the scribes seeking to arrest Jesus. The scribes approach Judas and speak with him, but what Judas says is not reported; we are told only that Judas “answered them as they wished” before he took money and handed Jesus over to them. The Jewish scribes’ desire to arrest Jesus drives the action, which Judas follows. The author does not say what if anything Judas wished; presumably his motivation is to be found in what Jesus has revealed to him in the preceding dialogues.

In the final section of the dialogues, Jesus explains that in handing him over Judas “will sacrifice the human being who bears me” (56.20–22).

While that sacrifice will not harm the divine Jesus (56.9–11), it will lead to dramatic change in the cosmos—defeat, enervation, groaning, and destruction for the oppressive rulers of this realm, but exaltation for the saved “great race of Adam” (57.1–15). Probably, Jesus also refers to this sacrifice in his second, eschatological interpretation of the disciples’ dream: having presented a series of sinful human beings, “the stars that bring everything to completion” announce “to the races of human beings, ‘Lo, god has accepted your sacrifice from the hands of a priest.’” That god is “the deacon of error” who gives orders and “presides over the entirety,” that is, Saklas. Then “on the last day they”—Saklas and his stars—“will be put to shame” (40.17–26). Judas is most likely the priest who offers this final sacrifice to Saklas in the form of the human Jesus. This act is by no means virtuous: it represents the culmination of human sins performed in the name of Jesus, and the gospel has nothing positive to say about sacrifices or the priests who offer them. Nonetheless, it appears to be a necessary step toward the downfall of Saklas and his fellow rulers and of the system of domination and sacrifice that they control.

Judas is the one to perform this act, not because he is more or less virtuous than the other disciples, but because he knows what they do not—who Jesus is and where he comes from (35.14–21). In contrast, the other disciples mistakenly believe that Jesus is the son of the creator god, Saklas (34.11–13). Judas may even already know about the existence of a saved “race” (36.7–9). He has the *gnōsis* (*sooun*) that the disciples lack (34.13–18, 35.15). It is not explained how Judas has this superior knowledge, but it is the reason why Jesus separates him from the others to tell him “the mysteries of the kingdom”—“because he (Jesus) knew that he (Judas) was thinking about the rest of the exalted matters as well” (35.21–25). Jesus’s revelations to Judas build on the knowledge that he already has, and they include the necessity of Judas’s sacrifice of the human being who bears Jesus and its significance for the downfall of the rulers. Unlike similar figures in other dialogue gospels, Judas’s role as a hearer of the revelation is not to transmit that revelation to others or to serve as the model for readers of the gospel (Introduction III.A); rather, he receives information that should motivate him to hand Jesus over. To be sure, thanks to the dialogues, readers of the gospel also gain this information about the lower rulers, the holy race and other races, and the end times—they are provided a motivation for Judas’s act more substantial than the greed or simple

diabolical inspiration found in other gospels—but the gospel does not attribute to Judas the responsibility for sharing this insight. In contrast, the savior tells John at the end of the *Secret Book*: “I have told you all things, so that you might write them down and transmit them secretly to those who are like you in spirit” (NHC II 31.28–30). Judas may not serve as an authoritative transmitter of revelation, but Jesus’s (mostly) patient instruction of Judas and responses to his questions do not depict Judas as an entirely negative student (Devoti 2012, 122). That he hands Jesus over suggests that he has learned what Jesus wanted him to know.

The characteristics and roles attributed to Judas reflect not only the importance of his task, but also its ambiguity as something wicked but necessary. In general, Jesus twice warns Judas that what he tells him will make him “groan all the more” (35.27, 46.11–12). Judas will be separated from the other disciples—and from their god—and will be replaced among them (35.23–36.4); indeed, the disciples will later stone Judas and persecute him (44.24–45.1). The gospel insists so strongly on this point that it cannot be that Judas’s sacrifice of the human Jesus makes him “the father of proto-orthodox Christianity and its sacrificial theology” (*pace* Painchaud 2008a, 184; Brankaer 2013, 593–94); rather, the disciples and their followers have misunderstood what Judas did. It is not Judas who has developed the eucharist on the basis of his act. On the other hand, Judas has been separated from the holy race as well (46.14–18). Neither saved nor damned, Judas will stand alone, “cursed by the rest of the races” (46.20–22). Set apart from the disciples, that is, “those who offer sacrifices to Saklas,” Judas will not perish with them at the end, but he “will surpass them all” precisely because (“for”) he will sacrifice the human being who bears Jesus (56.12–22). Judas will not surpass the disciples by committing a sin even worse than theirs (although it may be worse), nor by going on high to the kingdom where the holy race will dwell (35.24–26, 46.11–14, 46.25–47.1). Instead, Judas will, in the likeness of his star (55.12–13), ascend to the highest level of the cosmos, the thirteenth aeon (above the twelve), to rule over those who remain in the reorganized realm of chaos and Hades (46.19–24). Replacing the destroyed Nebrō, Saklas, and their angels, Judas will become “the thirteenth *daimōn*” (44.21).

Few words in the gospel have provoked as much scholarly discussion as *daimōn*—and rightly so, for it is an ambiguous word designating ambiguous beings in Greek religion and philosophy of the first two centuries CE. For

most Greek speakers of the period, the daemon was simply an intermediary being, filling in the gap between human beings and the distant gods and handling matters too mundane for the likes of Apollo, Athena, and company. Daemons could be capricious and unpredictable beings, but they were not truly malevolent as a class. The application of the term to Judas must in part indicate this intermediate status: he will exist at a level between that of the higher realm of the invisible spirit, the self-originate, and other immortals and that of whatever races remain after the eschatological destruction that Jesus describes. The range of beings to which the author refers with the term *aggelos* should also caution against an overly negative interpretation of *daimōn* (Introduction IV.A) (Meyer 2009, 67). As ruler in the thirteenth aeon, Judas is neither an angel like those above nor a human being like those below, and *daimōn* provides a convenient way for the author to express the intermediate nature of his identity (S. Petersen 2009, 123–26). On the other hand, there is little if any evidence that at this time any other Jews or Christians used *daimōn* in a purely neutral fashion, certainly not in the gospels that the author of *Judas* knew and consciously supplemented. In New Testament works, originally good angels rebel and fall (Matt 25:41, 2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6, Rev 12:7–9), providing precedent for the application of that term to such rulers as Nebrō, Saklas, and their allies, but demons are consistently hostile to god and his people in early Christian literature. The application of the term to Judas as eschatological ruler must reflect this negative use of the term at least in part.

Jesus laughs as he addresses Judas as the thirteenth demon, indicating that he uses this negative term with some irony. Possibly it refers ironically to the demonization, so to speak, of Judas by “the rest of the races” and especially the Christians represented by the disciples. Or it may reflect Judas’s role as a replacement of such negative rulers as Nebrō and Saklas; perhaps even Judas will have to exercise harsh rule over a region of chaos and corruption. Perhaps Judas is not the only demon; rather, as “thirteenth” suggests, there are twelve other demons, namely, the other disciples (including Judas’s replacement), who have aeons in which they rule as well (37.15–16) (Bermejo Rubio 2012, 65). This last possibility seems the likeliest to me. Whatever negative associations the author invokes with the term *daimōn*, however, interpretation should not put too much weight on its single use by Jesus in a mocking, even teasing way (Schenke Robinson 2009a, 102). Like Peter, the “Satan” of Matthew (16:23) and Mark (8:33),

Judas is destined to play an important but morally ambiguous role in the necessary arrest and crucifixion of Jesus (Schmid 2012a, 102). Moreover, it is not clear how permanent Judas's assignment as ruler of this cosmos will be; perhaps sometime in the distant future, he will, like Saklas before him, complete the time of his kingdom (cf. 53.13–16), but unlike Saklas, he will at last be permitted to ascend to that kingdom that for now he can only see and mourn (cf. Marjanen 2010).

The Gospel of Judas is not the only gnostic work in which the crucifixion of Jesus, among other events, leads to the transformation or destruction of this world and the overthrow of its rulers (COMMENTS 55.23–57.15). Similar scenarios appear in the *Revelation of Adam* and *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, but these works do not show how one should understand the passion narratives of the generally accepted gospels in light of their views of Jesus's death. It has been suggested that Judas's handing over of the human Jesus cannot have a positive role in the gospel's view of the end time because "the idea that a human being could be part of God's salvation plan is completely foreign to Gnostic soteriology" (Schenke Robinson 2011, 118). But on this point, as on so many others, this new gospel challenges what we thought we knew about gnostics and their views. Gnostic Christians, it turns out, had a more diverse mythology and nuanced understandings of god, humanity, and this world than we have often allowed. Above all, they appear to have been more Christian than many historians have imagined.

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TRANSLATION

Incipit

33 ¹The secret report of judgment, in which Jesus spoke with Judas Iscariot during eight days prior to the three days, before he celebrated Passover.

Prologue: The Earthly Ministry of Jesus

⁶When he appeared on earth, he performed signs and great wonders for the salvation of humanity. ¹⁰And while some were [walking] in the way of righteousness and others were walking in their transgression, ¹³the twelve disciples were called, ¹⁵and he began to speak with them about the mysteries that are above the world and the things that will happen until the end. ¹⁸But many a time he would not reveal himself to his disciples; ²⁰instead, you would find him in the midst of the children.

***Four Appearances of Jesus* First Appearance: Judas's Recognition of Jesus**

²²One day he came to his disciples in Judea and found them seated, gathered, and training for godliness. ²⁶When he [. . .] his disciples ³⁴¹gathered, seated, and giving thanks over the bread, [he] laughed.

³But the disciples said to him, “Teacher, why are you laughing at [our] thanksgiving? ⁵What have we done? [This] is what is appropriate.”

⁶He answered and said to them, “I am not laughing at you—you do not do this by your own will. ⁹Rather, by this your god [will] be blessed.”

¹¹They said, “Teacher, it is you [. . .] who are the son of our god.”

¹³Jesus said to them, “How do [you] know me? ¹⁵Truly I say to you, no race from the human beings among you will know me.”

¹⁸When his disciples heard this, [they] began to get irritated and angry and to blaspheme against him in their heart. ²²But when Jesus saw their foolishness, [he said] to them, ²⁴“Why has agitation brought anger (to you)? ²⁵Your god who is within you and [. . .] ³⁵ ¹have become irritated, along with your souls. ²[Let] the one who is [strong] among you people bring forward the perfect human being and also stand before my face.”

⁶And they all said, “We are mighty!” ⁷But their spirit could not dare to stand before him—except for Judas Iscariot. ¹⁰He was able to stand before him, but he could not look him in the eyes. ¹³Instead, he turned his face away.

¹⁴Judas said to him, “I know who you are and where you have come from. ¹⁷You have come from the aeon of the Barbēlō, the immortal (aeon). ¹⁹But as for the one who sent you, its name I am not worthy to proclaim.”

²¹Jesus, because he knew that he was thinking about the rest of the exalted matters as well, said to him, ²³“Separate from them, and I will tell you the mysteries of the kingdom, not so that you might go there, but so that you might groan all the more. ³⁶ ¹For someone else will take your place, so that the twelve [. . .] might be complete in their god.”

⁵And Judas said to him, “What day will you tell me these things? ⁷And (when) will the great day of light dawn for the [. . .] race?” ⁹But when he had said this, Jesus left him.

Second Appearance: The Mighty and Holy Race

¹¹When morning came, he appeared to his disciples, and they said to him, ¹³“Teacher, where did you go? ¹⁴What do you do after you have left us?”

¹⁵Jesus said to them, “I went to another great and holy race.”

¹⁷His disciples said to him, “Lord, what is the great race that is more exalted and holier than we but not in these aeons now?”

²²When Jesus heard these things, he laughed and said to them, ²⁴“Why are you thinking in your heart about the mighty and holy race? ³⁷ ¹Truly I say to you, no offspring [of this] aeon will see [that race], nor will any angelic army of the stars rule over that race, nor will any mortal human offspring be able to go with it. ⁸For [that race] does not come from [. . .]

came into being [. . .] the race of the human beings [. . .] ¹¹but it is from the race of [. . . great] people. [. . .] the powerful authorities [. . .] ¹⁴nor any power [of the aeons] in which you rule.”

¹⁷When his disciples heard these things, they were disturbed in their spirit, each one, and they were at a loss for words.

Third Appearance: The Disciples’ Dream and Its Interpretations

²⁰Jesus came to them on another day, and they said to him, ²²“Teacher, we saw you in a dream, for we saw great dreams [in the] night that passed.”

²⁴[But Jesus said,] “Why [. . .] you hid yourselves?”

³⁸ ¹ For their part, [they said, “We] saw a large building [in which] there were a large altar, ³[and] twelve men who we say are priests, and a name. ⁶A multitude were devoting themselves to that altar ⁹[. . .] the priests [. . .] the offerings. ¹⁰We too were devoting ourselves.”

¹²[Jesus said,] “Of what sort are [. . . ?]”

¹³And they said, “[Some] are fasting for two weeks; ¹⁶others are sacrificing their own children, others their wives, ¹⁸while they are blessing and submitting to one another. ²⁰Others are sleeping with men; others are murdering; ²²others are committing a multitude of sins and lawless deeds. ²⁴And the people who stand [at] the altar [are] invoking your [name]. ³⁹ ¹And because they are engaged in all the labors of their sacrifice, that [altar] becomes full.” ⁴After they had said these things, they fell silent because they were agitated.

⁵Jesus said to them, “Why have you become agitated? ⁷Truly I say to you, all the priests that stand at that altar are invoking my name. ¹¹And even more, I say to you that my name has been written upon this building of the races of the stars by the races of the human beings, ¹⁵and in my name [they] shamefully have planted fruitless trees.”

¹⁸Jesus said to them, “It is you who receive the offerings at the altar that you saw. ²¹That is the god that you serve, and you are the twelve men whom you saw. ²⁵And the cattle that are brought in are the sacrifices that you saw, that is, the multitude that you are leading astray ⁴⁰ at that altar.

²[" . . .] is going to stand, ³and in this way he will use my name; and <the> races of the pious will devote themselves to him. ⁷After him another man will present the [fornicators], ⁹and another will present the killers of children, ¹¹and another, those who sleep with men, those who fast, ¹³and the rest of impurity, lawlessness, and error, ¹⁵and those who say, 'We are equal to angels.' ¹⁷And they are the stars that bring everything to completion. ¹⁸For they have said to the races of the human beings, ¹⁹'Lo, god has accepted your sacrifice from the hands of a priest'—²²that is, the deacon of error, ²³or the lord who gives orders, who presides over the entirety. ²⁵On the last day they will be put to shame."

41 ¹Jesus said [to them,] "Desist from [sacrifices of animals], ³which [. . .] on the altar, ⁴because they are upon your stars and your angels and have already come to completion there. ⁷Therefore, consider them [. . . ,] and let them [become] manifest."

THE SINS OF THE DISCIPLES

⁹His disciples [said . . . "Cleanse] us from our [sins], which we have committed by the deceit of the angels."

¹³Jesus said to them, "It is impossible [. . .] them [. . .] ¹⁵nor [can] a fountain extinguish the [fire] of the [entire] inhabited world, ¹⁷[nor] can a spring in a [. . . give drink to] all the races, except the great one that is destined. ²¹And no single lamp will illumine all the aeons, except the second race, ²⁵nor can a baker feed the entire creation 42 under [heaven]."

¹And [. . .] to them [. . . ,] "Teacher, help us, and [. . .]"

⁵Jesus said to them, "Stop contending with me. ⁷Each of you has his own star [. . .] of the stars will [. . .] what belongs to it [. . .] ¹¹It is not to the corruptible race that I was sent, but to the mighty and incorruptible race. ¹⁴For no enemy has ruled [over] that race, nor one of the stars. ¹⁷Truly I say to you (pl.), the pillar of fire will fall suddenly, ²⁰and that race will not move [by] the stars."

THE RACES OF HUMAN BEINGS

²²And when Jesus had said these things, he left and [took] Judas Iscariot with him. ²⁵He said to him, “The water [. . .] the high mountain [. . .] 43 [. . .] ¹has not come [to water . . .] spring [. . .] tree of [the fruit . . .] of this aeon [. . .] after a time [. . .] ⁶Rather, it has come to water god’s garden and the [. . .] that will endure, ⁸for [it] will not defile the [. . .] of that race, ¹⁰but [it will exist] forever and ever.”

¹¹Judas said to him, “[. . .] me, what fruit does this race possess?”

¹⁴Jesus said, “As for all human races, their souls will die, ¹⁶but as for these, when they have completed the time of the kingdom and the spirit separates from them, ²⁰their bodies will die, but their souls will live and be taken up.”

²³Judas said, “And so what will the remaining races of the human beings do?”

²⁵Jesus said, “It is impossible 44 to sow on a [rock] and get their fruit. ²So too [. . .] the [. . .] sort and corruptible wisdom ⁵[. . .] the hand that created mortal human beings, and their souls go up to the aeons on high. ⁸[Truly] I say to you (pl.), [no . . .] or angel [or] power will be able to see those [. . .] that the [great] holy race [will see].”

¹³After Jesus said these things, he departed.

Fourth Appearance: Judas’s Vision

¹⁵Judas said, “Teacher, just as you have listened to all of them, listen now to me as well. ¹⁷For I have seen a great vision.”

¹⁸But when Jesus heard, he laughed and said to him, “Why are you training, you thirteenth demon? ²²But speak, and I will put up with you.”

²³Judas said to him, “In the vision I saw the twelve disciples stoning me and 45 pursuing [me . . .] ¹And [I] came also to the place [. . .] after you. ³I saw [a building . . .], and my eyes could not [comprehend] its size. ⁵Great people were surrounding it, and that building <had> a roof of greenery. ⁷And in the midst of the building [. . .]. ¹¹Teacher, take me in along with Those People.”

¹²[Jesus] answered and said, “Your star has led you astray, Judas, especially because no mortal human offspring is worthy to enter the

building that you saw. ¹⁷For it is that place that is kept for the holy ones, ²⁰the place where neither the sun nor the moon will rule, nor the day, ²²but they will stand at rest always in the aeon with the holy angels. ²³Lo, I have told you the mysteries of the kingdom, ⁴⁶¹and I have taught you [about the] error of the stars, and [. . .] over the twelve aeons.”

Erotapokriseis (Questions and Answers) 1. The Domination of the Rulers and the Rule of Judas

⁵Judas said, “Teacher, surely my seed does not dominate the rulers, does it?”

⁷Jesus answered and said to him, “Come, and I will [speak with] you [. . .], ¹¹but so that you might groan all the more when you see the kingdom and its entire race.”

¹⁴When Judas heard these things, he said to him, ¹⁶“What more have I received because you have separated me from that race?”

¹⁸Jesus answered and said, “You will become the thirteenth, ²⁰and you will come to be cursed by the rest of the races, and you will come to rule over them. ²⁴In the last days they <will . . . > you, and you will not go on high ⁴⁷to the [holy race].”

THE PRIMARY AEONS

¹Jesus said: “[Come,] and I will teach you about the [. . .] that [. . .] human being will see. ⁵For there exists a great and infinite aeon, the extent of which no angelic race has been able to see. ⁸[In] it is a great invisible spirit, ¹⁰which no angelic eye has seen nor thought of heart comprehended and which has not been called by any name.

¹⁴“And a luminous cloud appeared there.

¹⁶“And it (the invisible spirit) said, ‘Let an angel come into being for my attendance.’ ¹⁸And a great angel, the self-originate, the god of light, came forth from the cloud. ²¹And for its sake four other angels came into being from another cloud, ²⁴and they came into being for the attendance of the angelic self-originate.

²⁶“And 48 the [self-originate] said, ¹‘Let [. . .] come into being.’ ²And it happened [. . .], and it [established] the first luminary to rule over it. ⁵And it said, ‘Let angels come into being to serve [it].’ ⁸And innumerable [myriads] came into being.

⁹“And it said, ‘[Let] a luminous aeon come into being.’ ¹¹And it came into being, and it (the self-originate) established the second luminary to rule over it, ¹⁴along with innumerable angelic myriads serving.

¹⁵“And this is how it (the self-originate) created the rest of the aeons of light, ¹⁷and it caused them to be ruled, and it created innumerable angelic myriads for their service.

ADAMAS, THE INCORRUPTIBLE RACE OF SETH, AND THEIR LUMINARIES AND HEAVENS

²¹“And Adamas existed in the first cloud of light, which no angel has been able to see among all those called ‘divine.’ ⁴⁹ ¹And [. . .] that [. . .] the image [. . .] and according to the likeness of [this] angel. ⁵And he revealed the incorruptible [race] of Seth to the twelve [luminaries . . .] ⁹By the will of the spirit, he revealed seventy-two luminaries among the incorruptible race. ¹²And by the will of the spirit, the seventy-two luminaries for their part revealed 360 luminaries among the incorruptible race, ¹⁶so that their number is five for each. ¹⁸And their parent is the twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries, ²⁰and for each aeon (there are) six heavens, so that there are seventy-two heavens for the seventy-two luminaries.

THE 360 FIRMAMENTS AND THE CORRUPTIBLE WORLD

²⁵“And for each 50 [of them (the seventy-two heavens)] (there are) [five] firmaments, ²[so that there are] 360 [firmaments.] ³[They] were given authority and a [. . .] angelic army without number for glory and [service], ⁷while [also] virgin [spirits] for glory and service (were given) to all the aeons and the heavens and their firmaments.

¹¹“The multitude of those immortals are called ‘world,’ ¹³that is, ‘corruption,’ by the parent and the seventy-two luminaries that are with the self-originate and its seventy-two aeons, ¹⁸the place where the first human being appeared with his incorruptible powers. ²²And the aeon that appeared

with his race, ²³in which there are the cloud of knowledge and the angel that is called 51 Ēl[ēlēth . . .]

NEBRŌ, SAKLAS, AND THEIR RULERS AND ANGELS

³“Afterwards [Ēlēlēth] said, ‘Let twelve angels come into being [and rule] over chaos and [Hades].’ ⁸And lo, from the cloud appeared an angel whose face poured forth fire and whose likeness was defiled with blood. ¹²He has [the] name Nebrō, which has been interpreted as ‘apostate,’ but others call him Ialdabaōth. ¹⁶And another angel came forth from the cloud as well: Saklas. ¹⁷Nebrō created six angels—and (so did) Saklas—for attendance, ²⁰and these produced twelve angels in the heavens, and each one received a portion in the heavens.

²³“And the twelve rulers spoke with the twelve angels: ²⁶‘Let each one of you 52 [. . .]’ ¹and they [. . .] race [. . . five] angels:

⁴The first is [. . .]th, the one whom they call the anointed.

⁶The [second] is Harmathōth, who is [the eye of fire].

⁸The third is Galila.

⁹The fourth is Iōbēl.

¹⁰The fifth [is] Adōnaios.

¹¹These are the five that ruled over Hades and the first over chaos.

CREATION AND MORTALITY OF ADAM AND EVE

¹⁴“Next Saklas said to his angels, ‘Let us create a human being according to the likeness and according to the image.’ ¹⁸Then they modeled Adam and his wife Eve, ¹⁹but she is called in the cloud ‘Life’ (Zōē). ²¹For it is by this name (Adam) that all the races understand him, ²³and each one of them calls her by their names.

²⁵“But Saklas did not 53 command [. . .] produce, ²except [. . .] in the races [. . .] which [. . . Adam.]

⁵“And the [angel] said to him, ‘Your life shall be measured out by time, along with your children.’”

2. The Life Span of Humanity

⁸And Judas said to Jesus, “What is the maximum that a human being will live?”

¹⁰Jesus said, “Why are you amazed? For Adam received his time measured out, along with his race, ¹³in the place where he received his kingdom measured out, along with his ruler.”

3. The Fate of the Human Spirit

¹⁶Judas said to Jesus, “Does the human spirit die?”

¹⁷Jesus said, “This is how god commanded Mikhaēl to give the spirits of the human beings to them while they serve—as a loan. ²²But the great one commanded Gabriēl to give the spirits to the great undominated race, the spirit along with the soul. ²⁵Therefore, the rest of the souls shall 54 [. . .] ²light [. . .] chaos [. . .] ⁵spirit within you (pl.), which you have caused to dwell in this flesh among the races of the angels. ⁸But god caused acquaintance to be brought to Adam and those with him, ¹⁰in order that the kings of chaos and Hades might not rule over them.”

4. The Corruption of Humanity

¹³And Judas said to Jesus, “What, then, will those races do?”

¹⁵Jesus said, “Truly I say to you (pl.), it is the stars that bring completion upon all these. ¹⁸When Saklas completes the times that have been assigned to him, ²¹their first star will come with the races, and the things that have been said will be brought to completion. ²⁴Next they will fornicate in my name and kill their children, 55 ¹and [. . .] wicked, ²and [. . .] ⁴the aeons, ⁵bringing their races and presenting them to Saklas. ⁷And next [. . .] will come, bringing the twelve tribes of [Israel] from [. . .], ⁹and all [the races] will serve Saklas, sinning in my name. ¹²And your (sing.) star will [rule] over the thirteenth aeon.” ¹⁴But then Jesus laughed.

5. The Destruction of the Stars

¹⁵[Judas] said, “Teacher, why [are you laughing at me?]”

¹⁶[Jesus] answered [and said,] “I am laughing not [at you, but] at the error of the stars, ¹⁹because these six stars go astray with these five

combatants, ²¹and they all will be destroyed with their creations.”

6. The Fate of the Baptized

²³And Judas said to Jesus, “Come then, what will those who have been baptized in your name do?”

²⁶Jesus said, “Truly I say [to you], this baptism ⁵⁶ [. . . in] my name [. . .] ⁴will destroy the entire race of Adam, the earthly man. ⁶Tomorrow the one who bears me will be tortured. ⁸Truly I [say] to you, no hand of a mortal human being [will . . .] me.

¹²“Truly [I] say to you, Judas, as for those who offer sacrifice to Saklas, they all shall [perish], ¹⁵for the [. . .] upon the [. . .] and all [. . .] ¹⁸everything that is [evil]. ¹⁸But as for you, you will surpass them all, ²⁰for you will sacrifice the human being who bears me.

²²“Already your horn has been exalted,

²³and your anger has been kindled,

²⁴and your star has passed by,

²⁵and your heart has [. . .].

⁵⁷ ¹“Truly [I say to you,] your final [. . .] ⁵of the aeon have been [defeated, and] the kings have become weak, ⁶and the races of the angels have groaned, ⁸and the evils that [they sowed . . .] the ruler being destroyed. ¹⁰And next, the [. . .] of the great race of Adam will be exalted, ¹²for prior to heaven, the earth, and the angels, that race exists through the aeons.

Conclusion of the Dialogues

¹⁶“Lo, you have been told everything. ¹⁷Look up, and see the cloud, the light within it, and the stars surrounding it. ²⁰And the star that leads the way is your star.”

²²And Judas looked up and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it.

²⁴Those standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud, saying, ⁵⁸ ¹“ . . . the] great race [. . .]” ⁵And Judas no longer saw Jesus.

Epilogue: Judas Hands Jesus Over

⁶And at once there was a disturbance among the Jews, more than [. . .]
⁹Their chief priests grumbled because [he] had gone into the guest room for his prayer. ¹²But some of the scribes were there watching closely, so that they might arrest him during the prayer. ¹⁶For they were afraid of the people because they all regarded him as a prophet.

¹⁹And they approached Judas and said to him, “What are you doing here?
²² You are Jesus’s disciple.”

²³For his part, he answered them as they wished. ²⁴And Judas took money and handed him over to them.

²⁷The Gospel of Judas

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Incipit (33.1–6)

33 ¹The secret report of judgment, in which Jesus spoke with Judas Iscariot during eight days prior to the three days, before he celebrated Passover.

NOTES

33.1–2. *the secret report of judgment*. The opening phrase functions as a single semantic unit, for the relative clause that follows (*nhēt-f* = “in which”) refers to the masculine *logos* rather than the feminine *apophasis* (Emmel 2008, 36 n. 11). The genitive construction (*n-tapophasis*) designates the nature of the report: it is a “judgment-report” or “report of judgment.” The phrase is modified by a relative clause and does not begin a complete sentence; it functions as a title or heading to what follows.

secret report. There is no doubt that the stative *hēp* that follows the bare *et-* of the attributive relative clause means “secret” or “hidden,” but it is frequently difficult to be precise about the translation of *logos*, which can mean simply “word” or “discourse.” Because it is a *logos* “in which Jesus spoke with Judas Iscariot,” Nagel (2007, 234–36) argues that it must have an oral character and should be translated “conversation” (*Gespräch*). He adduces as parallels Gos. Thom. prol. (*nšāče et-hēp*), Bk. Thom. 138.1–4 (*nšāče et-hēp*), and 2 Apoc. Jas. 44.13–17 (*pšāče*); in all these cases *šāče*, the equivalent of *logos*, is modified by clauses of speaking (and subsequent writing). The first two examples are imprecise parallels because they use the plural to refer to the “words” or “sayings” (not a conversation) that Jesus spoke; the third is singular, but lacks the attributive clause (*et-hēp*). In these cases *šāče* is the direct object, first, of the verb “to speak”—for example, “This is the discourse that James the Just spoke in Jerusalem”—and then subsequently of the verb “to write”—“and Mareim, one of the priests, wrote down” (2 Apoc. Jas. 44.13–17); *šāče* refers both to the oral event and to the resulting written record. In *Judas* it is likely that *logos* refers to the written work that resulted from a similar process and to which it provides the heading; the relative clause identifies its contents (“in

which”). Hans Förster (2010, 493–94) found that when the Sahidic New Testament retains *logos* in the singular (rather than translating it with *šāčē*), it means “report,” “account,” or “narrative.”

judgment. There are two Greek nouns *apophasis*: one, based on *apophēmi*, means “denial, negation”; another, based on *apophainō*, means “statement” or “declaration,” with a basically judicial sense (“sentence,” “verdict,” “judgment”) that can be more general (“assertion”). Although Gagné (2007) argued for the former option in this case, H. Förster (2012, 218) rightly points out that *apophasis* in the sense of “denial” is expected to be followed by a genitive construction that explains of what it is a denial. If we turn to the latter option (based on *apophainō*), some have argued for a neutral sense of “revelation” or “(authoritative) instruction” (Perkins 2009, 106, 119; Devoti 2012, 243–44). For example, Meyer (2011, 17–18) cites the opening of the work that the early third-century *Refutation of All Heresies* quotes and attributes to Simon Magus: “This is the letter (*gramma*) of *apophasis*, voice, and name from the afterthought of the great, infinite power” (6.9.4). He points also to the appearance of *apophasis* in Codex Tchacos in Ep. Pet. Phil. 3.11–16, where it functions as the equivalent of “voice” (*smē*) in the parallel in NHC VIII 135.3. The character of the *apophasis* in the alleged work of Simon is not clear. The passage from the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, however, does not suggest a purely neutral sense for *apophasis*: “[Then] an *apophasis* came from the light, saying (to the disciples), ‘It is you who testify to me, that I have said these things to you, but because of your unbelief I shall respond again’” (CT 3.11–16; cf. NHC VIII 135.3–8). This is a rebuke; this Coptic translator chose to use *apophasis* rather than the more neutral *smē* most likely for this reason. In general, *apophasis* connotes judgment, and in a Christian context, eschatological judgment. Other instances in Coptic texts, which include inscriptions on tombstones, support this meaning (van der Vliet 2006, 138–40). It appears in the *Interpretation of Knowledge* from Nag Hammadi in an eschatological context: at the consummation, the *apophasis* will be fulfilled (14.10–16). Athanasius of Alexandria uses the term to refer to god’s verdict against Adam and Eve (*Festal Letter* 41.15, referring to Gen 3:19). Shenoute calls Paul’s warning that “if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person” (1 Cor 3:17) an *apophasis* that will condemn the sinner in the end times; the abbot claims that at the last judgment sinners will be cast out from before god’s judgment

seat by “god’s word of judgment” (*pšāče n-tapophasis m-pnoute*), a close parallel to our phrase (Behlmer 1996, 37–40). Hans Förster (2012) collects many more examples from later Coptic literature.

33.3–4. *during eight days*. The adverbial initial *n-* with a number of days (*n-[š] moun nhoou*) tends to mean duration or extent of time, that is, “for eight days” (Layton 2011, §217). But the dialogues do not show Jesus speaking continuously with Judas *for* eight days; rather, the conversations take place *during* an eight-day period. The first dialogue presumably occurs on the first day, and the final dialogue on the eighth. On the other hand, it is possible that the author imagines more appearances and conversations during this period of time than he narrates.

33.5–6. *before he celebrated Passover*. This clause is a circumstantial conversion of the “not-yet” conjugation, which is usually translated “before . . .” (Layton 2011, §336). It is not clear how the “before” relates to the preceding elements. If the clause forms a unit with “three days”—“the three days before he celebrated Passover”—then the eight days of conversations would begin eleven days before Passover. Alternatively, it could be the period of “eight days” that occurred before he celebrated Passover and that is also “prior to the three days.” This problem receives discussion below.

celebrated Passover. The phrase *r-paskha* translates precisely the Greek *poiein to pascha* (“to perform, keep the Passover”), which occurs regularly in the Septuagint and the New Testament (e.g., Exod 12:48, Num 9:2–14, Matt 26:18, Heb 11:28). There is no reason, then, to consider it a variation of *paschein*, meaning “suffered.” It has been stated that this phrase cannot be a reference to Passover because “by nature, Gnosis does not concern itself with orthodox Jewish or orthodox Christian celebrations that it rather loathes and derides, as the *Gospel of Judas* also makes clear enough right in the next scene” (Schenke Robinson 2009a, 101 n. 6). The incipit does not describe contemporary gnostic practice, however, but places the dialogues in relation to the narratives in the canonical gospels, where Jesus does celebrate Passover. The gospel’s theological perspective does not seem conducive to reading the phrase as possibly meaning that Jesus “became Passover,” in a way that would be inspired by 1 Cor 5:7 and John 1:29, 19:36 (Jenott 2011, 188; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 82), unless the phrase is used ironically as part of the gospel’s polemic against a continuation of Jewish cultic practices among Christians (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 121–22).

COMMENTS

The incipit characterizes the work that follows in relationship to other available gospels about Jesus. It is “secret” or “hidden”: unlike other gospels, it is not generally available, and its contents are not widely known. It is a “report of judgment”: it primarily offers condemnations, warnings, and forecasts of eschatological destruction. And the content that it reports took place sometime before, according to other gospels, Jesus celebrated the Passover. The incipit, then, presents the gospel as what Hartenstein (2000, 2012) calls a “second teaching,” which supplements or corrects what can be found in the other gospels (Introduction III.A).

The work’s self-identification as a “secret (*hēp*) report (*logos*),” probably a *logos apokruphos*, is a promotional strategy that several Christian authors of the second and third centuries employed (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 317). The author of the *Secret Book According to John*, for example, calls his work “the teaching [of the] savior and [the revelation] of the mysteries [and the] things hidden (*hēp*) in silence [and the things] that he taught to John [his] disciple” (NHC II 1.1–4). The *Gospel According to Thomas* offers readers “the secret (*hēp*) sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down” (prol.). So too the *Book of Thomas* consists of “the secret (*hēp*) sayings that the savior spoke to Judas Thomas, which I myself, Mathaias, wrote down” (138.1–3). The James of the *Apocryphon of James* presents his work as “a secret book (*apokruphon*) that was revealed to me and Peter by the Lord” (1.10–12) and refers to yet another “secret book” that “the savior revealed to me” and which he had sent the addressee ten months earlier (1.28–31). That work’s opening scene makes explicit the religious context in which such claims to offer secret teachings or reports functioned: the author invites the reader to imagine the twelve disciples gathered together, remembering what the savior had said, and writing what they remembered in books, “whether in secret or openly” (2.7–14). Multiple works about Jesus, whether we call them “gospels” or “memoirs of the apostles” (Just. *1 Apol.* 67.3) or something else, were circulating, and some authors, like ours, promoted their books as containing teachings of Jesus not available in more generally known works (Brakke 1999, 205–6; H. Förster 2013; cf. Nicklas 2006, 80–86).

In comparison to these other works that characterize themselves as secret or hidden, *Judas* stands out for its lack of an authorial claim. In every case, including our work, the author states that Jesus or the savior spoke or

revealed the work's contents and, with the exception of the *Gospel According to Thomas*, that he did so to a particular individual: John (Ap. John), Judas Thomas (Bk. Thom.), James, or Judas Iscariot. The four other secret works identify also the one who wrote down the teaching: the *Gospel According to Thomas*, the *Book of Thomas*, and the *Apocryphon of James* do so explicitly, while in the *Secret Book* the disciple John's authorship of at least most (but not all) of the book is implied by the subsequent use of the first person ("I") and by the savior's instructions to him at the end of the dialogue (NHC II 31.28–30). Dialogue gospels that do not claim secrecy and whose openings survive (*Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, *Dialogue of the Savior*) lack such an authorial claim, which perhaps functions in the secret gospels to guarantee the authenticity of a teaching that is not generally known. *Judas*, in contrast to the other gospels claiming secrecy, does not identify anyone as the person who composed the secret report that contains Jesus's teaching to Judas Iscariot, and the narrator nowhere speaks in the first person. The other disciples, whom the gospel never names and whom it presents as ignorant and therefore unreliable, are not good candidates for such a role, nor is Judas himself, who was known to have died shortly after the crucifixion. Who could have written this work? The author seemingly made no attempt to resolve this dilemma, an example of his general tendency to allow his discourse to become unmoored from the period of Jesus and his disciples, even as he positions it as supplemental to the gospels that record that period.

The other secret works provide at their openings also an indication of the book's purpose or the nature of its contents. The *Secret Book* promises "the revelation of mysteries" (NHC II 1.1–2); the reader of the *Gospel According to Thomas* learns that "whoever finds the meaning of these sayings will not taste death" (prol.); James blesses "those who will be saved through the faith of this discourse (*logos*)" (Ap. Jas. 1.26–28). In a similar manner our incipit specifies that it is a "secret report of judgment (*apophasis*)": the reader will encounter warnings, condemnations, eschatological judgments. The gospel does contain some good news, some information about how god has acted to save human beings (e.g., 54.8–12), but its primary purpose is to pronounce judgment, that is, to expose the wrong beliefs and practices of some followers of Jesus and to reveal how the cosmic powers that oppose god will be overthrown. The author seeks the ultimate salvation of its readers, but his strategy is one of dissuasion

(Painchaud 2013, 289–90). Judas Iscariot, universally condemned (among Christians), is an appropriate disciple to receive such a message; possibly the incipit’s failure to mention that Jesus spoke to the other disciples as well serves to highlight the theme of judgment.

The chronology of “eight days prior to the three days, before he celebrated Passover” purports to position the conversations that follow precisely within the chronology(ies) of Jesus’s final days presented in the other gospels, but in fact that relationship is not clear. Translation is not at issue as much as the meaning. Scholars have offered various theories to account for the eight and three days. Attempts to outline an eight-part structure of the dialogues to correspond to the eight days are unconvincing (see Introduction III.B). Likewise it has been argued that the dialogues take place on precisely three days (33.23–24, 36.11, 37.21–22) (Kasser et al. 2007, 179–80; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 81). But this hypothesis runs into the problem of Jesus’s departure at 44.13–14 and the beginning of a new appearance at 44.15; maintaining the three-day scheme appears to require emending the text from “he departed” to “they (the disciples other than Judas) departed” (Kasser et al. 2007, 180), which is unlikely in a dialogue gospel of this kind, in which the revealer comes and goes, not the auditors (Nagel 2009, 129–32). The chronological references in the incipit do not structure the dialogues.

It is not obvious how the circumstantial “not-yet” clause, “before he celebrated Passover,” relates to earlier elements in the sentence (Note on 33.5–6, *before he celebrated Passover*). Most commentators have understood “the three days before he celebrated Passover” to be a single unit, which they have taken to be based on Mark 14:1, which reads, “It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.” This passage can be interpreted as marking the start of a three-day period that begins with the plot against Jesus and concludes with Passover, which begins on the evening of the second day and counts as the third day (e.g., Gathercole 2007, 63; Jenott 2011, 188). Our gospel’s orientation to Mark’s chronology makes sense because it has “chief priests” and “scribes” murmur or plot against Jesus, in accord with Mark 14:1, and it places Jesus in a “guest room” (*kataluma*), as in Mark 14:14 (58.9–19). According to this interpretation, the eight-day period of dialogues between Jesus and Judas must conclude at least three days before Passover. Grosso

(2009, 456–57), however, plausibly discerns a precise chronology of eight days in Mark that run from Mark 11:1 to the discovery of the tomb, which he identifies as our gospel’s “eight days”; he then places the “the three days before he celebrated the Passover,” during which (in his view) all the dialogues take place, within the framework of those eight days (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 81). But this scheme requires reading *ha-thē* (“prior to”) as not indicating that the eight days occur prior to the three days, but (in a way allegedly similar to the *pro* in John 12:1) that “the revelation starts three days before Passover” (Grosso 2009, 467). This is not the most natural reading of the Coptic text.

Grosso’s proposal avoids one problem, however. If one takes the conversations as taking place during an eight-day period that ends prior to the three days before Passover, then Jesus’s statement to Judas near the end of the dialogues presents a puzzle: “Tomorrow the one who bears me will be tortured” (56.6–8). This statement appears to indicate that the dialogues conclude and Jesus ascends into the luminous cloud on the day when Passover begins in the evening, that is, on the day indicated in Mark 14:12–16. Such a scenario is consistent with the phrase “at once” (58.6) that introduces the final scene of Judas handing over Jesus, which presumably occurs that evening, not long after Jesus’s ascent. The human being who bears Jesus would then indeed be tortured on the following day (“tomorrow”). Jesus’s statement in 56.6–8 did not become clear until the publication of new fragments in 2010, and thus it played no role in discussions of the incipit’s chronology before then. Yet subsequent considerations of the incipit likewise appear not to have taken it into account (e.g., Jenott 2011, 188; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 120–21). Although the reference to “tomorrow” supports Grosso’s placement of a proposed three days of dialogues that end on the day before Passover within Mark’s eight days leading to the resurrection, the incipit’s placement of the eight days “prior to” the three days before Passover remains a problem for his proposal. It seems that any reconstruction that takes the incipit to be referring to “the three days before he celebrated Passover” runs into problems, even outright contradiction (Nagel 2014, 303 n. 39; Brakke 2020, 40–42).

Another possibility is that “the three days” in the incipit does not refer to the three days before Passover: in that case, the circumstantial clause “before he celebrated Passover” or “when he had not yet celebrated

Passover” does not modify “the three days” but “eight days.” That is, Jesus spoke with Judas during eight days that were *both* “prior to the three days” *and* “before he celebrated Passover.” This understanding is consistent with Jesus’s statement that the one who bears him will be tortured on the day following the conclusion of the dialogues. On the other hand, it appears to be a less natural reading of the text: the phrase “the three days” seems to require specification of *which* three days, a specification that “before he celebrated Passover” would provide. Possibly the author assumes that his readers would know to what “the three days” refers without any other specification—namely, the most famous three days in Mark and indeed in all Christian literature, the three days from Jesus’s death to his resurrection (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34) (van Os 2009, 368). Despite its shortcoming, this hypothesis seems to create no chronological difficulties, and therefore my translation places a comma after “the three days” to separate that phrase from what follows. The conversations between Jesus and Judas preceded the three days from crucifixion to resurrection and concluded before Jesus celebrated the Passover.

Why, then, a period of eight days? Correspondence to an eighth heaven in some reports of gnostic systems (Iren. *Haer.* 1.30.4; Epiph. *Pan.* 25.2.2, 26.10.4, 40.2.3) (Montserrat-Torrents 2006, 87) is unlikely without any such heaven in *Judas*, which instead speaks of seventy-two heavens, 360 firmaments (49.20–50.3), and a “thirteenth aeon” for Judas the *daemon* and his star (44.21, 55.13). On the other hand, the idea that the earth was encircled by eight spheres, the highest of which was fixed, was so common that “eight” appears regularly in ancient works in reference to the cosmos; therefore, it could be used in this way without much reflection on or detached from its original heavenly significance (Scott 1991, 55, 96). A more promising suggestion, however, is the so-called octave of Easter, found (as we have seen) sketchily in Mark (Grosso 2009, 456–57), which appears in second-century works like Barn. 15.8–9 and Just. *Dial.* 24.1, 41.4, 138.1 (van Os 2009, 367–68). (The term “octave of Easter” is anachronistic before the fourth century, however.) According to this concept, Easter is the eighth day of a new Christian week, either replacing the seventh day as the Sabbath (*Barnabas*) or providing the true meaning of circumcision on the eighth day (Justin). The connection to the passion narrative makes this an initially attractive option. Explicit references to periods of eight days in the New Testament (e.g., Luke 2:21, 9:28; Acts

25:6) seem less relevant (Grosso 2009, 465), with the possible exception of John 20:26, which refers to an eight-day period between two of Jesus's postresurrection appearances; some early Christians may have been tempted to populate such an interval with secret dialogues, but it is chronologically wrong for our gospel. If we take the incipit to be saying that the dialogues took place during the Easter octave, then "prior to the three days" would not modify "eight days"; instead, Jesus would have spoken with Judas prior to the three days, indicating that the dialogues took place only during the first five days of the eight days (which include the three days). At this point taking "eight days" to refer to the octave of Easter becomes complicated and unpersuasive, and the lack of a definite article ("*the* eight days") suggests that the author does not intend to refer to a known period of eight days.

The most likely understanding would seem to be that "Jesus spoke with Judas Iscariot during eight days (*and*) prior to the three days (*and*) before he celebrated Passover." That is, the period of eight days is not the octave of Easter, and it concludes on the day when Passover begins in the evening, before "the three days" from crucifixion to resurrection, which is also the day before the crucifixion, when the human bearer of Jesus is tortured. The period of eight days probably has no symbolic meaning: in a manner similar to John 20:26, our author intends simply to indicate a period of about a week. This solution creates consistency among all the chronological references, although it requires a great deal of thought to achieve.

The incipit's seemingly precise placement of the conversations it reports within the chronology of such generally known gospels as Mark gives the appearance of accuracy (van den Kerchove 2014, 115), even as it raises many questions. On the one hand, it tells readers that its secret report of judgment supplements the gospels with which they may be familiar and can be reconciled with what those gospels report. On the other hand, the time in which Jesus speaks with Judas remains mysterious, not only because the incipit is unclear, but also because the gospels narrate numerous events during the days to which the incipit seems to refer, no matter how it is understood, such as the so-called cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15–19) and the anointing in Bethany (Mark 14:3–9). Possibly the dialogues are meant to replace those events, many of which take place in or near the temple and which the author may suggest never really happened (F. Williams 2008, 384). More probably the author intends only to signal

supplementation of the canonical gospels with his second teaching rather than to present a realistic timing of that teaching.

Prologue: The Earthly Ministry of Jesus (33.6–21)

33 ⁶When he appeared on earth, he performed signs and great wonders for the salvation of humanity. ¹⁰And while some were [walking] in the way of righteousness and others were walking in their transgression, ¹³the twelve disciples were called, ¹⁵and he began to speak with them about the mysteries that are above the world and the things that will happen until the end. ¹⁸But many a time he would not reveal himself to his disciples; ²⁰instead, you would find him in the midst of the children.

NOTES

33.10–12. *And while some were [walking] in the way of righteousness and others were walking in their transgression.* The syntax of these clauses does not make clear how they relate to the surrounding sentences. In both instances “walking” (*eu-mooše*) could be either the circumstantial or the focalizing conversion of the durative conjugation, but the presence of both *auō* and *men* (33.10) suggests that this is not an independent sentence. The *auō* at the beginning of the clause may indicate a connection to the preceding section, for *auō* with the circumstantial following a main clause can mean “also, and indeed, too, furthermore” (Layton 2011, §493). In that case this sentence explains why Jesus has to work for the salvation of humanity: “as also some were [walking] in the way of righteousness and others were walking in their transgression.” The *men*, however, more likely anticipates the *de* at 33.13, and these clauses describe the context of human ethical diversity out of which twelve disciples were called.

33.13–15. *the twelve disciples were called.* Nagel (2007, 239) and Schenke Robinson (2008, 85) emend *au-mou[te]* to *af-mou[te]*: “he called the twelve disciples.” This suggestion is reasonable: it would bring this main verb in past tense into conformity with the other past tense verbs in

masculine singular at 33.7, 15, and thereby create a continuous description of what Jesus did when he appeared on earth. On the other hand, the passive construction is intelligible and highlights the calling of the twelve out of the mass of human beings who walk in one of the two ways.

33.16–17. *the mysteries that are above the world.* The mysteries that Jesus began to teach the disciples are described as *hičn-pkosmos*. Nagel (2007, 239; 2009, 112–24) translates “upon the world” in the sense of “in the world”; *hičn-*, he argues, cannot mean “beyond” in particular. What Jesus teaches the disciples is limited to things within the cosmos and presumably does not include higher divine realities. Nagel’s interpretation would be more persuasive if the phrase were, as at 33.7, *hičm-pkah* (“upon the earth”), but the *kosmos* in *Judas* includes its 360 firmaments and their angelic armies and virgin spirits (50.2–18) and therefore, unlike “the earth,” does not provide a flat surface, so to speak, for something to be “upon.” The mysteries are “on top of” the cosmos in the sense of “above,” as in Phil 2:9, where *hičn-ran nim* translates *hyper pan onoma* (“above every name”).

33.18–21. *But many a time he would not reveal himself to his disciples; instead, you would find him in the midst of the children.* The verbs in this sentence are in the “tenseless” aorist conjugation rather than in the past as in the preceding and following sentences. My translation reflects the aorist’s tendency “to come under the aegis of any time range that has already been expressed or implied by the preceding text to which it is a sequel” (Layton 2011, §337; cf. §348). But equally plausible are translations that move the sentence out of the narrative time frame entirely: “he does not reveal himself . . . instead, you find him” or “he will not reveal himself . . . instead, you will find him.”

you would find him. Most commentators understand the “you” here to be impersonal, the equivalent of “one would find him.” Arguing that such usage is unattested in narrative texts, Nagel (2009, 239) emends *šak-he ero-f* to *šau-he ero-f*, meaning either “they (the disciples) would find him” or “he would be found” (so too Schenke Robinson 2008, 86; Jenott 2011, 189; Devoti 2012, 249). But the Coptic use of the second-person masculine singular for “the *general person* (rhetorical person)” is attested in Shenoute and other admittedly nonnarrative works (Layton 2011, §§75, 181[f]). In *James* in Codex Tchacos itself, we find the disciple asking Jesus about how to escape from the power of the lower rulers: When the rulers confront a person, “[What] do you (sing.) say?” (15.16); in the NHC parallel, he asks,

“What can I say?” (29.1–2). This “you” also refers to the general person, although again not in a narrative context. Likewise, the generic use of the second person in ancient Greek is rare, but does occur (Stanton 1997). Therefore, an occurrence of the impersonal second person here is possible, as is a direct address to the reader, a possibility discussed below.

in the midst of the children. The second clause contains an unknown word: “instead, *n-hrot* you would find him in their midst.” Most commentators treat the initial *n-* as adverbial and *hrot* as a corruption or variation of an otherwise attested word, possibly *hroti* (Bohairic masculine noun, “child, young”; Crum 1939, 631a), *hortf* (Bohairic masculine noun, “phantom, ghost”; Crum 1939, 704a), *htor* (Sahidic masculine noun, “necessity”; Crum 1939, 726b), or *šort* (Sahidic masculine noun, “awning, veil”; Crum 1939, 588b). These possibilities create the meanings “as a child,” “as a phantom,” “as necessary,” or “in a veiled way.” The first option (“as a child”) has found the most support among scholars: “instead, you would find him as a child in their midst.” Jesus or another divine revealer appears as a child in several Christian works of the second century, including the gnostic *Secret Book According to John* (BG 21.3–5). On the other hand, Jesus never appears as a child in *Judas*. The Bohairic *hroti*, with one exception in a “magical” papyrus, is attested only in the plural. Moreover, adverbial phrases formed with *n-* and the zero article phrase tend to mean not “as a . . .” (*hōs*), but “in a . . . way” (Layton 2011, §217)—thus, probably “childishly” or “in a childlike manner,” not “as a child.” If the initial *n-* is adverbial, then the option “as necessary” is more likely. With the exception of “child,” these proposals require the transposition (and restoration) of letters. These considerations suggest an alternative: *nhrot* is an article phrase with the plural definite article, placed in extraposition and anticipating the personal element in *teu-* in “in *their* midst” (Layton 2011, §313). In that case, the meaning “children” seems probable: “instead, as for the children, you would find him in their midst.” Extraposition in anticipation of the personal element of the possessive article is rare but found in, for example, Luke 2:35 (*nto de oun-ousēfe nēu ebol hitn-toupsukhē*; “and a sword will pierce your own soul”), Gos. Jud. 35.19–21 (*p-entaf-taouo-k pai ete-n-ti-mpša an n-taouo m-pefran*; “but as for the one who sent you, its name I am not worthy to proclaim”), and Gos. Jud. 43.15–23 (*genea nim n-rōme se-na-mou nqi-neupsukhē . . .*; “as for all human races, their souls will die”). Although the long spelling of the definite

article is expected before two consonants (i.e., *nehrot*; Layton 2011, §52[a]), the short form is found in two other instances in Codex Tchacos: *mpsukhē* (20.6) and *nkritēs* (30.8). For complete discussion of this problem, see Brakke 2020, 46–54.

COMMENTS

As the narrative frame for and introduction to the gospel’s dialogues, the prologue presents a seemingly neutral summary of Jesus’s ministry as found in the New Testament gospels: Jesus performed signs and wonders, sought to save people, called twelve disciples, and gave them teaching with theological and eschatological content. By using traditional language and summarizing Jesus’s earthly ministry as the widely known gospels present it, the author invokes the narrative world of those gospels and appeals to a wide range of Christians (T. Petersen 2009, 427). He establishes the common ground or shared teaching that his gospel will supplement and correct. In the final sentence, he shifts the gospel out of that narrative world and into the time and space of the dialogues, a time and space that include Jesus, the disciples, “the children,” and possibly even the reader—“you.”

Most of the prologue’s vocabulary is unremarkable for any second-century Christian work. That Jesus “appeared on earth” does refer to the incarnation in a way in which other Christians spoke about his postresurrection appearances (Mark 16:9) or his future return (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; Tit 2:13; 2 Clem. 17.4) (van den Kerchove 2014, 115–17), but a similar use is attested in 2 Tim 1:10 (cf. Tit 2:11, 3:4–5). The language of “appearance” or “manifestation” (*epiphaneia*) is noticeably more frequent in the second-century Pastoral Epistles, as well as in Basilides and Pseudo-Barnabas, discussed below. “Signs and great wonders” represents a slight variation on the phrase “signs and wonders” or “wonders and signs,” which is frequent in the New Testament and early Christian literature. In the New Testament, with the exception of Acts 2:22 (and John 4:48?), figures other than Jesus perform the signs and wonders, including false messiahs or the eschatological “lawless one” (Matt 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Thess 2:9), Moses (Acts 7:36), the disciples or apostles (Acts 4:30, 5:12, 6:8, 14:3, 15:12; Heb 2:4), and, by his own account, Paul (Rom 15:19, 2 Cor 12:12). According to the *Didache*, in the last days, “the world deceiver will appear as god’s son and perform signs and wonders” (16.4).

On the other hand, Christian works of diverse theological orientations do apply the phrase “signs and wonders” or something similar to Jesus’s or the savior’s ministry in ways that resemble our passage. According to Irenaeus, Basilides taught that “the unengendered, unnamable parent . . . sent its first-born, the intellect, called Christ [cf. Gos. Jud. 35.19–21], to save people who believed in it, from the authority of the beings that had crafted the world. And unto the nations belonging to them he (Christ) appeared on earth (*apparuisse in terra*) as a man, and he performed deeds of power (*virtutes*)” (*Haer.* 1.24.4). The gnostic *Revelation of Adam* has Adam prophesy that the savior will incarnate as a human being: “And he will perform signs and wonders, in order to heap scorn upon the powers and their ruler” (77.1–3). The author of *Barnabas* summarizes Jesus’s ministry:

He himself, in order to destroy death and display the resurrection of the dead, because it was necessary that he be revealed (*phanerōthēnai*) in the flesh, submitted, so that he might also redeem the promise to the fathers, and—while preparing for himself the new people—so that he might demonstrate, while he was on the earth (*epi tēs gēs*), that he himself will judge, after he has brought about the resurrection. Moreover, as he taught Israel and performed great wonders and signs (*tēlikauta terata kai sēmeia*), he preached and intensely loved it (Israel). When he had chosen his own apostles, who were going to preach his gospel—they were lawless beyond all sin, so that he might show that he did not come to call righteous people but sinners—then he revealed himself (*ephanerōsen heauton*) to be god’s son. For if he had not come in the flesh, people in no way could have been saved by looking at him. (5.6–10)

Alongside Pseudo-Barnabas’s distinct interest in Israel and a “new people,” this passage includes the key elements of our summary: Jesus “was revealed” or appeared “on the earth,” performed “great wonders and signs,” chose his apostles (who are described in strikingly negative terms), and came so that people would be saved. (In fact, *ephanerōsen heauton* could be very close to what *maf-ouonh-f* translates in Gos. Jud. 33.19.) For Pseudo-Barnabas, the performance of signs and wonders plays an important role in Jesus’s revelation of himself in the flesh, which is salvific. But this saving function of the signs and wonders does not mean that Jesus’s death on the cross was not also required for human salvation: “It was necessary for him to suffer on a tree” (5.13). Likewise, when our author writes that Jesus “performed signs and great wonders for the salvation of humanity,” we need not conclude that Jesus saves people in this way *rather than* through the crucifixion, so that “his death has no soteriological value” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 122–23). Jesus explains the eschatological and cosmological role of the crucifixion at the conclusion of the dialogues (56.18–57.15)

Some have perceived a tension between the claim that Jesus came “for the salvation of humanity” and the gospel’s stark division of people into different “races” (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 320; Devoti 2012, 247). The word *oučai* (“salvation”) occurs nowhere else in the work, and the unqualified term *rōme* (“human being”) functions nearly always negatively to identify evildoers and those who are not saved. In the disciples’ vision of evil, priests who commit vile sins, and in Jesus’s interpretation of it, the wicked persons are called “human beings” (38.4, 24; 39.23; 40.8) or “the races of the human beings” (39.15, 40.19). Elsewhere the damned are described as “mortal human offspring” (37.7, 45.15), “all human races” (43.15), and “the rest of the races of the human beings” (43.24–25). It is not a good sign for the disciples that Jesus refers to them twice as “human beings” (34.17, 35.2–3). On the other hand, *rōme* can appear with adjectives or other markers that give it a positive valence. Jesus challenges the disciples to bring forward “the perfect human being,” which of course they are unable to do (35.3–4). The saved can be called “the race of those great human beings” (37.12–13), “great human beings” (45.5), or simply “Those People” (45.11–12), terms paralleled in the *Revelation of Adam* (66.10–11, 67.18–19, 74.5–6). In the higher realm exists an immortal called “the first human being” (50.20). And when Jesus narrates the creation and destiny of humanity, the term seems to function neutrally: the primordial human beings and people in general are marked as neither saved nor damned (52.16; 53.10, 17, 21). Likewise, the spiritual status of “the human being who bears” Jesus and whom Judas will sacrifice is not clear (56.20–21). Therefore, one can understand the “humanity” for whose salvation Jesus came as also being originally neutral, as having the potential to become either the negative “races of the human beings” or the saved “race of those great human beings” (Introduction IV.B). And in fact the author tells the reader that when Jesus appeared on earth, “some were [walking] in the way of righteousness and others were walking in their transgression.”

As many commentators have noted, this sentence echoes the rhetoric of “two ways” or “two spirits,” which originated in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 30:15–20, Ps 1:6) and then developed and diversified in early Jewish and Christian literature (1QSa 3.18–21, *T. Ash.* 1:3–9, Did. 1–6, Barn. 18.1–21.1). Again, the vocabulary here is conventional: “way(s)” (*hiē* = *hodos*) is the usual term for the two alternatives, and to speak of the ethical life as “walking” is frequent, especially in the letters of Paul. “The way of

righteousness” appears in Matt 21:32 and 2 Pet 2:21. *Parabasis* (“transgression”) is relatively rare (Rom 2:23, 4:15, etc.), but Pseudo-Barnabas includes it in his description of “the way of the black one” (20.1) (cf. Barn. 12.5: “their transgression”). Unlike other instances of the two-ways tradition, *Judas* does not explicitly use it in a hortatory manner, to present the individual reader with a choice, but in a sectarian manner, to divide human beings into two broad groups who walk in the two different ways; the possibility of “humanity” and thus any individual human being joining either of these groups is implicit. More precisely, the division serves as the context in which the twelve disciples were called, possibly implying that even they were drawn from both kinds of people (Magnusson 2016, 181), as Pseudo-Barnabas similarly characterizes the disciples as sinful (5.9).

It is possible that the author uses the two-ways rhetoric ironically: that is, conventionally moral non-gnostic Christian readers are meant to think of themselves as walking in the way of alleged righteousness, but they will learn that in fact they are not so walking (T. Petersen 2009, 427). Against this possibility one might cite the overall generically Christian nature of the prologue: it appears simply to summarize Jesus’s ministry as found in other gospels. Moreover, another gnostic author adapts the two-ways rhetoric—or, more precisely, its “two spirits” form as found in Qumran’s *Community Rule* (3.18–21). The *Secret Book According to John* contrasts “the spirit of life” from the divine entirety with “the counterfeit spirit” from the lower rulers; these two spirits operate within and among human beings, leading them either to flee “works of wickedness” or to practice them, with the result that people divide into different “souls” with different destinies (NHC II 25.16–30.11). Like his fellow gnostic, our author uses this widespread tradition in a straightforward manner to create an admittedly dualistic picture of human moral diversity, the circumstances under which Jesus came to bring people salvation. This purpose means that a reference to “the way of righteousness” is not “out of place” because gnostics rejected the Jewish Law and its righteousness (Devoti 2012, 248). Our author later condemns the disciples and their followers for not following a conventional morality in terms drawn from that Law (38.14–23, 40.7–16).

Equally conventionally, the author describes the disciples as “called” and as taught by Jesus about god (“the mysteries that are above the world”) and eschatology (“the things that will happen until the end”). A reasonable

summary of what Jesus taught in the gospels, these two topics provide also the agenda for Jesus's mythological discourse later in the work. Some interpreters have stressed that Jesus *began* to teach the disciples, suggesting that this indicates that what Jesus taught them was incomplete (and thus so too are the gospels that they wrote) or that the disciples eventually proved to be unsuitable students (F. Williams 2008, 385; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 124–25). More likely, “began” simply indicates narrative sequence: the disciples were called, and then Jesus began to teach them. This diction is characteristic of Mark (4:1, 2; 5:17; 6:2; 8:11, 31; 10:28; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 83). We remain in the generally accepted narrative world of gospels like Matthew and Mark.

The final sentence takes the reader out of that narrative world, however, and possibly addresses him or her directly. Shifting out of the simple past, the author uses the tenseless aorist to state that generally Jesus often does not reveal himself to his disciples—that is, he is not present to them; instead, you will find him among “the children.” It marks a transition from the historical time of the other gospels to the eternal time of the “secret report,” which is characterized by an alternation between Jesus's presence with and absence from the disciples, a movement between two groups of people, “his disciples” and “the children.” At one point the disciples ask Jesus about where he goes when he leaves them: “When morning came, he appeared to his disciples, and they said to him, ‘Teacher, where did you go? What do you do after you have left us?’ Jesus said to them, ‘I went to another great and holy race’” (36.11–17). “The children” among whom Jesus is often found are the members of the great and holy race. The gospel's preferred term to describe those who are saved (and those who are not saved) as a group is *genea* (Introduction IV.B). The saved are “the great and holy race,” “the mighty and holy race,” and so on, while other human beings are “the corruptible race,” “the races of the pious,” and so on. *Genea* carried the basic connotation of kinship relation by blood (“family,” “race,” “generation,” “offspring”), but it could refer to groups not so related (“class,” “kind”). Ancient concepts of “race” (*genea*) included not only blood relations, but also shared customs, institutions, and religious practices, and thus “race” did not constitute an immutable category (Buell 2005; Townsend 2012). A variety of ancient Christians called themselves a race, even a “new race (*genos*),” which they invited others to join (e.g., Diogn. 1.1). Nonetheless, the basic meaning connoted descent through

generation, and thus describing members of a *genea* as “children” makes sense.

Other passages suggest that calling those among the saved *genea* “children” is appropriate. Three times the gospel refers to those who are not saved with the term *čpo* (“offspring,” “begetting”). When the disciples ask about the identity of the great and holy race, Jesus questions why they are thinking about that great race, and he tells them that “the entire offspring of this aeon” will not see that race, “nor will any mortal human offspring be able to go with it” (37.2–3, 6–8). Later, when Judas reports a vision of a large building surrounded by “great people” and asks to enter that building, Jesus replies that “no mortal human offspring is worthy to enter the building that you saw” (45.3–17). Presumably the disciples and other people who are not saved are among “the offspring of this aeon,” while the great and holy race consists of offspring of some other aeon.

When Jesus in his discourse with Judas turns to human history, it is clear that the gospel includes descent through generation in its understanding of *genea*. Jesus reports that Saklas said to Adam, “Your life is going to be measured with time, along with your children (*mn-nekšēre*).” In response Judas asks, “What is the maximum that a human being will live?” And Jesus replies, “Why are you amazed? For Adam received his time measured out, along with his race (*mn-tefgeneā*)” (53.6–12). The parallelism makes clear that Adam’s “children” constitute his “race.” It turns out, however, that Adam has two races, whose destinies at the end of the present world will differ. On the one hand, “the entire race of Adam, the earthly man,” will be destroyed (56.4–6), while “the [fruit(?)] of the great race of Adam will be exalted” (57.11–12). According to the gospel, then, a *genea* consists of “offspring” or “children,” and thus “the children,” in whose midst Jesus is often found when he is not revealing himself to the disciples (33.18–21), plausibly can refer to “the great and holy race” to which he goes when he leaves the disciples (36.11–17).

Epithets like “children” or “little ones” for the true followers of Jesus can be traced back to the New Testament gospels. In fact, our sentence might allude to a familiar scene in the Synoptic Gospels that sets in contrast the “children” (*paidia*), whom Jesus blesses, with the “disciples” (*mathētai*), who sternly rebuke those who bring the children. Jesus says that all his followers should either be children or resemble them (Matt 19:13–15//Mark 10:13–16//Luke 18:15–17). Matthew uses at least three terms to identify

true disciples as children: *huiioi* (5:45, 17:26), *paidia* (18:1–5, 19:13), and *mikroi* (18:6, 10, 14). In one passage, Jesus calls to himself a child (*paidion*), whom he places “in their midst” (*en mesō autōn*), referring to the midst of the disciples (Matt 18:2//Mark 9:36). Child language is less frequent in second-century sources. Gnostic works, like *Judas*, prefer the vocabulary of race, generation, or seed (*sperma*) (Gos. Jud. 46.6), but they can refer to the saved as children. In the *Reality of the Rulers* the luminary Ēlēlēth, speaking to Nōrea, calls those who will be acquainted with the truth “your children” (96.19) and “the children of the light” (97.13–14). According to the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, “the children of the great Seth” repose in the luminary Daueithe, while “the souls of the children” do so in Ēlēlēth (NHC III 65.19–22). The designation of the saved as children coheres with other early Christian writings, including gnostic ones, and it alludes to a scene in the New Testament gospels in which children, representing Jesus’s true followers, are contrasted with the disciples, who appear uncomprehending, even callous (especially in Mark’s version, where the disciples’ attitude causes Jesus to become indignant). Such an allusion contributes to the gospel’s negative depiction of the disciples.

Most commentators have suggested that the second-person masculine singular functions here impersonally (“one finds him in their midst”), which may be the most probable meaning (Note on 33.18–21, *But many a time . . .*). It is possible, however, that the clause more directly addresses the reader, that is, that “you” refers to the implied reader. In this case, the clause would function similarly to the aside in Mark 13:14 (“Let the reader understand”). Pagels and King (2007, 125–26) have so concluded and suggest therefore that the entire sentence may be a gloss by a later scribe, which would explain also the shift in tense. To be sure, the line between a generic “you” and one that refers specifically to the reader may be difficult to discern. An interesting set of possible parallels appears in the untitled work in Nag Hammadi Codex II known as *On the Origin of the World* (although it was probably written a century or more after *Judas*). Five times the author pauses his narration of a cosmogonic myth to refer the reader to other works with the phrase “you will find”; for example, “The account of these matters you will find (*knahe e-*) precisely in the *First Discourse of Ōraia*” (102.23–25; cf. 102.7; 107.2, 15; 112.23). This author refers to himself in the first person (97.27) and seems clearly to be addressing an implied reader or

possibly even an actual addressee whose name has been lost. An example closer to our case occurs in the long version of the *Secret Book According to John*, in which the savior pauses to remark, “Now, others (i.e., angels), whom I have not mentioned to you (*nak*), preside over the rest of the passions; and if you want to know about them, the matter is written in the *Book of Zoroaster*” (NHC II 19.6–10). Here the second-person singular address is less out of place because the savior has an interlocutor, the disciple John, but the reference to a book implies that the author is interrupting that fiction and addressing the reader directly.

The neutral, generally Christian character of the prologue suggests that our author likewise could be turning to any Christian reader and instructing him or her to find not a book, but Jesus. Having established common ground with him or her through a conventional summary of widely accepted gospels, the author seeks to challenge this reader and therefore addresses him or her at the conclusion of the summary. The first-century CE literary critic known as Longinus advised that addressing the reader with the second-person singular would make the reader “more attentive and full of active interest, because he is roused by the appeals to him in person” (*On the Sublime* 26; LCL 199:248–49). Our author first appeals to a Christian reader with a commonly shared message and then invites that reader to find Jesus among “the children,” that is, among the members of “the great and holy race,” the author’s community of true Jesus believers, in whose midst Jesus is often found. Ideally, that reader will be more attentive and interested in the teachings that follow.

FOUR APPEARANCES OF JESUS

First Appearance: Judas's Recognition of Jesus (33.22–36.10)

33 ²²One day he came to his disciples in Judea and found them seated, gathered, and training for godliness. ²⁶When he [. . .] his disciples ³⁴gathered, seated, and giving thanks over the bread, [he] laughed.

³But the disciples said to him, “Teacher, why are you laughing at [our] thanksgiving? ⁵What have we done? [This] is what is appropriate.”

⁶He answered and said to them, “I am not laughing at you—you do not do this by your own will. ⁹Rather, by this your god [will] be blessed.”

¹¹They said, “Teacher, it is you [. . .] who are the son of our god.”

¹³Jesus said to them, “How do [you] know me? ¹⁵Truly I say to you, no race from the human beings among you will know me.”

¹⁸When his disciples heard this, [they] began to get irritated and angry and to blaspheme against him in their heart. ²²But when Jesus saw their foolishness, [he said] to them, ²⁴“Why has agitation brought anger (to you)? ²⁵Your god who is within you and [. . .] ³⁵ ¹have become irritated, along with your souls. ²[Let] the one who is [strong] among you people bring forward the perfect human being and also stand before my face.”

⁶And they all said, “We are mighty!” ⁷But their spirit could not dare to stand before him—except for Judas Iscariot. ¹⁰He was able to stand before him, but he could not look him in the eyes. ¹³Instead, he turned his face away.

¹⁴Judas said to him, “I know who you are and where you have come from. ¹⁷You have come from the aeon of the Barbēlō, the immortal (aeon). ¹⁹But as for the one who sent you, its name I am not worthy to proclaim.”

²¹Jesus, because he knew that he was thinking about the rest of the exalted matters as well, said to him, ²³“Separate from them, and I will tell you the mysteries of the kingdom, not so that you might go there, but so

that you might groan all the more. 36 ¹For someone else will take your place, so that the twelve [. . .] might be complete in their god.”

⁵And Judas said to him, “What day will you tell me these things? ⁷And (when) will the great day of light dawn for the [. . .] race?” ⁹But when he had said this, Jesus left him.

NOTES

33.25–26. *training for godliness*. The phrase *r-gumnaze e-tmtnoute* parallels 1 Tim 4:7: “Train yourself for godliness” (*gumnaze de seauton pros eusebeian*). Nagel (2007, 240, 260–62; 2009, 118–19) argues that this phrase should be translated “disputing about divinity.” He notes that the Sahidic New Testament uses *mnteusebēs* to translate *eusebeia* in 1 Tim 4:7; that although *mtnoute* can mean *eusebeia*, it more usually corresponds to *theiotēs* (Crum 1939, 231a); and that *gumnazein* appears in several Coptic texts with the meaning “dispute” or “discuss.” The most relevant example of the last point appears in the *Gospel of Mary*, in which the disciples “began to discuss the Savior’s words” (*au-r-arkhe[sthai] n-r-gumn[n]aze ha-pra n-nša[č]e m-p[sō(tē)r*; 9.22–24). Nonetheless, the parallel with 1 Tim 4:7 argues against this view. In the Greek New Testament *gumnazein* always means “to train” (Heb 5:14, 12:11), even in a negative sense (2 Pet 2:14); such is its meaning in 2 Clem. 20.2 as well. The following sentence places “giving thanks over the bread” parallel to our phrase, so that “giving thanks over the bread” is an example of the religious practices by which the disciples train for godliness (Heininger 2010, 426; Nicklas 2012, 100–101).

33.26–27. *When he [. . .] his disciples*. The lacuna must have contained a verb that ends with a tau, which is visible, and that marks the direct object with *e-*, which appears before “his disciples.” Some have proposed [*qōš*]t, which would result in “When he [saw (or observed)] his disciples” (e.g., Jenott 2011, 136; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 64). Others have discerned a tau before the lacuna as well and have proposed *t[ōm]t*, which would result in “When he [came upon (or met)] his disciples” (e.g., Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 262; Nagel 2014, 276). Either makes sense.

34.5–6. *[This] is what is appropriate*. The end of line 5 contains a lacuna before which there is a pi; line 6 begins with *p-et-esše* (“what is appropriate”). The original editors restored *p[ai]*, creating a cleft sentence, literally, “It is this that is what is appropriate” (Kasser et al. 2007, 187). The

restoration of simply *p[e]* (Jenott 2011, 138; Devoti 2012, 190) does not create a complete sentence.

34.8. *you do not do this*. The clause is in focalizing conversion, along with its contrasting one in 34.10 (*e[f-na-č̃]i-cmou*): *etn-eire* could be emended to <et>*etn-eire*.

34.11–13. *it is you [. . .] who are the son of our god*. The independent pronoun *ntok* survives at the end of line 11. The *pe* of a presumed nominal sentence survives before *pšēre m-pennoute* at the end of line 12 and the beginning of line 13. Editors disagree about the restoration of the beginning of line 12. Nagel (2014, 276–77) proposes [*hōōk*]: “You [yourself] are the son of our god.” Brankaer and van Os (2019, 66–67) restore *na[mē]e*: “You [really] are the son of our god.” Jenott (2011, 138) prudently restores nothing. Some sort of intensifying word like those proposed seems likely; my translation seeks to convey that emphasis without the precision of knowing what that word is.

34.13. *know*. The verb here and in the following sentence is *sooun*, the equivalent of *ginōskō*, the verbal form of the noun *gnōsis*. It suggests personal and direct knowledge (“acquaintance”) rather than informational knowledge (Layton 2021, 9).

34.25–26. *Your god who is within you and [. . .]*. Only an initial *nu* survives at the beginning of the lacuna in line 26. The *nu* probably began *nef-* (“his,” that is, “your god’s”). Most editors do not restore the remainder of the lacuna, but proposals to do so include *nefqom* (“his powers”) (Nagel 2014, 276) and *nefsiou* (“his stars”) (Jenott 2011, 138).

35.18–19. *the aeon of the Barbēlō, the immortal (aeon)*. The phrase “the immortal” (*pathanatos*) is masculine and so must modify “the aeon,” not “the Barbēlō,” whose definite article is feminine.

35.19–21. *But as for the one who sent you, its name I am not worthy to proclaim*. The main clause *ete-n-ti-mpša an n-taouo m-pefran* is a negated focalizing conversion; in this rare construction, “negation applies only within the topic element” (“I am not worthy”), “whereas the overall nexus is affirmative” (“It is its name that . . .”) (Layton 2011, §453[b]). The clause means, “It is its name that I am not worthy to proclaim.” The clause is preceded, however, by two items in extraposition that anticipate the personal element in the possessive pronoun *pef-*: the articulated attributive clause *p-entaf-taouo-k* (“the one who sent you”) and the demonstrative

pronoun *pai* (“this one”). The emphasis, then, is not just on the name, but on whose name, which my translation seeks to convey.

its name. In the immediate context, it is uncertain whether the grammatically masculine gender of the phrase “the one who sent you” conveys the gender of the being to which it refers. That being is almost certainly the invisible spirit, which likely transcends gender (Note on 47.16, *And it (the invisible spirit) said*). Therefore, I translate “its name” rather than “his name.”

It has been suggested that the use of *taouo* in two different senses (“put forth, send” and “utter, proclaim”) is a deliberate word play in Coptic and thus must deviate from the original Greek, which lacks a word with both of these meanings (Gathercole 2007, 141; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 91). It is possible that the translator was making such a pun in choosing the single *taouo* rather than two different words among the several other Coptic words that could have these meanings, but that does not mean that he revised or misrepresented the original Greek, which probably used two different words for these meanings. Alternatively, but much less likely, perhaps the Greek text stated that the one whose name Judas will not proclaim “spoke” or “uttered” Jesus, a familiar way in Jewish and Christian literature for divinity to create other beings, above all in the first chapter of Genesis.

36.3. *the twelve* [. . .]. A sigma appears to be legible before the lacuna and an omicron and a nu after it. Scholarship is divided between two proposed restorations. The original editors suggest *s[boui] on*: “the twelve disciples,” followed by the particle *on* (Kasser et al. 2007, 191). Van der Vliet (2006, 140–42) proposes *s[toikhi]on*: “the twelve elements.” The latter seems more likely than the former, which may be too short for the lacuna. The gospel consistently uses *mathētēs* for “disciple” rather than *sboui* (although it is known to alternate between Greco-Coptic and Egyptian Coptic equivalents). A reference to “the elements (*stoicheia*),” a term used for heavenly rulers already in the New Testament (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20), would anticipate the association of the twelve disciples with the stars as ruling forces (Jenott 2011, 193–94).

36.8–9. *the* [. . .] *race*. The final alpha of *genea* is visible at the beginning of line 9, before a substantial lacuna. Some editors discern *mau* before *nai*, which begins the next sentence (e.g., Brankaer and van Os 2019, 70). That would suggest *t-genea* [*et-m*]*mau*, “[that] race,” which is plausible, even probable.

COMMENTS

The first appearance of Jesus features three short dialogues prompted by Jesus's observations of the practice or mental conditions of his interlocutors: (1) he finds or sees the disciples "gathered, seated, and giving thanks over the bread" (33.26–34.2); (2) he sees the disciples' "foolishness" (34.22–23); and (3) he recognizes that Judas is "thinking about the rest of the exalted matters" (35.21–23). These three exchanges introduce three major themes of the gospel: (1) the disciples' mistaken worship of the wrong god and ignorance of Jesus's true identity; (2) Judas's recognition of Jesus's true identity; and (3) Judas's ambiguous role, on the one hand, as a recipient of divine revelation and, on the other, as neither an ignorant disciple nor a member of the chosen race.

The context of the first short dialogue is a ritual in which the disciples are "giving thanks (*eucharistein*) over the bread" and which they call "[our] thanksgiving," that is, "our *eucharistia*." It is a ritual meal rather than an ordinary one for which the disciples are simply giving thanks, for by participating in it the disciples are "training for godliness," that is, engaging in a practice that would demonstrate their piety or make them more pious. By the second century, *eucharistia* and its cognates had become a technical term for a Christian ritual meal (Did. 9.1, 5 ["your eucharist"]; Ign. *Smyrn.* 6.2, 8.1; Ign. *Phld.* 4; Just. *1 Apol.* 66.1, applied specifically to the food). Ignatius exhorts the Ephesians to "gather (*sunerchesthai*) for god's eucharist" (*Eph.* 13.1), just as the disciples in our passage are "gathered" (*soouh*, which can translate *sunerchesthai*; Crum 1939, 372b). The author of the *Didache* urges Christians, "On the Lord's day, when you have gathered together, break bread and give thanks (*eucharistēsate*), having first confessed your trespasses, so that your sacrifice might be pure" (14.1). The disciples have gathered for their eucharist, as Ignatius and the *Didache* encourage. The use of the term "eucharist" does not necessarily imply a connection to the death of Jesus, nor does the mention of only bread necessarily imply the absence of wine (or indeed of any other food or drink); eucharistic practice and the meanings attributed to it were diverse in this period (Bradshaw 2004, 55–60). The placement of the ritual meal in Judea must have some significance, for Judea plays no role in the remaining dialogues, which could be anywhere or nowhere. Most likely it places the disciples and their meal in relationship to "Judeans," that is, to Jews, their ritual practices, and their god (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 322; Sandul

2011, 44). These associations prepare the way for the later dream that portrays the disciples' worship as temple cult.

Jesus laughs because the false god that the disciples worship has devised this ritual meal to receive blessing. Interpreters have not always taken Jesus at his word when he tells the disciples that he is not laughing at them (DeConick 2008a, 103; Bermejo Rubio 2008, 339–41; 2009c, 162–63; Clivaz 2012; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 136–37), but Jesus emphasizes the disciples' god, not their intention. The focalizing conversions in 34.8–11 accentuate a contrast, most likely between the will or intention of the disciples, on the one hand, and their god's will or intention to be blessed through this rite, on the other. The phrase “(not) by your own will” (*h[m-pe]tnouōš*) most likely does not make grand claims about the disciples' lack of free will—that is, that their actions are determined by fate or their stars—but simply states that they do not want or intend to worship the wrong god. Because of their ignorance, their action does not match their intention. Later in the work multiple luminaries are revealed “by the will (*hm-pouōš*) of the spirit” (49.5–16), that is, in accord with the spirit's intention or wish; at the end of the work Judas answers the scribes “as they wished” (*kata-peuouōše*) (58.23–24). The disciples' response indicates the inadvertence of their act: they think that they are doing what is correct and that they are worshiping the god whose son Jesus is. Jesus's reference to “your god” points out their error and announces his alienation from both the disciples and the god that they worship: it resembles Jesus's references to “your law” in his conversations with Jews in the Fourth Gospel (John 8:17, 10:34; Bermejo Rubio 2013, 601). Nonetheless, Jesus's laughter mocks the god who intends to receive blessing in this way, not the disciples who unintentionally bless him. The laughter by which Jesus ridicules lower false gods appears also in Irenaeus's account of Basilides's teaching (*Haer.* 1.24.4) and may have been derived from Psalm 2: “He who resides in the heavens will laugh at them, and the Lord will mock them” (2:4), that is, “the kings of the earth” and “the rulers” who oppose the Lord and his anointed (2:2) (Grant 1959, 123–24).

The disciples' statement, “Teacher, it is you [. . .] who are the son of our god,” initiates a sustained allusion to the accounts of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 16:13–20//Mark 8:27–30//Luke 9:18–22) (van den Kerchove 2014, 117–19), and it provokes the first reference to “race.” The disciples' “confession” sounds like Peter's in

Matt 16:16 (“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”), but it comes from disciples who are nameless (“they”), like those who give the incorrect answers in the Synoptic passages. The stage is set for the one named disciple to make the accurate identification. Jesus’s question in response is rhetorical: there appears to be no way in which the disciples can have knowledge or acquaintance (*sooun* = *gnōsis*) of Jesus, at least in their present condition, for “no race (*genea*) from the human beings who are among you” will do so. The convoluted phrasing expands Jesus’s pronouncement beyond the immediate circle of the disciples to the different races or sorts of people among them, that is, the races of human beings whom the disciples represent. Elaborations on who these races are and why they will not gain *gnōsis* of Jesus take up much of the ensuing dialogues. The use of the “amen” formula highlights the significance of the pronouncement (Introduction III.A).

The disciples’ reaction displays the deleterious moral effects that adherence to their god has upon them. The author characterizes the disciples’ irritation (*aganaktein*), anger (*orgē*), and blasphemous thoughts against Jesus in Stoic fashion as “foolishness,” the opposite condition from that of the sage (*sophos*) or the perfect or mature (*teleios*) human being (35.3–4) (Dunderberg 2009, 207–8). By getting irritated or vexed at Jesus’s pronouncement, the disciples react improperly to correction: “Let us accept instruction, at which no one should get irritated (*aganaktein*),” exhorts the author of *1 Clement* (56.2); only “the foolish” (*asophoi*) become irritated when they are corrected, writes the author of *2 Clement* (19.2). Their reaction echoes one of the disciples’ less virtuous moments in the canonical gospels, when they become irritated at the woman who anoints Jesus (Matt 26:8//Mark 14:4). The disciples’ irritation develops into full-blown anger or wrath, one of the primary vicious passions displayed by the foolish in Stoic thought, and in this way they become like their god. The disciples’ souls show an affinity for or likeness to their god—and his accompanying powers or stars—that is, the creator god of the Bible, whom the gnostics likewise characterized as wrathful (Apoc. Adam 70.6–8, 75.9–25, 77.7–9; Iren. *Haer.* 1.30.10; Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 325; Nicklas 2012, 104). The *Secret Book According to John* attributes blaspheming the spirit to the only human beings who seem beyond salvation (NHC II 27.29). It is possible that the disciples’ irritation and anger reflect also the reactions of other Christians to gnostic teachings (Pagels and King 2007, 129–30).

Jesus's challenge to the disciples functions as the equivalent to his question to them at Caesarea Philippi—"But who do *you* say that I am?" (Mark 8:29 parr.; emphasis added)—but with distinctive gnostic terminology found also in the *Secret Book*. According to that work, the "strong" (*tačrēu*) person has received moral and intellectual stability from the invisible spirit, which "gives strength" to the aeons of the entirety (NHC II 4.14) and by whose will the entirety "became strong" (NHC II 8.26–28). The "intelligence" of the first human being became "stronger than those which had made him," including "the first ruler," whose own strength came from above (NHC II 20.3–5, 11.21–22). As for subsequent human beings, "if the spirit of life increases—for the power comes (to them)—it strengthens (*tačro*) that soul, and nothing can mislead it into the works of wickedness" (NHC II 26.15–19). In our passage a person so strengthened represents and can bring forward "the perfect (*teleios*) human being"; that person has become, in moral terms, a perfect or mature human being ("sage") (Dunderberg 2009, 205–13) and, in terms of gnostic anthropology, an earthly incarnation of the divine archetype of humanity, Adamas, "the first human being" (Gos. Jud. 48.21–23, 50.20). In the *Secret Book* the saved are those who are "similar in spirit" (*homopneuma*) to the disciple John and come from "the immovable race of the perfect (*teleios*) human being" (BG 22.13–16, NHC II 2.23–25). Such a person can "stand" before Jesus, that is, demonstrate the state of stability and permanence that is characteristic of divinity, true being, just as the aeons "stand" at rest or in attendance before the invisible spirit and the Barbēlō (Ap. John NHC II 5.16, 23, 30, etc.) and "the holy ones" will "stand at rest always in the aeon with the holy angels" (Gos. Jud. 45.17–24) (M. Williams 1985). Not surprisingly, in this gospel the wicked and ignorant "stand" before a false altar (39.8–10).

At first glance Judas's ability to stand before Jesus and his identification of Jesus's true identity might indicate that he is a member of the immovable race and, in comparison with the Caesarea Philippi scene, the gnostic counterpart of Peter. The disciples claim to be "mighty" (*čoor*), an adjective that Jesus later uses for "the mighty (*čoor*) and holy race" (36.25–26); the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* refers as well to "the great incorruptible, immovable race of the great mighty people of the great Seth" (NHC III 59.13–15). Nonetheless, the spirit that the disciples have is not strong enough to stand before Jesus. In the gospel's anthropology, "spirit"

(*pneuma*) has a divine origin and is granted temporarily to human beings to give them life, but people can degrade and misuse this divine gift (COMMENTS 53.16–54.12), as the disciples appear to have done. Judas, however, is able to stand before Jesus, and the turning away of his face implies his recognition of Jesus’s divinity, as this gesture indicates in the Bible and Jewish apocalyptic literature (Exod 33:20; *1 En.* 14:21–25; Scopello 2008b, 128–29; Jenott 2011, 191–92).

Judas’s statement is distinctively gnostic in its reference to “the aeon of the Barbēlō” and a higher unnamed divine principle. Gnostic works differ in how they understand the origin and divine identity of the incarnate savior, whether explicitly identified as Jesus or not. In the poem that concludes the long version of the *Secret Book*, “the perfect forethought of the entirety,” that is, the Barbēlō, appears to become incarnate herself: “I entered the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body” (NHC II 31.3–4). In *First Thought in Three Forms*, first thought (the Barbēlō) declares more precisely, “I put on Jesus” (50.12–13). According to the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, however, it is the great Seth who “put on” “the living reason-born Jesus” (NHC IV 75.15–17). Irenaeus reports that other second-century gnostics taught that an immortal called the anointed (Christ) was begotten by an original triad of parent, thought (the equivalent of the Barbēlō?), and holy spirit, and that this anointed one later descended into Jesus (*Haer.* 1.30.1, 12–13). Judas claims here not that Jesus is the Barbēlō, but (in a manner similar to Irenaeus’s report about the anointed) that he “came from” the immortal aeon of the Barbēlō. In the later theogony various immortals “come forth” or “come into being” from luminous clouds, which seem to function as spaces similar to aeons; the invisible spirit itself exists within “a great and infinite aeon,” as does Adamas in “the first cloud of light” (47.5–48.26). Rather than an incarnation of some other being, then, the Jesus who speaks with the disciples appears simply to be an immortal himself, who originated as others did by emerging from an aeon—or from a luminous cloud, for although the name Barbēlō does not appear in the theogony, an unnamed “luminous cloud” does fill the Barbēlō’s position as the second divine principle (47.14–16). This immortal Jesus who speaks is borne by a human being in this world (56.6–7, 20–21). The one who sent Jesus and whose name Judas professes to be unworthy to say must be the great invisible spirit, “which has not been called by any name” (47.8–13; cf. Ap. John NHC II 3.15–17; Steles Seth 125.26–28; Iren. *Haer.* 1.29.1).

Judas's confession reveals that Judas, in contrast to the other disciples, does indeed have the *gnōsis* of who Jesus is and where he has come from.

The last of the three short dialogues is an exchange between Jesus and Judas that continues the allusion to the Caesarea Philippi scene, but it renders Judas's status more ambiguous than what the immediately preceding exchange suggested and raises suspense about what Jesus will reveal further. In Matthew, after Peter calls Jesus "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Jesus praises Peter for receiving revelation from his father and makes extraordinary promises to him (16:17–19)—and yet, just a few verses later, Jesus rebukes Peter as Satan and accuses him of thinking about "human matters" rather than "divine matters" (16:23). Similarly, here Jesus recognizes that Judas is thinking about "exalted matters," invites him to separate from the ignorant disciples, and promises to tell him "the mysteries of the kingdom"—and yet, not so that Judas will go to that kingdom, but so that he will groan all the more. The separation of Judas from the other disciples after his proclamation resembles Gos. Thom. 13 (Gathercole 2007, 73). There too Thomas's approved statement about Jesus comes after other disciples have failed to identify Jesus; his statement contains an apophatic element ("Teacher, my mouth utterly will not let me say what you resemble"); Jesus approves of Thomas's knowledge; and the episode concludes with danger for Thomas ("you will take stones and stone me"). *Thomas* 13 must be understood as another variation on the Caesarea Philippi scene, and, as in our passage, the leading disciple's acknowledgment of his inability to speak fully about Jesus's identity prompts additional revelation. Both works position themselves as supplements or amendments to the earlier gospels: Peter's confession, which the other gospels narrate, is incomplete or requires correction.

The phrase "mysteries of the kingdom" must be taken from Matt 13:11//Mark 4:11//Luke 8:10. *Judas* refers to multiple realms, higher and lower, with the vocabulary of "kingdom" and ruling (Introduction IV.A; cf. Painchaud 2008b; Jenott 2011, 192). In this passage the "there" to which Judas will not go almost certainly refers to "the kingdom"; "the mysteries of the kingdom," then, means information about the upper realm, the "exalted matters" about which Judas is thinking. In early Christian literature "mystery(ies)" (*mustērion*) often refers to revealed eschatological information (in addition to Mark 4:11 parr.; Rom 11:25; Eph 3:3; 2 Thess 2:7; Rev 1:20; Did. 11.11; Diogn. 8.10; 11.2, 5) (Marcus 1984; Lang 2015),

and so it does here as well, as the subsequent reference to a future “day of light” indicates.

Jesus’s revelation to Judas will cause him “to groan all the more.” According to the *Revelation of Adam*, Adam and Eve “groaned” in their hearts when divine revealers appeared to them and announced that they would tell them “about eternity and the seed of That Human Being”; presumably, Adam and Eve groaned because the seed had left them and thus salvation appeared beyond their reach (66.1–14; Jenott 2011, 193). Groaning is an appropriate response to learning about salvation that one will not receive. On the other hand, Paul spoke of a groaning in anticipation of a salvation that one will in fact receive (Rom 8:22, 2 Cor 5:2–4). It is not certain that Judas will *never* go to the kingdom; possibly he will do so in some distant future time, after he performs the eschatological role that he has been assigned. Moreover, the extended and well-constructed analogy with the Caesarea Philippi scene and Peter’s confession makes it unlikely that Judas’s recognition of Jesus is patterned after and analogous to the unclean spirits in Mark who recognize Jesus (3:11, 5:7), despite the verbal parallel to Mark 1:24 (so DeConick 2008b, 567). In contrast to how our gospel’s Jesus deals with Judas, Mark’s Jesus does not recognize the demons’ interest in exalted matters, nor does he take any of them away from others for individualized instruction and revelation (Dunderberg 2009, 201–2 n. 4). Judas’s status is more ambiguous than his admirable strength and correct confession might suggest, but perhaps not as evil or hopeless as some modern commentators would have it.

It is not clear how Jesus’s statement that Judas will be replaced so that the twelve disciples or elements (or whatever) might be complete in their god connects with (*gar*) what goes before. Possibly Judas will groan over his replacement as well (Gathercole 2007, 72–73) because he later learns that “the twelve disciples” (thus including his replacement) will stone him and pursue him (44.24–45.1). The sentence possibly but not certainly indicates knowledge of Acts 1:15–26 (Cazelais 2012, 217–18). If it is “the twelve elements (*stoicheia*)” that will be complete (Note on 36.3, *the twelve* [. . .]), then the gospel’s own logic, which associates the twelve disciples with stars and thus probably with the Zodiac, would require that Judas be replaced (Jenott 2011, 193–94). More generally, although Acts provides the only surviving account of such a replacement, it is possible that the idea that the traitorous disciple was replaced to maintain a set of twelve could

have developed and circulated among Christians without knowledge of Acts (cf. Gathercole 2012, 295–97). Writing decades before Acts, Paul, for example, speaks of “twelve” after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5) even though he possibly knows that Jesus was betrayed (“handed over”; 1 Cor 11:23). For a possible verbal allusion to Acts, see the Note on 38.6–7, *devoting themselves*. In any event, the replacement indicates that Judas will separate from the disciples not merely temporarily for special revelation, but permanently.

Judas’s concluding unanswered questions reveal only that more new information lies ahead at some point (“what day?”) but also that a saved race can expect a great day of light to dawn for it. Although the phrase “the great day of light” does not seem to be attested elsewhere (but cf. Gos. Truth 32.25–32; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 93), its reference to the final consummation and ultimate salvation of the elect seems clear enough. The *Reality of the Rulers* uses imagery of light to refer to that event (97.7–8, 13–14), and in our gospel “light” and being “luminous” are markers of immortal status (e.g., 47.15, 48.10–11, 57.18). The probable restoration of “that” with “race” (Note on 36.8–9, *the [. . .] race*) even though no race of the saved has been mentioned suggests a mystifying honorific title: “That Race” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 145–46). It looks forward to Jesus’s next appearance, which fully introduces the mighty and holy race.

Second Appearance: The Mighty and Holy Race (36.11–37.20)

36 ¹¹When morning came, he appeared to his disciples, and they said to him, ¹³“Teacher, where did you go? ¹⁴What do you do after you have left us?”

¹⁵Jesus said to them, “I went to another great and holy race.”

¹⁷His disciples said to him, “Lord, what is the great race that is more exalted and holier than we but not in these aeons now?”

²²When Jesus heard these things, he laughed and said to them, ²⁴“Why are you thinking in your heart about the mighty and holy race? ³⁷ ¹Truly I say to you, no offspring [of this] aeon will see [that race], nor will any angelic army of the stars rule over that race, nor will any mortal human offspring be able to go with it. ⁸For [that race] does not come from [. . .] came into being [. . .] the race of the human beings [. . .] ¹¹but it is from the race of [. . . great] people. [. . .] the powerful authorities [. . .] ¹⁴nor any power [of the aeons] in which you rule.”

¹⁷When his disciples heard these things, they were disturbed in their spirit, each one, and they were at a loss for words.

NOTES

36.14–15. *What do you do after you have left us?* This clause in durative conjugation is converted (*ek-r-ou*), but ambiguously so. It could be the circumstantial conversion, in which case its tense would be simultaneous with the preceding verb (*nt-ak-bōk*), which is the focalized past: “Teacher, where did you go (and) what were you doing after you left us?” The final phrase is certainly circumstantial (*e-ak-lo*). My translation, however, reads it as a focalizing conversion and thus as a separate question that asks about ongoing behavior of Jesus.

36.16–17. *I went to another great and holy race.* The sentence is in the focalizing conversion (*nt-aei-bōk*), most likely emphasizing “to another great and holy race.”

36.21. *not in these aeons now.* The translation reflects the awkward position of *tenou* (“now”) at the end of the sentence. Jenott (2011, 194) suggests instead that *tenou* begins the following sentence, which would place *auō* anomalously in second position. Although there is a dicolon before *tenou* in the manuscript, the passages that he cites as examples of *auō* in second position (NHC I 67.6, NHC II 10.26, BG 39.4) do not in fact show *auō* functioning as an enclitic in the manner of *de*, *qe*, and *on*.

37.2. [*of this*] *aeon.* The reconstruction “[of these] aeons” is also possible (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 331).

37.3. *will see [that race].* All editors agree on this restoration. After the lacuna the concluding *-mau* of *et-mmau* (“that”) is visible, and the occurrences of “that race” at 37.5–6, 8 provide confirmation.

37.12. [*. . . great*]. The final *-oq* of *noq* survives after the lacuna. Most scholars reconstruct [*nin*]oq *n-rōme* (“those great people”), which is probable but not certain.

37.19–20. *they were at a loss for words.* Literally, “they did not find what they were going to say.”

COMMENTS

Jesus’s second appearance consists of a brief dialogue between Jesus and the disciples that introduces the idea of a race that is great, mighty, and holy in contrast to the mortal race of the human beings that belongs to “this aeon.” The fragmentary state of nine lines of Jesus’s discussion of the holy race (37.8–16) leaves us with a good sense of that contrast, but with little detail about how the two groups originated.

Jesus’s appearance “when morning came” probably indicates the day following the first appearance, but not certainly. The disciples’ second question, if it is an independent clause in focalizing conversion (Note on 36.14–15, *What do you do after you have left us?*), asks about an ongoing activity in which Jesus regularly leaves the disciples. That is, Jesus appears to and departs from the disciples more often than what the gospel narrates, as the closing sentence of the prologue states (“many a time”; 33.18–21). When he leaves the disciples he is with “another great and holy race,” that is, “the children” (33.20–21). It is Jesus’s absence from the disciples—and

the contemporary community of Christ believers that they represent—that prompts disclosure of the existence of and Jesus’s presence with the other great and holy race—that is, with the contemporary community of gnostic Jesus believers. The seemingly timeless and nonlocalized (*ortlos*) character of the dialogues (Introduction III.A) allows for this double reference to the past time of the original disciples and the present time of those who claim allegiance to them.

In contrast to his laughter in the previous appearance, Jesus now certainly laughs at the disciples, who are presumably “offspring of this aeon” and therefore unable to see and comprehend “the mighty and holy race” (for “mighty,” cf. Gos. Jud. 35.7, Gos. Eg. NHC III 59.13–15; COMMENTS 33.22–36.10). What survives of the description of the mighty and holy race establishes its superiority through negative contrasts: offspring of this aeon cannot see it; angelic armies of stars do not rule over it; no mortal human offspring can accompany it; it does not come from something that came into being; it is different in some way from “the race of the human beings” and probably not vulnerable to the powerful authorities nor to any power of the aeons in which the disciples rule. Instead, the race is from the race of (probably) those great people; this awkwardly repetitive formulation may indicate the derivation of the mighty and holy race from “the incorruptible [race] of Seth” in the higher realm (49.5–6). The race described here is human but has an origin and a character that transcend this world: it seems to belong to another aeon, in a realm of immortality where stars do not rule.

Above all, that race is free from rule by others: no angelic army of stars will rule over it. Here the gospel introduces one of its primary themes: the reign of stars and angels over this realm and the people in it. That angels move or lead the stars, that the stars are angels, that the angels and stars form one or more armies, and that stars or angels rule over this cosmos in some way are ideas that run through Jewish and Christian apocalyptic (and other) literature (Jenott 2011, 194–95). The ancients had long believed that the stars were alive, although they disagreed about how they moved, what kind of bodies they may have had, and the like (Scott 1991). Jews such as Philo and Christians such as Clement and Origen attempted to integrate biblical evidence for the activities of angels and stars with a long tradition of philosophical discussion of these matters. According to Genesis, god created the luminaries in the sky to illumine the earth, to separate day and night, and “to be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years”

(1:14); the latter role possibly implied some rationality. The sun and the moon, “the two great luminaries,” possess “rulership” (*archē*) and “rule” (*archein*) the day and the night” (1:16–18). According to other biblical books, stars could fight battles (Judg 5:20, Dan 8:9–11), and it seems that an individual star could rebel against its task of “sending light to all the nations” and try to set up a throne above the clouds and the other “stars of god” (Isa 14:12–14). Revelation in the New Testament suggested that the stars could be angels (1:20), and in that work “a star that had fallen from earth to heaven” acts just as an angel does (9:1–2; cf. 20:1). Both the Septuagint and early Christian literature provided rich material for conceiving of angels and stars as related and as exercising dominion over the cosmos.

Philo (*Conf.* 168–75) drew on the passages in the Septuagint, but he resisted some of their implications about the independence of angels and stars. He insisted that there is “one ruler (*archōn*) and sovereign and king, who alone may direct and regulate all things,” that is, god. Nonetheless, like any king, god has subordinates to administer his rule, the stars and angels. It is clear that Philo has the stars in mind, for he notes that some people have called “the sun, the moon, and the whole sky” gods. They are wrong to do so, however:

There is, too, in the air a sacred company of unbodied souls that attends the heavenly powers, souls that the prophetic word customarily calls angels. Therefore, the entire army (*stratos*) composed of the several contingents, each marshalled in their proper ranks, has as its task to serve and minister to the word of the captain who thus marshalled them, and to follow his leadership as right and the law of service demand. For it must not be that god’s soldiers should ever be guilty of desertion from the ranks.

God, of course, is capable of doing everything he wants on his own, but not everything is “fitting” for him to do, and thus he delegates some tasks to “the subordinate powers,” who nonetheless act only on the knowledge that he gives them. Philo possibly indicates that, unlike the angels, the stars have bodies but do not move themselves; instead, angels move them (Scott 1991, 70–71). In whatever fashion Philo thought that the angels and the stars precisely relate, an “angelic army of stars” would have made sense to him.

Philo stressed that the soldiers in this army are subordinate to god, would never desert their ranks, and do not make their own plans, but other ancient Jews imagined armies of angels and stars acting more independently, going astray, and having specific domains of rule. The so-called Book of the Luminaries in *1 Enoch* 72–82 describes astral ranks, orders, and tasks in

some detail; their leaders are angels, some of whom are named (82:12–14). These stars and their leaders can, despite Philo’s claims, think on their own and so go astray; such errant stars can become hostile against human sinners, who think that the stars are gods (80:6–8). Our gospel’s view of the stars includes the possibility of stars going their own way (46.1–2, 55.19–20) and of deceiving or acting with hostility toward human beings (45.13–14), but that does not appear in the current passage, in which the rule of the angelic army of the stars over human affairs need not be malevolent: the holy race is simply not subject to this rule.

The stars’ ruling responsibilities may have been primarily calendrical, seasonal, and predictive (“signs”), but as god’s subordinates, the angels could have leadership over specific nations. According to Deuteronomy, “the most high” made as many “peoples” (*ethnē*) as there are “angels” or “sons of god”; Israel was assigned to “the Lord” (32:8–9). Sirach repeats this idea: each *ethnos* has a “governor” (*hēgoumenos*); Israel’s is the Lord (17:17). Basilides elaborated on this concept: the angels in the lowest of the 365 heavens divided the earth and its nations among themselves. Although all of these angels are called “rulers” (*principes*) because they rule individual peoples (*gentes*), they nevertheless have their own ruler, to whom the Jews were assigned. “The god of the Jews” tried to subject the other nations to his own, but the other rulers and their assigned nations resisted. It appears to be the ruin (*perditio*) caused by this conflict that provoked the unnamable parent to send Christ to save people “from the authority of the beings that had crafted the world” (Iren. *Haer.* 1.24.4). Philo’s astral/angelic soldiers may carry out their assigned tasks in complete obedience to their god, but other Jews and Christians imagined that ruling stars and angels act with some independence and so can abandon their duties, exercise their dominion over human beings negatively, and come into conflict with each other.

The disciples too have aeons in which they rule, to which also “powers” (*dunamis*) belong. Possibly these aeons constitute the cosmos itself, the lower world, and thus the disciples “are or will become the rulers over the lower world,” like the stars (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 148). Matthew 19:28 depicts the disciples as sitting “on twelve thrones” and “judging the twelve tribes of Israel” at the final consummation, and Paul claims that “the saints (*hagioi*) will judge the world (*kosmos*)” (1 Cor 6:2). If so, one wonders how these archontic disciples can also be under the control of their

fellow star-rulers, as interpreters often imagine. On the other hand, the gospel uses the term *aiōn* imprecisely to refer to any domain in which rule is exercised and from which inhabitants take their character (Introduction IV.A). Therefore, the aeons in which the disciples rule could be more earthbound aeons, that is, communal religious spaces in which the disciples or those who claim to be their successors exercise authority. Jenott (2011, 195) points out that in the early third century Tertullian, probably drawing on Matt 19:28, refers to bishops as sitting on “the apostles’ thrones” (*Praescr.* 36.1). Possibly the characterization of the disciples ruling in their own aeons mocks as ludicrously grandiose the claims to authority within Christian communities made by their purported successors.

This use of the term *aiōn* for regions or domains within this cosmos suggests also the possibility that the great and holy race to which Jesus goes when he leaves the disciples is present within this cosmos, but in a separate domain. That is, the absence of the great race from what the disciples call “these aeons” may not mean its presence in the upper realm; rather, it may be present in other aeons within this realm, aeons in which the disciples do not rule, such as the community of our gospel’s author.

Some commentators have seen in this passage, as fragmentary as it is, “a quite severe soteriological determinism,” because of the stark contrast between the mighty and holy race, which transcends every domain of rule, and all other “mortal human offspring,” who cannot see or go with that race (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 148). To be sure, Jesus indicates that it is impossible for the disciples to think about the mighty and holy race, indeed that it is laughable that they should even try. Yet the Fourth Gospel contains passages in which people seem to be incapable of understanding the spiritual realities about which Jesus speaks (Nicodemus in John 3, the Samaritan woman in John 4, “the Jews” nearly throughout), and it uses similarly dualistic language to contrast the saved with “the world” (e.g., 15:18–19). Such rhetoric can appear in factional polemic against another religious community that a sect views as larger, more powerful, and hostile. It does not follow, however, that the incapacity of certain people to see or comprehend higher realities has been imposed on them permanently, or that such people played no role in the creation of their unfortunate spiritual state, or that they could not have been—or still could be—otherwise (Introduction IV.B).

Third Appearance: The Disciples' Dream and Its Interpretations (37.20–44.14)

37 ²⁰ Jesus came to them on another day, and they said to him, ²²“Teacher, we saw you in a dream, for we saw great dreams [in the] night that passed.”

²⁴[But Jesus said,] “Why [. . .] you hid yourselves?”

38 ¹ For their part, [they said, “We] saw a large building [in which] there were a large altar, ³[and] twelve men who we say are priests, and a name. ⁶A multitude were devoting themselves to that altar ⁹[. . .] the priests [. . .] the offerings. ¹⁰We too were devoting ourselves.”

¹²[Jesus said,] “Of what sort are [. . . ?]”

¹³And they said, “[Some] are fasting for two weeks; ¹⁶others are sacrificing their own children, others their wives, ¹⁸while they are blessing and submitting to one another. ²⁰Others are sleeping with men; others are murdering; ²²others are committing a multitude of sins and lawless deeds. ²⁴And the people who stand [at] the altar [are] invoking your [name]. ³⁹¹And because they are engaged in all the labors of their sacrifice, that [altar] becomes full.” ⁴After they had said these things, they fell silent because they were agitated.

⁵Jesus said to them, “Why have you become agitated? ⁷Truly I say to you, all the priests that stand at that altar are invoking my name. ¹¹And even more, I say to you that my name has been written upon this building of the races of the stars by the races of the human beings, ¹⁵and in my name [they] shamefully have planted fruitless trees.”

¹⁸Jesus said to them, “It is you who receive the offerings at the altar that you saw. ²¹That is the god that you serve, and you are the twelve men whom you saw. ²⁵And the cattle that are brought in are the sacrifices that you saw, that is, the multitude that you are leading astray ⁴⁰at that altar.

²[" . . .] is going to stand, ³and in this way he will use my name; and <the> races of the pious will devote themselves to him. ⁷After him another man will present the [fornicators], ⁹and another will present the killers of children, ¹¹and another, those who sleep with men, those who fast, ¹³and the rest of impurity, lawlessness, and error, and those who say, 'We are equal to angels.' ¹⁷And they are the stars that bring everything to completion. ¹⁸For they have said to the races of the human beings, ¹⁹'Lo, god has accepted your sacrifice from the hands of a priest'—²²that is, the deacon of error, ²³or the lord who gives orders, who presides over the entirety. ²⁵On the last day they will be put to shame."

41 ¹Jesus said [to them,] "Desist from [sacrifices of animals], ³which [. . .] on the altar, ⁴because they are upon your stars and your angels and have already come to completion there. ⁷Therefore, consider them [. . . ,] and let them [become] manifest."

NOTES

37.25–26. *Why [. . .] you hid yourselves?* The surviving letters before the lacuna in line 25, *nta-*, probably begin a focalized past tense of a verb (but cf. Nagel 2009, 119–21). The text after the lacuna makes it clear that the subject of the verb "hide" is second-person plural and that it is in the past, but it cannot be determined how it relates syntactically to what came before.

38.3. [*in which*]. The consensus of scholars is to restore *nhēt-f* ("in which"), but in fact it is not certain. Van den Kerchove (2008, 314–16) correctly points out that if the scene is modeled after the Jerusalem temple (and many other ancient temples), the altar should be in front of the temple building itself (the Holy of Holies). She attributes to Einar Thomassen the alternative suggestion of *mmau* ("where there were . . ."), and she offers the possibility of *nahra-f* ("before which there were . . ."). The image of a multitude devoting themselves to the altar also supports placing the altar in front of the temple. On the other hand, the multitude could be outside the building that contains the altar to which they are devoted. And van den Kerchove notes that *ēi* (*oikos* = "building") could refer to the entire temple complex, not only the Holy of Holies, and it seems that the dream has a double reference to the Jerusalem temple cult of the past and to the

Christian assembly within a house (*ēi*) in the present. These latter considerations support the reading “in which.”

38.3–4. *twelve men*. Although *rōme* can mean simply “human being” (as it does throughout Gos. Jud.), the later identification of the twelve as the disciples indicates that they are male.

38.6–7. *devoting themselves*. In the New Testament and early Christian literature, the verb *proskarterein* denotes assiduous attendance, sometimes with no religious meaning (Mark 3:9, Acts 10:7, Rom 13:6), but often referring to persistent devotion to religious practices (Acts 2:42, 46; 6:4; Rom 12:12; Col 4:2; Pol. *Phil.* 7.2, 8.1). Here and at 38.10–11 its use may allude specifically to Acts 2:46, where the believers are described as “day by day devoting themselves [*proskarterountes*] with one accord in the temple” (translation mine).

38.7–8. *to that altar*. The scribe mistakenly wrote *epethusiastēri* of *e-pethusiastērion* twice.

38.9–10. [. . .] *the priests* [. . .] *the offerings*. Most editors have filled the lacunae in these lines. Line 9 reads š[. . .] *ol nqi-nouēēb*. The lacuna must contain a verb and a third-person plural conjugation base with “the priests” as the postponed subject. Because of the *šai* before the lacuna, all commentators have restored the limitative conjugation base *šantou-*: “until they (the priests).” The surviving *ol* after the lacuna has suggested a short verb that takes *ebol*, either *čōk ebol* (“until the priests completed or finished”) (e.g., van der Vliet 2006, 143) or *ei ebol* (“until the priests came out”) (e.g., Jenott 2011, 146). Whichever of these options they have chosen, editors have concluded that the lacuna in line 10 must include a verb in the conjunctive that can take “the offerings” (*nšmše*) as an object and have restored [*nse-či ehoun n-*]*nšmše*, which aligns with 39.19. The two resulting translations are “until the priests came out and received the offerings” and “until the priests finished receiving the offerings.” The former option may be more plausible if the altar is inside the building and the multitude is outside, so that the priests must go out to receive the crowd’s offerings, and its restoration in line 9 may better fit the lacuna’s size (Jenott 2011, 196).

the offerings. The noun *šmše* translates a range of words having to do with service or worship (e.g., *latreia*, *thrēskeia*, *diakonia*), but in the plural it probably translates *leitourgiai* (Crum 1939, 567b). We can compare 1 Clem. 40.2, which refers to sacrificial worship as performing *prosphora kai leitourgiai*.

38.12–13. *Of what sort are [. . . ?]*. Commentators differ on how to fill this lacuna and thus on whether Jesus asks about “the priests” (*nouēēb*) (“probably,” Jenott 2011, 146) or “those people/men” (*nirōme*) (e.g., Nagel 2014, 280; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 74). The restoration of “the priests” would mean that the disciples’ ensuing description applies only to the twelve priests, while “those people” could refer to the priests alone (i.e., “those men”; cf. 38.3–4), to the people in the multitude alone, or to all the people involved, both priests and multitude. The surviving copula *ne* rules out the singular *pmēēše* (Jenott 2011, 196). Those who argue that the question pertains only to the people in the crowd suggest that the disciples’ later reference to “the people who stand [at] the altar” (38.24–25) means that the people they have been describing up to that point are the multitude and that they now turn to the priests (e.g., van den Kerchove 2008, 319). On the other hand, it is possible that not all the priests stand at the altar or that they do not do so all the time (perhaps only when they invoke the name), and the sinful behaviors that follow (sacrificing wives, homoeroticism) suggest a group of men and appear typically in condemnations of wayward priests (COMMENTS; cf. Nicklas 2012, 105). Therefore, it seems likely that Jesus asks about the twelve men whom the disciples call priests, but he could do so using either *nouēēb* or *nirōme*.

39.1–2. *all the labors of their sacrifice*. The term *peušōōt* could mean either “their sacrifice” or “their deficiency” (Crum 1939, 590–93). The latter suits the theology of the gospel—the disciples’ beliefs and practices are indeed deficient—and the gospel otherwise uses the Greek *thusia* for “sacrifice.” It is unlikely, however, that the disciples themselves would refer to “their deficiency”; they are simply describing what they saw in the dream, which is sacrificial activity.

39.2–3. *that [altar] becomes full*. Jenott (2011, 148) and others (e.g., Brankaer and van Os 2019, 76) read the main clause in lines 2–3 as [e-]š[a]f-mouh nq̄ipethus[ia(s)tērion et-m]mau, which is reflected in my translation. The fai in line 2 and the pi at the beginning of line 3 are ambiguous, however, and some have read them as upsilon and nu, respectively, reconstructing as the subject *nethus[ia mpmēēše et-m]mau* (“the sacrifices of that multitude”) rather than “that altar” (Bermejo Rubio 2012, 102; Nagel 2014, 280). Moreover, there are two verbs *mouh*, one meaning “fill, become full” and the other “burn” (Crum 1939, 209–20). If one reconstructs “the sacrifices of that multitude,” then “burn” makes more

sense; *mouh* probably means “burn” or “kindled” in Gos. Jud. 56.23. If one adopts the reading “that [altar],” it is questionable whether *mouh* can mean “become full,” for it normally refers to the filling of containers with volume, such as houses, boats, and bottles, and, by metaphorical extension, to the filling of people, their hearts, and so on. This consideration further supports the translation “the sacrifices of that multitude burn” (Nagel 2009, 121–25; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 103). Jenott (2011, 148) argues persuasively, however, that the ink traces support the readings of *fai* and *pi*, which rule out the singular *thusia*, which is feminine. The altar figures so prominently in the dream and its interpretation that its appearance here seems appropriate. Despite arguments to the contrary, it does not seem an unreasonable metaphoric extension of *mouh* for the author to describe the altar either as burning (afame) or as becoming full. The emphasis on the multitude of worshipers suggests the latter, but the former is possible, especially if it means to suggest a large fire.

40.1–2. *at that altar*. Instead of concluding this sentence (so Nagel 2014, 283), the prepositional phrase could begin the following one: “At that altar [. . .] is going to stand.” In favor of the alternative translation are the two previous references to people standing at (*ečn-*) the altar (38.24–25, 39.8–10) (Jenott 2011, 200). In those passages, however, “at the altar” comes after the reference to standing; the image of the priests leading the cattle astray at the altar anticipates Jesus’s later descriptions of powers bringing and presenting sinners to the god Saklas (40.1–16, 54.24–55.11; COMMENTS).

40.3. [. . .]. The lacuna must contain a masculine singular noun phrase that ends in *-os*; the letter that appears immediately after the lacuna is not certain. Some have suggested a reference to the lower ruler, such as *pčoeis m-pkosmos* (“the lord of the cosmos”) (Schenke Robinson 2008, 89). But most commentators have preferred a term having to do with cultic or religious leadership. One possibility is *episkopos* (“overseer, bishop”) with some modifier (“the great,” “your”) (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 268). More likely is *diakonos* (“deacon, minister”), which appears at 40.22, either “your (*petn-*) deacon” (Jenott 2011, 150) or “their (*peu-*) deacon” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 78).

40.5–6. *will devote themselves to him*. Possibly “will devote themselves to it,” for the suffix in *ero-f* could refer either to the lost male subject of “will stand” (“him”) or to “my name” (“it”). In the dream the worshipers

devote themselves to the altar (38.6–8), which is later identified as the god whom the disciples serve (39.21–22). The lost male subject appears to function as the equivalent of both the altar and the disciples’ god, making “to him” more likely.

40.8. *another man*. I translate *kai-rōme* as “another man” because this person and the other figures in this sentence correspond to the “twelve men” who appear in the disciples’ dream (see Note on 38.3–4, *twelve men*).

40.11–13. *those who sleep with men, those who fast*. The text reads *nref-nkotke mnhoo[u]t mn-net-nēsteue*. It may also be translated, “those who sleep with men (and) with those who abstain,” or “those who sleep with men, those who abstain.” The questions concern the function of *mn-* and the meaning of *net-nēsteue*. Because the other sinners and sinful practices in Jesus’s list are connected by *auō*, it is possible that *mn-* does not join two different sets of sinners but functions in parallel with the *mn-* of *mn-hoout* and means “with,” creating a single phrase “those who sleep with men (and) with *netnēsteue*.” In that case *nēsteue* probably does not refer to fasting but simply to abstention; “those who abstain” would be people who have made a commitment to asceticism, including abstention from sex. A more general sense for *nēsteuein* appears in Gos. Thom. 27 (“abstain from the world”) and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 3.15, 7.12) (Nagel 2007, 244–45 n. 92; Jenott 2011, 201). On the other hand, the wider sense of *nēsteuein* is rare in early Christian literature, while its use for fasting is ubiquitous. Jesus’s repetition of sins from the disciples’ earlier list supports both translating *net-nēsteue* as “those who fast” (38.14–15) and understanding “those who sleep with men” as a complete clause (38.20–21) (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 159–60). The use of *mn-* to connect these two sets of sinners may reflect the influence of the immediately preceding *mn-*.

40.17–18. *And they are the stars that bring everything to completion*. Nearly all scholars take this clause as referring to “those who say, ‘We are equal to angels.’” For example, “And those who say, ‘We are equal to angels,’ indeed they are the stars which bring all things to completion” (Jenott 2011, 151; cf. Brankaer and van Os 2019, 79). This interpretation requires reading the *auō* in line 15 as the beginning of a new sentence; the *auō* at the beginning of line 17 then must mean something like “indeed” and not introduce a new sentence because lines 15–16 do not form a complete sentence. My translation takes the *auō* in line 15 as the final conjunction in the list of those sinners presented by the “another” of line 11, in parallel

with the (second) *mn-* in line 12 and the *auō* in line 13. The *auō* in line 17 introduces a new nominal sentence: *ntoou ne nsiou* (“they are the stars”). “They” (the subject of this new sentence) would then refer to the subjects of the previous sentence: “another man,” “another,” and “another,” and the same “they” would be the subject of the following sentence: “For they have said . . .”

40.21–22. *from the hands of a priest*. In the phrase *n-toot-ou n-ouēēb*, *ououēēb* (“a priest”) has been simplified to *ouēēb*, which is frequently attested (Layton 2011, §24[b]). Translations that consider *nouēēb* to have a plural meaning require different readings, either *n-toot-ou n-<n>ouēēb* (“through the priests”) or *n-toot-ou n-<hen>ouēēb* (“through priests”). The plural suffix of *n-toot-ou* suggests that *toot-* functions as a possessed noun that retains its meaning “hand” (Layton 2011, §§138–40)—here, “the hands”—rather than as the preposition “through”: “from the hands of a priest” (Nagel 2007, 245 n. 94; 2009, 126–28, with examples of *toot-* alternating with *qič̣*). This reading is supported by a possible allusion to Mal 1:10, “I will not accept a sacrifice (*thusia*) from your hands (*ek tōn cheirōn autōn*)” (cf. Mal 1:13), which other second-century Christian authors quote (COMMENTS).

40.22–26. *that is, the deacon of error, or the lord who gives orders, who presides over the entirety. On the last day they will be put to shame*. Scholars differ on how to translate the final lines of page 40. The explanatory relative clause *ete-paei pe pdiakonos nte-planē* (“that is, the deacon of error”) could modify either “god” or “a priest” in the preceding clause. An explanatory relative clause need not immediately follow its antecedent: see, for example, Luke 9:30 (cited at Layton 2011, §410). In the following lines there is only one main clause, *se-na-čpio-ou* (“they will put them to shame” or “they will be put to shame”). Before that there is a noun phrase with a simple attributive clause, *pčoeis de et-oueh-sahne* (“the lord *de* who gives orders”), followed by an appositive attributive clause, *pai et-o n-č(oei)s ečn-ptēr-f* (“who presides over the entirety”), and then a prepositional phrase, *hrai hn-phae n-hoou* (“on the last day”). Translators have combined these elements in diverse ways. For example: “But it is the Lord—he who is Lord over the All—who commands that on the last day they will be put to shame” (Jenott 2011, 151; cf. Pagels and King 2007, 113). But there is neither an elided *pe* before *et-oueh-sahne* to create a cleft sentence nor a *če-* for “commands *that*.” According to this option, “the

Lord” would be the invisible spirit. Or: “But the Lord who commands is the one who is the Lord over the all” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 79; cf. Devoti 2012, 203). But there is neither a *pe* to create a nominal sentence nor an elided *pe* before *et-o n-č(oei)s ečnptēr-f* to create a cleft sentence. With this option the identity of “the Lord”—whether it is the invisible spirit or the lower craftsman—is ambiguous (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 162). Nagel (2007, 246; 2014, 282) suggests emendation of the final clause to *f-načpio-ou* (“he will put them to shame”), making “the lord who gives orders, who presides over the entirety” the subject in extraposition: “Der Herr aber, der gebietet, der Herr ist über das All, <wird> sie am letzten Tage zuschanden machen” (2014, 283). Bermejo Rubio (2012, 109) suggests a possible interpolation. The consensus appears to be that the *de* in *pčoeis de et-oueh-sahne* must indicate a new sentence. My translation, however, works with the text as it is and understands the *de* not as marking a new sentence but as introducing “an explanation or an intensification” (BDF §447[8]). Examples include Rom 9:30, “Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is (*de*), righteousness through faith” (cf. 3:22); 1 Cor 2:6, “Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, but (*de*) wisdom not of this age” (my translation); Phil 2:8, “obedient to the point of death—/ even (*de*) death on a cross.” That is, “the lord who gives orders, who presides over the entirety” provides an intensified explanation of who “the deacon of error” is. What follows is a new sentence (“On the last day they will be put to shame”), the subject of which (“they”) refers to the stars that will bring everything to completion, that will present the sinners, and that will announce the acceptance of the sacrifice.

41.1–3. *Desist from [sacrifices of animals]*. My translation follows the text as restored by Jenott (2011, 152): *hō erō-|tn n-thu[sia] n-hn[t]e[bno]oue*. In the fragmentary line 2, enough letter traces remain to make certain the restoration of “animals” (with the abbreviated plural indefinite article *hn-*). The phrase *hō erō-tn* (“be satisfied with, cease”) is followed by *n-thu[. . .]*. Most editors restore a form of the infinitive, *n-thu[siasē]*, meaning, “Stop [sacrificing animals]” (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290; Nagel 2014, 284; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 80). Jenott (2011, 152), however, argues that there is not enough space for that many letters and instead restores the noun with the zero article, *n-thu[sia]*, meaning, “Cease from [sacrifices of animals]” (so too Bermejo Rubio 2012, 108). In further support of Jenott’s restoration it should be noted that when

the phrase *hō ero-* is followed by a verb, one usually finds the circumstantial conversion or *e-tre-*, while *n-*, as we have here, mediates a following noun (Crum 1939, 651b). Even those scholars who restore the verb appear to take the plurals that follow (“they are upon,” “consider them”) to refer to sacrifices, rather than to animals. My translation conveys also that the command is for the disciples to stop participating in sacrifices, not for them to cause sacrifices to stop.

41.3–4. *which [. . .] on the altar.* Not only do editors fill the lacuna in line 3 in different ways, they also disagree about how many letters are visible. There is a consensus that after the final epsilon of *tebnooue* (“animals”), *nta-* begins a relative clause of the second-person plural past and that *-ai* at the end of the line concludes *ehrai* for the phrase *ehrai hičn-pethusiastē[ri]on* (“on the altar”). Proposed verbs include *alo* (“lift up”) (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290), *talo* (“offer”) (Jenott 2011, 152; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 80), *eine* (“bring”) (Schenke Robinson 2008, 90), and *šōōt* (“sacrifice”) (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 270), any of which would make sense. The resulting sentence would read, “Desist from [sacrifices of animals, which you have lifted up or offered or brought or sacrificed] on the altar.”

41.7–9. *Therefore, consider them [. . .], and let them [become] manifest.* My translation construes the clause *marou-šōpe qe [. . .] | nahrē-tn* (literally, “therefore, let them be [. . .] before you”) as “therefore, let them be [. . .] in your opinion,” that is, “therefore, consider them [. . .]” (Crum 1939, 650a). All editors agree that in line 7, *eu* follows *marou-šōpe qe* and that a tau appears at the end of the line. Some leave the rest of the line unreconstructed (Jenott 2011, 152; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 80), but others are more confident, restoring *eušo[ue]it* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290; Devoti 2012, 204; Nagel 2014, 284). In that case, the sentence would read, “Therefore, consider them [of no account,] and let them become manifest,” which is plausible, even probable.

and let them [become] manifest. A lacuna follows *ouonh ebol* (“manifest”) in line 9. Editors are divided over whether the contents of that lacuna belong solely to the following sentence, “His disciples [said . . .],” or the lacuna contains an element that completes this sentence. The original editors of this fragment suggest that *nē-tn* follows *ouonh ebol*: “and let them [become] manifest to you” (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290); Nagel (2014, 284) proposes *n-hoeine*: “and let them become manifest as

such.” These suggestions are plausible, but proposals that posit that this sentence ends with *ouonh ebol* may be more probable (Note on 41.9–11, *His disciples [said . . . “Cleanse] us*).

COMMENTS

This passage contains the heart of the gospel’s polemic against rival Christian communities. The author accuses other Christians of worshiping the wrong god in the name of Jesus: he depicts their worship as sacrificial and led by individuals who claim to be both priests and (by implication) the followers of or successors to the original disciples. This polemic finds its context in the second century, when several Christian sources, most connected in some way with Rome, used the vocabulary of eucharist and sacrifice to characterize their worship and/or way of life and claimed that Christian leaders were the successors of the apostles and were or resembled priests. Whether or not the authors who deployed such rhetoric intended to identify their eucharist of bread and wine as a sacrifice offered to god in connection with Jesus’s death, it could certainly be interpreted that way, and our author appears to have done so (Introduction IV.C). In this scene the author builds his polemic on a dream reported by the disciples, which includes acts of immorality that Jews traditionally attributed to false or idolatrous worship and specifically to bad priests (38.1–39.3). Jesus interprets the dream on two levels: first, as referring to the practice of the disciples or, rather, to the practice of contemporary groups that the author associates with the disciples (39.7–40.2), and, second, as referring to a cosmic and eschatological scene of sacrifice and judgment (40.2–26). Jesus then urges the disciples to desist from their sacrificial practices, which are in vain (41.1–9).

The scene opens in a way that obscures its temporal location and introduces the theme of shame. Jesus comes to the disciples “on another day,” which indicates a third appearance but does not require that it occurs on the day following the second appearance. The disciples announce that they have had multiple “great dreams” and that they saw Jesus in one. The single dream that they narrate seems likely to be the one in which they saw Jesus; otherwise, why report this fact? Probably the disciples equate the name that they saw with Jesus himself, for Jesus identifies the name as his (Schwarz 2012, 75). What the disciples saw was a dream (*rasou*, possibly *onar* as in Matt 1:20 etc.), not a vision (*horama*) as Judas will later see

(44.17–18). Judas sees something real, an event that will happen and a building that exists but that he will not enter, while what the disciples see is symbolic and requires explanation. The disciples and Judas both describe their dreams or vision as “great,” a grandiose claim probably meant to portray them as self-important. Although the precise meaning is lost because of the lacunae, Jesus describes the disciples as having hidden themselves and asks them why. Possibly Jesus’s question alludes to Gen 3:8–13, in which Adam and Eve hide themselves in shame and god asks them a series of questions. The disciples feel shame at what they have seen, and rightly so, for they were in the dream and almost certainly participated in the sins that they witnessed.

The disciples’ report of their dream presents a standard picture of a working temple in which sacrifices are carried out, but it includes features that evoke worship both in the long-destroyed Jerusalem temple and in second-century Christian communities. The number of priests—twelve—suggests both the Jerusalem temple, which served the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve disciples. The emphasis on “a name” alludes to the silence and piety that surrounds the name of Israel’s god, but must also refer to the name of Jesus, which the disciples say the worship leaders invoke and Jesus later says was written on the building. The term for “building” (*ēi* = *oikos*) appears in the Septuagint as a term for the temple (e.g., Exod 23:19, Isa 2:2), but it can refer also to an ordinary “house,” in which second-century Christians worshiped (van den Kerchove 2008, 315–18). The disciples highlight their claim about the priestly status of the worship leaders: they are not simply identified as priests; rather, they are “men who we say are priests,” just as Christian worship leaders of the time were not actual priests in temples, but their identity as priests was asserted. The disciples refer to their own participation in the sacrificial worship obliquely: although Jesus will later identify the disciples as the twelve men, they do not do so, saying only, “We too were devoting ourselves.” Their disturbed silence at the end of their report suggests that they did in fact see themselves acting as the twelve men and engaging in the sins that they report (*pace* Cahana-Blum 2020, 69).

The disciples’ account emphasizes sinful behavior and magnitude or abundance. The disciples stress the great size of the building and its altar; the participants form “a multitude”; the altar is full of or aflame with the many sacrifices. This emphasis on magnitude, number, and abundance

hardly reflects the number of Christians at this time, which was by any estimation very small; rather, the author understands his opponents as constituting a group more numerous and powerful than his own. And the leaders of his rivals perpetrate “a multitude of sins and lawless deeds”: they sacrifice their children and wives, commit murder, and sleep with men, even as they appear to be pious by fasting and blessing and showing deference to one another.

The list of sins that the disciples recount forms the basis for Jesus’s list in his eschatological interpretation of the dream and later for his description of the corruption that will precede the destruction of the cosmos (54.15–55.13). The list draws on traditional rhetoric that disparages wrongly directed worship, especially the priests who lead it. Parallels occur across the three lists, with additional resonances between the second and third, both of which have an eschatological orientation:

The Disciples’ Report of Their Dream (38.14–26)

¹⁴[Some] are *fasting* for two weeks; ¹⁶others are **sacrificing their own children**, ¹⁷others their wives, ¹⁸while they are blessing and submitting to one another. ²⁰Others are *sleeping with men*; ²¹others are **murdering**; ²²others are committing a multitude of *sins and lawless deeds*. ²⁴And the people who stand [at] the altar [are] **invoking your [name]**.

Jesus’s Eschatological Interpretation of the Dream (40.1–16)

²[. . .] is going to stand, ³and in this way he will **use my name**; ⁵and <the> races of the pious will devote themselves to him. ⁷After him another man will present the [fornicators], ⁹and another will present the killers of children, ¹¹and another, those who *sleep with men*, ¹²those who *fast*, ¹³and the rest of impurity, *lawlessness*, and error, ¹⁵and those who say, ¹⁶“We are equal to angels.”

Jesus’s Prophecy of Eschatological Corruption (54.24–55.11)

²⁴Next, they will fornicate in my name and **kill their children**, ⁵⁵ ¹and [. . .] wicked, ²and [. . .] ⁴the aeons, ⁵bringing their races and presenting them to Saklas. ⁷And next [. . .] will come, ⁸bringing the twelve tribes of [Israel] from [. . .], ⁹and all the races will serve Saklas, ¹¹sinning in my name.

Three themes persist through the lists: misuse of Jesus’s name; murder, especially of children; and sexual immorality (fornication, homoeroticism). The cultic context of the original dream and its sins continues in Jesus’s interpretation of the dream, in which a standing figure uses Jesus’s name

and worshipers devote themselves to him or the name. The cultic references carry over into the later eschatological prophecy: the people will serve Saklas, whom Jesus earlier identified as the altar to which the people in the dream devote themselves (39.21–22); and cosmic ministers of some kind present people to the deity, just as the priests in the dream bring worshipers and their offerings to the altar. People perform this ritual in Jesus’s name, while engaging in murder (of children) and illicit sex, including homoerotic activity.

Students of “Gnosticism” will note the irony of a gnostic making such accusations against his opponents, for the charges resemble those that Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315–403) would later lodge against the gnostics of his day:

And if one of them (gnostics), a man, prematurely ejaculates and the woman becomes pregnant, listen to the even more terrible thing that these folks dare to do. As soon as it is feasible, they induce the expulsion of the embryo, and take the aborted offspring and grind it up with a mortar and pestle. And they season it with honey, pepper, and other spices, and with aromatics, so as not to nauseate themselves. Doing this, all the participants belonging to this <herd> of swine and dogs gather together and partake with the fingers of the ground-up baby. And when in this fashion they have accomplished their act of cannibalism they pray, finally, to god. It says, “We have not been deceived by the ruler of desire, but rather we have collected the transgression of our brother.” And, of course, they consider this to be the perfect Passover. . . . Those males among them called Levites do not have sexual intercourse with females but have intercourse with one another. They, of course, are the ones who are preferred and honored among them. But they scorn those who practice religious behavior, purity, and virginity, as though they undertook this labor in vain. (*Pan.* 26.5.4–6, 13.1; trans Layton 2021, 264, 271)

Epiphanius charges that the gnostics engage in ritualized abortion and infanticide and that male leaders with a priestly identity (“Levites”) have sex with one another. Although historians once accepted this report as an example of gnostic libertinism, recent scholarship has discounted it as having no basis in gnostic writings and instead as exemplifying the sexual slander that characterized religious polemics in antiquity (M. Williams 1996, 179–84; cf. Knust 2006). Frankfurter (2001) compared Epiphanius’s accusations to materials from the Satanic ritual abuse scandals of the 1970s and 1980s. He argued persuasively that perverse ritual, sexual immorality, child murders, and cannibalism often occur together in lurid imaginary scenarios born from anxiety about secretive others. Epiphanius’s account exemplifies what Frankfurter called “the cult subversion myth,” in which ritual “achieves a special power in denoting evil inversion and subversion of ‘our’ social practices” (380). Child murder and homoerotic behavior in the context of perverse ritual, then, incarnates heresy’s inversion of correct

religion. This insight applies to our gnostic author's vision of perverse ritual as much as it does to the anti-gnostic Epiphanius's.

On the other hand, Cahana (2011) draws on queer theory and historiography to argue intriguingly that historians should not be too quick to dismiss all reports of homoerotic activity in ancient sources as merely stock polemic or xenophobic fantasy, lest evidence for queer people or transgressive sexual activity of the past be overlooked. He suggests that Epiphanius provides evidence, not for libertine sexual activity that reflects hatred for and uninterest in the body, but for carefully chosen transgressive acts that challenged the prevailing gender norms of ancient society in general and of Christianity in particular. Far from believing that they were free to engage in whatever sexual act they desired, the gnostics—according to Cahana—“felt constrained to perform only those actions that led to the subversion of gender, and they were probably quite horrified by the possibility that desire would lead them to act in a gender-sustaining way” (33). (For a variation on this argument, see Cahana-Blum 2020, discussed below.) In favor of Cahana's hypothesis one can cite the complex ways that gender functions in gnostic mythology and the positive ways in which Sodom and its inhabitants appear in gnostic works (Apoc. Adam 75.9–31; Gos. Eg. NHC III 56.9–11, 60.9–18; NHC IV 71.18–30). Although his argument may be plausible (if not probable) for the fourth-century gnostics known to Epiphanius, Cahana's attempt to read our passage as “an oblique reference to the rituals described by Epiphanius” (32) rather than as slanderous accusations of other Christians fails to persuade. Epiphanius wrote some two hundred years after the composition of *Judas*, and it seems reasonable to assume that gnostics, like other Christians, could vary in their ethical teachings and in the views about gender that they derived from their shared mythology.

Instead, in addition to exemplifying the cross-cultural pattern of the cultic subversion myth, our author draws on a tradition of Jewish invective against idolatry that claims that false worship leads to sexual immorality and murder (Creech 2012, 248–49). In the first century CE, the anonymous author of the *Wisdom of Solomon* argued that pagans, because they went astray concerning the knowledge (*gnōsis*) of god, engaged in ritual murders of children (cf. Ezek 16:21), secret mysteries, and sexual perversion (14:22–26). Paul claimed that gentile worship of images of human beings and animals led god to deliver gentiles to impurity and degrading passions,

including homoerotic behavior among both men and women (Rom 1:18–32). Our author attributes a similar set of evil behaviors to Christians who have gone astray from proper knowledge of god, who worship the false god of the Old Testament, and who do so in the name of Jesus. Ironically, of course, the association of sleeping with men, sacrificing children, and profaning the holy name goes back to the Old Testament, especially Leviticus 18:

And you shall not approach a woman to uncover her shame in the separation of her uncleanness. And you shall not give your bed of semen to the wife of your neighbor, to bring defilement onto her. And you shall not give any of your offspring to serve a ruler. And you shall not profane the holy name. I am the Lord. And you shall not sleep with a male as in a bed of a woman, for it is an abomination. And you shall not give your bed to any quadruped for sowing to bring defilement on it, nor shall any woman stand before any quadruped so as to be mounted, for it is loathsome. (vv. 19–23)

Here the reference to giving one’s offspring to serve a ruler concerns some form of child sacrifice; this and the reference to sleeping with a male comes within a set of polluting sexual activities, including bestiality and profaning “the holy name.” The overall concern of Leviticus is the purity of the nation, which is to be set apart as holy from the surrounding peoples.

Temple cult and its priesthood especially required purity, and thus the imagery of defiling sexual activity logically appears in writings whose authors believed worship in the temple had gone wrong. A passage from the *Testament of Levi* provides a good precedent for the disciples’ dream (Lewis 2013, 176–77). This author condemns priests who take pride in their priestly identity, which they exploit for financial gain, and who do not follow the marriage customs that he considers proper. He predicts that the Jerusalem temple’s sanctuary will become desolate because of the sinful priests, who will become captives of gentiles (14:6–15:1). The author describes a gradual decline of the Jerusalem priesthood over a symbolic period of seven weeks. Although proper worship prevails during the first week, by the seventh week the priests will have become “idolaters, adulterers, money lovers, arrogant, lawless, lascivious, corrupters of boys, those who practice bestiality” (17:1–11). The author derives a bundle of themes—adultery, homoeroticism, bestiality—from Leviticus 18 and applies it specifically to bad priests.

To be sure, not only biblical authors and the Jews and Christians who followed biblical tradition deployed the accusation of human sacrifice. Rives (1995, 77–80) shows that, in the first two centuries CE, “pagan”

authors as well (e.g., Plutarch) adduced human sacrifice as “a sign of a religiosity that has exceeded all proper bounds,” often inspired by evil demons; it was an indication of “bad religion.” Second- and third-century Christians like Athenagoras (*Leg.* 26) and Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 3.42–43) took up the claim in their criticisms of pagan religion that demons inspired human sacrifice. The charge’s connotation of barbarism resonates also with *Judas*’s racial imagery (Rives 1995, 67–70; Townsend 2012, 165). Although the complete package of sins in the dream and Jesus’s interpretation of it is indebted primarily to a Jewish tradition of polemic against wicked priests and their cult, it draws also on wider Greco-Roman associations among human sacrifice, ethnic others, and bad religion.

The author of our gospel, then, is not breaking any new ground in religious polemic when he attacks as sexual transgressors and child murderers men who claim a priestly identity and preside over rituals that they characterize as sacrificial. It is odd, however, that our author includes among the sinners people who fast, whether they do so for two weeks as in the disciples’ report or they simply fast, as in Jesus’s prophecy. Christians of the second century are known to have quarreled over whether, how often, and when to fast (Nicklas 2013, 151–52). The reference to two weeks may allude to the hypocritical Pharisee in the Gospel of Luke who fasts twice a week (18:11–12). These priests fast for two weeks, surely a sign of excessive and therefore false piety, akin to their performances of deference to one another.

The inclusion of “those who say, ‘We are equal to angels,’” with fornicators and those who sleep with men among condemned sinners presents more of a conundrum. Jenott (2011, 66–68) suggests that the speakers claim equality to angels on the basis of their cosmically meaningful ritual activity. He cites in support of this possibility apocalyptic literature in which angels minister to god in a manner similar to that of priests in a temple (e.g., *1 En.* 14–15, *Rev* 8:3–5) and Clement of Alexandria’s view that the church’s clerical ranks are “imitations of angelic glory” (*Strom.* 6.13.107). This interpretation is more likely if one takes “those who say, ‘We are equal to angels’” as the subject of the nominal sentence “they are the stars (*ntoou ne nsiou*) that bring everything to completion” in extraposition; in that case the speakers must be leaders of some kind rather than the sinners that they present. This reading requires, however, that one understand the *auō* in line 17 as awkwardly positioned

between the extraposed subject and the main clause. In contrast, I take “those who say, ‘We are equal to angels’” as the final groups in the list of sinners that the star powers present, not the equivalents of those stars; the *auō* in line 17 begins a new sentence (Note on 40.17–18, *And they are the stars that bring everything to completion*).

Following this understanding of the syntax, Cahana-Blum (2020) argues that the speakers’ sinful behavior is what makes them “like the angels.” Cahana-Blum notes that after Irenaeus describes the gnostics who adduce *The Gospel of Judas* and reports that he has collected their writings on dissolution, he claims that they resemble Carpocrates by requiring that one “pass through all things” to be saved. Irenaeus writes, “And during every one of the sins and impure actions an angel assists, and the one who acts audaciously dares to attribute the impurity to the angel that was in the action, saying, ‘O angel, I make use of your work! O power, I accomplish your activity!’” (*Haer.* 1.31.2). This connection between sinful acts and angels suggests to Cahana-Blum that when our author’s Christian rivals perform the sinful acts of which he accuses them, they imitate the angels and inadvertently accomplish actions that “lead to the destruction of the archontic illusion” and ultimately to the “salvific dissolution” of this realm. They illustrate Gershom Scholem’s model of “redemption through sin” (Cahana-Blum 2020, 71–74). Although the resonance with Irenaeus’s claim is intriguing, this hypothesis requires that Irenaeus either mistakenly thought that those who claim to be like angels are gnostics (rather than the disciples and their successors) or deliberately falsified what he read in our gospel. Moreover, there are no indications elsewhere in *Judas* that the author considers these actions anything other than wrong. Finally, the speakers do not claim to be *like* the angels, but “equal” (*hisos*) to them.

Their boast is more likely an allusion to Luke 20:34–36, where Jesus calls those who do not marry “equal to angels”—*isangeloi*, a close equivalent to our work’s *hisos n-aggelos* (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 337; Nagel 2007, 245 n. 93; cf. Nagel 1966, 34–48). The precise assertion that Christian ascetics are “equal to angels” cannot be otherwise documented until Cyprian of Carthage in the third century (Nagel 1966, 39), but this does not mean that the reference here must have been added later by fourth-century monks (so Nicklas 2013, 152–53, although it is not clear why monks would attribute this claim to otherwise heinous sinners). In one passage Clement of Alexandria attributes equality with the angels

(*isangelos*) to the gnostic who has passed not only from faith to gnosis, but even from gnosis to love, and thus has possibly achieved “a mutual friendship between that which knows and that which is known” (*Strom* 1.57). But in another passage he states that “the one who has first moderated the passions, trained for freedom from the passions (*apatheia*), and advanced to the beneficence of gnostic perfection is here ‘equal to the angels’ (*isangelos*).” Such a person is “in reality a presbyter of the church” even if not ordained (*Strom.* 6.13.105–6). Therefore, when Clement goes on in the following paragraph to call ordained clerical ranks “imitations of angelic glory,” that praise is less enthusiastic than the equality to angels that he attributes to the gnostic who has attained freedom from the passions, which doubtless includes sexual desire. Some second-century works associate virginal Christians with angels, including the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 3.5–6 and the *Proto-Gospel of James*, in which the young virgin Mary lives secluded in the Jerusalem temple and receives her food from an angel (8.1). These references and the interest in sexuality that Jesus’s speech exhibits suggest that our author has in mind people who claim equality with angels on the basis of their abstinence from sex. He condemns his opponents for transgressing traditional norms not only by engaging in deviant sexual behaviors but also by practicing asceticism (Nicklas 2012, 106). The gospel adheres to a conventional standard of sexual propriety that values heterosexual marriage and family; those who violate that standard will face judgment on “on the last day.”

Before Jesus interprets the dream in reference to eschatological events, however, he applies it to the disciples themselves—or rather, to the Christian leaders and communities of the author’s context. His initial question to the disciples—“Why have you become agitated?” (*etbe-ou atetn-štortr*)—echoes his question to them at the eucharist in the first appearance: “Why has agitation brought anger?” (*etbe-ou a-pštortr n-pqōnt*) (34.24–25). In addition to that verbal allusion, the fasting, sexual abstinence, and mutual submission that the men in the dream practice recall the disciples’ “training for godliness” (33.25–26). The earlier scene concerned an act of worship aimed at the wrong god, one that involved eating, a component of most sacrifices that involve animals. Viewed in the context of second-century sacrificial imagery for the eucharist and its bread and wine, the disciples’ dream becomes a revelation of the true meaning of the disciples’ earlier seemingly “harmless” meal (Dunderberg 2016, 504).

Jesus further first stresses the Christian character of the worship through three statements about his name: the priests at the altar invoke Jesus's name; his name has been written on the building; and fruitless trees have been planted in his name.

To "invoke" or "call upon" (*epikalein*) god's "name" (*onoma*) appears in early Christian terminology for the saved in two basic forms, both of which originated in the Septuagint. In the first form god's name is invoked or called upon people. For example, in Amos 9:11–12 the Lord says that "on that day" he will come to the aid of "all the nations upon whom my name has been called." Acts quotes this passage in connection with the inclusion of gentiles (15:17), but other works speak of Christians as those upon whom the name has been invoked (Jas 2:7; Herm. Sim. 8.6.4), probably referring to baptism. In the alternative form, the saved people invoke or call upon god's name. According to Joel 2:32, "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," quoted by Acts (2:21) and Paul (Rom 10:13). Christians, then, can be referred to as those who invoke or call upon the Lord's name (Acts 9:14, 21; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Clem. 64; Herm. Sim. 9.14.3). This usage too may refer to baptism, for according to Acts, Ananias told Paul, "Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling upon his name" (22:16). To invoke the name of the Lord—that is, of Jesus, for Christians—was not merely a generally pious act, but an identity marker of a Christ believer. The priests who invoke Jesus's name are Christians, albeit ones who have gone astray (cf. Herm. Sim. 8.6.4).

The following sentence clarifies that the priests and worshipers misuse Jesus's name. It was written on the building not by Jesus, but "by the races of human beings," those who do not know Jesus (34.15–16, 37.10–11), and the building itself belongs to "the races of the stars." The worshipers have falsely claimed Jesus's name. Temples could bear inscriptions that included the names of the gods to which they were dedicated, and even without their own temples, Christians could use the metaphor of writing or inscribing to describe their preaching (Gal 3:1, 2 Cor 3:2–3).

The work of these worshipers produces "fruitless trees," an image that the Letter of Jude applies to allegedly false Christian teachers, whom it calls also "wandering stars" (12–13) (Piñero and Torallas 2006, 123). Luke draws on a recurring comparison of Israel to a fruitless fig tree (13:6–9; cf. Jer 8:13; Hos 9:10, 16–17; Joel 1:7), but, in a manner closer to our passage, Mark applies the metaphor specifically to the Jerusalem temple, the activity

in which does not serve its true purpose as “a house of prayer for all the nations” (11:12–21) (Nicklas 2012, 108). The planting of fruitless trees also anticipates *The Gospel of Judas*’s later use of the imagery of a garden, water, sowing of seed, and fruit (42.25–44.7, 57.8–12). It resembles especially the sowing of seed on a rock that fails to produce fruit (43.26–44.2); in this later passage the metaphor contrasts the opponents’ community with god’s garden, which is watered and fruitful (43.6–23).

After all of this, Jesus’s allegorical identifications of the dream’s elements are hardly surprising. The disciples are the twelve men called priests, and the cattle that they bring to the altar are the people whom they “lead astray” (*planan*), just as Judas’s star will lead him astray (45.13–14). The disciples are the “stars that go astray” (*asteres planētai*) of Jude 13, while their followers are the victims. Possibly more surprising is the identification of the altar as the disciples’ god. This image continues into Jesus’s eschatological interpretation of the dream and his later prophecy, when sinners are “brought” and “presented” to the altar (40.1–16) or to Saklas (54.24–55.11), just as the cattle are “brought in” to the altar here. The identification of the altar as Saklas and of the disciples’ followers as the cattle brought to it for slaughter forms the basis for the eschatological imagery of sinners being presented to the lower god for their ultimate destruction. By identifying the altar as what the people worship, the author may also be charging his rivals with idolatry (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 157).

At 40.2, however, Jesus shifts to the future tense and speaks of cosmic beings (“stars,” “the lord who gives orders, who presides over the entirety”) and of an ending (“completion,” “the last day”): the dream now has an eschatological meaning. The dream’s priests are no longer the disciples or their successors, but powerful astral figures, led by one whose identity is lost in a lacuna but is possibly “your deacon” or “their deacon” (Note on 40.3, [. . .]). Instead of bringing a multitude that is being led astray, they will present people who have committed sins. As we have seen, the sins here repeat and augment those mentioned by the disciples and anticipate those that Jesus lists in his later eschatological prophecy (54.24–55.11). The nature of the sins suggests that they applied to the male priests, and here Jesus adds a new sin, claiming to be equal to angels, which also characterizes leaders or ascetics, rather than ordinary Christians. The author

continues to aim his rhetorical fire primarily at the leaders among rival Christian groups rather than the followers whom they have led astray.

The “men” that will present the sinners are lower rulers, namely, the stars that will bring earthly events to their completion (Note on 40.17–18, *And they are the stars that bring everything to completion*). These stars will say to human beings, “Lo, god has accepted your sacrifice from the hands of a priest.” Who is this god? What is the sacrifice that he accepts? And who is the priest? Much depends on whether the lengthy explanatory relative clause—“that is, the deacon of error (*pdiakonos nte-planē*), or the lord (*pčoeis*) who gives orders (*oueh-sahne*), who presides over the entirety (*pai et-o n-č(oei)s ečn-ptēr-f*)”—refers to the god or to the priest (Grosso 2010, 75–76). The deacon of error and presiding lord must be either Nebrō or Saklas, either of which can be understood as the leader of the “error” that characterizes the stars, but Saklas is more likely because, unlike Nebrō, he is presented as ruling this world (to which “the entirety” must refer) and as giving (and not giving) commands (52.14–53.7; note *oueh-sahne* at 52.25–53.1). In Jesus’s later eschatological prophecy, it is Saklas to whom the races are brought and whom they serve (55.5–11) and to whom the people who will be destroyed offer sacrifice (56.13–14). It seems more likely, then, that it is the god who accepts the sacrifice who is the deacon of error, or the lord who gives orders and presides over the entirety—namely, Saklas—rather than the priest from whose hands the sacrifice is accepted (Pagels and King 2007, 137; Schenke Robinson 2008, 89; Painchaud 2008a, 172; Turner 2008, 232).

The title “the deacon of error” (most likely *ho diakonos tēs planēs*) evokes, on the one hand, eschatological antagonism against true divinity and, on the other, the origin of the gnostic craftsman (Grosso 2010, 77–78). Although an ironic allusion to Gal 2:17 is possible (“deacon of sin”), more relevant is “the spirit of error” (*to pneuma tēs planēs*) that opposes “the spirit of truth” along with “the spirit of the antichrist” in 1 John 4:3–6. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* features “spirit(s) of error,” “demons of error,” and even a “ruler of error” (*archōn tēs planēs*) (Grosso 2010, 78, with refs.). These beings that belong to error, like the spirit of error in 1 John, oppose the truth as the end time nears. Our work’s “deacon of error,” rather than spirit or demon of error, reflects the ritual context of its eschatological scenario. Although it is customary and apt for modern readers to refer to the error of wisdom in certain gnostic accounts of the

craftsman's origin (Ap. John NHC II 9.25–10.7; Nat. Rulers 94.4–19; Iren. *Haer.* 1.29.4), those works in fact do not apply the word “error” (*planē*) to wisdom's action. The Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* does use it in connection with the craftsman, however: personified error (*planē*) plays the roles of both wisdom and Ialdabaōth in classic gnostic myth; the source of matter, error creates this cosmos, deceives human beings, and even persecutes Jesus (17.14–18.24). *Judas* does not personify error, so that the deacon serves error; rather, the genitive construction (appurtenance in the Coptic translation; cf. Layton 2011, §148) in “deacon of error,” like “report of judgment” (33.1–2), modifies or describes the deacon, who will receive a sacrifice in a ritual characterized by error as well as by impurity and lawlessness (40.13–15).

The sacrifice that Saklas will accept differs from other sacrifices, for it is referred to in the singular (“the sacrifice”), is offered by a single priest, and takes place in an eschatological context, when all things are brought to completion and events are leading to “the last day”; in its aftermath Saklas, the deacon of error, and his fellow stars will be put to shame. Probably the sacrifice is that of the human being who bears Jesus, which likewise will take place as one of the events leading to the dissolution of the present world order and the overthrow of the current rulers (56.18–57.10) (cf. Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 338). If that is the case, the priest from whose hands the sacrifice will be accepted is almost certainly Judas (56.20–22). He may be separated from the eleven disciples, but it turns out that he will function as a priest, as they do. Alternatively, the listed sinners—fornicators, child murderers, and so on—may collectively constitute the single eschatological sacrifice, for they will be presented to Saklas at the end time (54.18–55.6) and will likely perish with the stars (55.19–22, 56.12–14). If that is the case, the identity of the priest is less clear; possibly he is the “first star” that comes with the races at the end (54.21–22). The first option is more likely, however: Judas's sacrifice of the single victim, the human bearer of Jesus, precedes the shaming of the rebellious astral powers.

The stars' announcement likely alludes to Mal 1:10, in which the prophet quotes the Lord as saying, “I will not accept a sacrifice (*thusia*) from your hands (*ek tōn cheirōn humōn*)” (cf. Mal 1:13); the verse occurs in a passage that early Christian authors applied to Christian worship in general and the eucharist in particular (Schwarz 2012, 79; Frank 1978). In Malachi, the

hands from which the Lord will not accept a sacrifice belong to the “priests” of Israel, who, the Lord says, “despise my name” (1:6). The prophet goes on to suggest that god will instead accept sacrifice from “the nations”: “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the nations, and in every place incense is brought to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty” (1:11). In addition to the eucharistic use of the passage by other Christians, the reference to “my name” probably drew the attention of our author, as it did that of Irenaeus (as we shall see). The *Didache* combined portions of Mal 1:11 and 1:14 in order to exhort Christians to keep their sacrifice pure by confessing their sins and settling quarrels with one another before celebrating the eucharist on Sunday; the author understood the total eucharist event—gathering together, breaking of bread, offering thanks—as the “pure sacrifice” that god requires (Did. 14.1–3) (Frank 1978, 71–72; McGowan 2012, 197–98). Justin Martyr deployed Mal 1:10 in polemics against Jews and their rituals, twice applying these verses to the eucharist. He said to the Jew Trypho, “By making reference to the sacrifices which we Gentiles offer to him in every place, namely, the bread of the Eucharist and the chalice of the Eucharist, he (god) predicted that we should glorify his name, but that you should profane it” (*Dial.* 41.2–3). Similarly, Justin argued that Malachi refers to “all the sacrifices made in his name,” which are the bread and wine that gentile Christians offer (*Dial.* 116.3–117.1).

Irenaeus too argued that Mal 1:10–11 teaches that the Christian eucharist is the sacrifice that is offered to god and glorifies his name in every place, while the Jews should stop making offerings (*Haer.* 4.17.5), but he was more concerned with refuting rival Christians who he claimed deprecated the material creation. Irenaeus, therefore, emphasized the materiality of the gifts that Christians offer (Frank 1978, 74–75; McGowan 2012, 202–4). God, of course, has no need of sacrifices, which he requires rather for the good of those who offer them (lest they become “fruitless and ungrateful”); nonetheless, Jesus commanded his disciples to offer “bread from the creation” and wine, which is “from the creation to which we belong” (*Haer.* 4.17.5). The “name” that is “glorified among the nations” (Mal 1:11) when Christians rightly offer the eucharist is the name of Jesus, which the Father has made his own name: “Because the name of the Son belongs to the Father, and because the church makes offering in <every place> to the omnipotent god through Jesus Christ, he (Malachi) says well for both

reasons, ‘And in every place incense is offered in my name, and a pure sacrifice’ (Mal 1:11)” (*Haer.* 18.7.6). According to Irenaeus when the Lord Almighty said, “I will not accept a sacrifice from your hands,” he meant the hands of the Jews, and thus the Lord will accept a material sacrifice—that is, the eucharist—from the hands of the gentiles, who properly glorify his name—that is, the name of Jesus.

Although they deployed it for diverse purposes, Christian authors in our gospel’s milieu had made Mal 1:10–14 a significant support for their contention that their eucharist is the pure sacrifice that the god of Israel now accepts in place of sacrifices “from the hands of” the Jews. The author of *Judas* offers, then, his own explanatory gloss on Mal 1:10 (*ete-pai pe . . .*). According to our author, the eucharist, performed in the name of Jesus, indeed represents a sacrifice that Saklas, the god of the Jews, will accept—whether the sacrifice of the man who bears Jesus from the hands of Judas or the sacrifice of sinners from the hands of some other priest. But that god, “the deacon of error,” and his fellow stars will be put to shame on the last day.

In sum, the disciples’ dream has two allegorical references. First, it represents the practice of other Christians at the time of the gospel’s composition: immoral men who claim to be priests and successors to the disciples lead worship to the false god Saklas; they characterize this worship as sacrificial, but the real victims are the worshipers whom they lead astray. Second, it represents events at the end of this cosmos, when star powers will present sinners to Saklas, who will accept a final sacrifice before being put to shame along with his fellow rulers. Both interpretations serve as words of judgment—against rival Christian leaders, sinful human beings, and the rebellious lower rulers.

Jesus follows his interpretations of the dream with an exhortation surely addressed to the author’s opponents as much as to the disciples: they should discontinue their sacrificial practices, which belong to or are the responsibility of (“upon”) their deceptive stars and angels (for this meaning of *hičn-*, see Crum 1939, 758b), in whose higher realms such practices find their fulfillment. Instead, if the scholars who fill the lacuna on line 7 with “empty” are correct (Note on 41.7–9, *Therefore, consider them . . .*), they should consider their eucharists useless or in vain and let their true worthless nature become clear to everyone. The non-gnostic Christian readers of *Judas* are not fatalistically doomed to experience the

eschatological destruction that Jesus proclaims, but they should stop offering the eucharist to the false creator god in Jesus’s name (cf. Devoti 2012, 145–46).

The Sins of the Disciples (41.9–42.22)

41 ⁹ His disciples [said . . . “Cleanse] us from our [sins], which we have committed by the deceit of the angels.”

¹³Jesus said to them, “It is impossible [. . .] them [. . .] ¹⁵nor [can] a fountain extinguish the [fire] of the [entire] inhabited world, ¹⁷[nor] can a spring in a [. . . give drink to] all the races, except the great one that is destined. ²¹And no single lamp will illumine all the aeons, except the second race, ²⁵nor can a baker feed the entire creation 42 under [heaven].”

¹And [. . .] to them [. . . ,] “Teacher, help us, and [. . .]”

⁵Jesus said to them, “Stop contending with me. ⁷Each of you has his own star [. . .] of the stars will [. . .] what belongs to it [. . .] ¹¹It is not to the corruptible race that I was sent, but to the mighty and incorruptible race. ¹⁴For no enemy has ruled [over] that race, nor one of the stars. ¹⁷Truly I say to you (pl.), the pillar of fire will fall suddenly, ²⁰and that race will not move [by] the stars.”

NOTES

41.9–11. *His disciples [said . . . “Cleanse] us*. The single bracketed text corresponds to two lacunae in the manuscript on lines 9 and 10. The restoration of “Cleanse us” on lines 10–11 is certain. Some editors posit that the lacuna on line 10 included *pč(oei)s*: “[Lord, cleanse] us” (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290; Nagel 2014, 284), but Jenott (2011, 152) claims that the lacuna is too small. The disciples address Jesus as “Lord” in one other instance in the surviving text, where it is spelled out and not written as a *nomen sacrum* (36.19).

The contents of the lacuna on line 9 are uncertain. It must contain *peča-u* (“they said”) with the subject (“his disciples”) marked by *nqi-*. Some editors restore a word before *peča-u* to complete the previous sentence (Note on 41.7–9, *Therefore, consider them . . .*), but others propose *na-f* after *peča-u*, that is, “said to him” (Jenott 2011, 152; Brankaer and van Os

2019, 80), citing 36.17–18 (*peča-u na-f nqi-nefmathētēs*). The latter seems more probable, but certainty is impossible.

41.17. *inhabited world*. My translation seeks to capture the distinction between *oikoumenē*, used here, and *kosmos*.

41.18–20. *a spring in a [. . . give drink to]*. The reconstruction of the verb *tso* (“to give or make to drink”) is probable, but not certain. Only the initial tau survives. It cannot be determined what the spring is in: editors have suggested *polis* (“city”) (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290) and *ahe* for *ouahe* (“oasis”) (Nagel 2014, 284).

41.24. *the second race*. The emendation of the text to *e-tme<h>snte n-genea* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290) is undoubtedly correct. It probably means the latter race, that is, “the great one that is destined,” rather than the former, that is, “all the races” (Jenott 2011, 203).

42.1. *under [heaven]*. A consensus of scholars accepts the original editors’ restoration *et-haro-[s n-tpe]* (“under heaven”) (Kasser et al. 2007, 42).

42.1–3. *And [. . .] to them [. . .]*. Most scholars have restored these lines as *auō | n[aei nter-ou-sōt]m ero-ou | n[qi-nef-mathētēs pe]ča-u na-[f]*, “And [when his disciples heard] these things, they [said to] him” (e.g., Jenott 2011, 154), or something similar. This is probable, but very little text survives.

42.4–5. *and [. . .]*. Most editors read the beginning of line 5 as *n[k-t]oučo-n*: “and save us” (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 290; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 112; Nagel 2014, 284), which is plausible, even probable. Others, however, cannot discern *čon* and so leave a lacuna (Jenott 2011, 154; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 82). The proposal of *n[pr-]ouōtb* for *m[pr-]ouōtb*, “and do not depart,” is unlikely (Schenke Robinson 2011, 122).

42.7–10. *Each of you has his own star [. . .] of the stars will [. . .] what belongs to it*. Any restorations of the lacunae in lines 9–10 are speculative, but the proposal of Nagel (2014, 284) is plausible and attractive: *a[uō] ou[on nim] n-nsiou na-|č[ōk ebol m-]pete-pō-f pe* (“and each of the stars will bring to completion what belongs to it” (cf. Schenke Robinson 2011, 122); cf. 40.17–18, 54.17–18. Apart from this reconstruction the phrase *pete-pō-f pe* is ambiguous and could mean “what belongs to him.”

42.11–14. [. . .] *It is not to the corruptible race that I was sent, but to the mighty and incorruptible race*. My translation reflects the use of the

focalizing conversion. The lacuna after the alpha that begins line 11 cannot be restored, but Nagel (2014, 286) has suggested *a[nok de]* (“But as for me, it is not”), which is plausible and attractive.

COMMENTS

The disciples, who already have expressed shame and disturbed feelings about their dream, respond to Jesus’s interpretations of it appropriately by asking to be cleansed of their sins, which they committed thanks to the “deceit” or “error” (*planē*) of the angels. Jesus’s responses to them indicate that whatever help he brings, he brings only to the mighty and incorruptible race, and it may be that the disciples cannot join that race. The metaphors in his first response—a fountain, a spring, a lamp, a baker—do not have persuasive biblical precedents (cf. D. Kim 2015) but effectively make the point that their benefits are limited and cannot be extended to everyone. The salvation that Jesus brings applies only to the great race that is “destined” or “appointed” (*tēš*, perhaps *hōrismenē*), presumably by the divine. The New Testament uses this vocabulary to refer to god’s plan for Jesus (cf. Luke 22:22, Acts 2:23) and for his appointment of governing officials (Rom 13:1). The restriction of salvation to a limited number of people chosen by god is characteristic of much early Christian discourse. Matthew’s Jesus states, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (22:14), and *Thomas’s* Jesus tells the disciples, “I shall choose you—one out of a thousand and two out of ten thousand” (Gos. Thom. 23). Paul informed the Roman believers that salvation would include a “full number” (*plērōma*) of gentiles, which, despite its seeming abundance, must not have been very many, for Paul thought that the full number would soon “come in” and trigger the return of the Lord (Rom 11:25).

Jesus’s second response, following the disciples’ request for help (and possibly salvation), suggests that they may not be able to join the great race, but the lacunae in 42.9–11 prevent certainty on this point. Jesus deflects the disciples: they should not be contending with Jesus but should instead turn to their individual stars. What that might mean for the disciples is lost in the lacunae, but a plausible reconstruction (Note on 42.7–10, *Each of you has his own star . . .*) suggests that their fates are tied to the eschatological moment when the stars will bring things to completion (cf. 40.17–18, 54.17–18). Jesus, however, then explains that his mission—like the fountain, spring, lamp, and baker—is limited to the mighty and

incorruptible race. His wording—“I was not sent” (*nt-au-tnoou-t an*)—echoes that of Matt 15:24 (*ouk apestalēn*), where Jesus likewise announces a limitation of his mission. Jesus repeats his earlier characterization of the great race as not ruled by the stars or any other hostile powers (37.4–6), and he then returns to eschatology. That race will not be moved by the stars—that is, subject to their direction—when “the pillar of fire” falls. The pillar of fire must refer to the craftsman of this world, the god of the Old Testament (Exod 13:21–22, 14:24), Saklas (Jenott 2011, 204), although it is Nebrō who is associated with fire in the later mythological discourse (51.10). Pillars of fire appear in the visions of *1 Enoch* (18:11–12, 21:7–10), but they are frightening elements in pits and prisons, not images for god.

The characterization of the holy race as not moving or immovable (*tgenea n-at-kim* or *ete-mas-kim*) appears in other gnostic works, especially the *Secret Book According to John* (BG 22.15; NHC II 25.23, 29.10, 31.31–32) and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III 51.8–9, 59.13–14, 61.19–20), but also in the *Three Tablets of Seth* (118.12–13) and *Zōstrianos* (6.27, 51.16) (M. Williams 1985, 4). In general, the designation “the immovable race”—most likely *hē asaleutos genea*—suggests that the saved people possess the stability and permanence of true divinity, but Michael Williams (1985) shows that gnostic authors interpreted and applied the image in diverse ways. For example, in *Zōstrianos* immovability connotes the achievement of contemplation of divine stillness and perfection, but in the *Secret Book* those who are immovable have gained stability by overcoming the passions and escaping the capricious instability of the fate controlled by the lower powers (138–40). Escape from astral fate is relevant to the image here, for the stars do not rule over the holy race. But in this passage that race’s immovability resembles even more that found in the *Holy Book*, in which immovability “is primarily the quality of endurance possessed by a warrior race engaged in a battle with cosmic powers” (151). In that work the race survives despite the flood, fire, famines, pestilences, and other persecutions that the cosmic powers inflict upon it (146; Gos. Eg. NHC IV 72.10–27). Here the great race will not move during the eschatological turmoil that will accompany the sudden fall of the pillar of fire; it will endure (cf. 43.9).

Because Jesus speaks to the disciples about their sins, which the dream exposed, it is unlikely that what he says to and about the disciples should be extended without qualification to their followers or to the readers of the

gospel (Jenott 2011, 203–4). To be sure, some Greek and Roman authors imagined that every human being has his or her own star; according to Plato’s *Timaeus*, for example, every human soul was educated on a star before it was placed in its appropriate body (41d–42e). That seems not to be the case in *Judas*, however: stars rule people and possibly lead them astray. The twelve disciples too rule aeons (37.14–16) and are probably associated with the Zodiac and with the twelve angels that each “received a portion in the heavens” (51.22–23). The disciples, who have led a multitude astray, therefore present a special case. It may be impossible for them to be cleansed of their sins and join the mighty and incorruptible race, but if it is possible, it seems that their salvation will not come through Jesus.

The Races of Human Beings (42.22–44.14)

42 ²²And when Jesus had said these things, he left and [took] Judas Iscariot with him. ²⁵He said to him, “The water [. . .] the high mountain [. . .] 43 [. . .] ¹has not come [to water . . .] spring [. . .] tree of [the fruit . . .] of this aeon [. . .] after a time [. . .] ⁶Rather, it has come to water god’s garden and the [. . .] that will endure, ⁸for [it] will not defile the [. . .] of that race, ¹⁰but [it will exist] forever and ever.”

¹¹Judas said to him, “[. . .] me, what fruit does this race possess?”

¹⁴Jesus said, “As for all human races, their souls will die, ¹⁶but as for these, when they have completed the time of the kingdom and the spirit separates from them, ²⁰their bodies will die, but their souls will live and be taken up.”

²³Judas said, “And so what will the remaining races of the human beings do?”

²⁵Jesus said, “It is impossible 44 to sow on a [rock] and get their fruit. ²So too [. . .] the [. . .] sort and corruptible wisdom ⁵[. . .] the hand that created mortal human beings, and their souls go up to the aeons on high. ⁸[Truly] I say to you (pl.), [no . . .] or angel [or] power will be able to see those [. . .] that the [great] holy race [will see].”

¹³After Jesus said these things, he departed.

NOTES

42.23–24. *he left and [took] Judas Iscariot with him.* The *-das* of *ioudas* survives at the beginning of line 24. Editors unanimously restore the verb *či* (“take”) in the lacuna at the end of line 23, differing only on whether to restore the direct object marker *n-* before [*iou*]*das* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 291; Devoti 2012, 206) or to imagine that the name was directly suffixed to the verb (Jenott 2011, 154; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 82). Jenott rightly cites Mark 9:2 (“Jesus took with him Peter and James and John”) and 14:33 (“he took with him Peter and James and John”) in support of this restoration; in both cases the Coptic text uses *či*.

42.25–26. *The water [. . .] the high mountain [. . .].* It is not clear how *pmoou* (“the water”) in line 25 relates to *m-ptoou et-čose* (“of/on the high mountain”) in line 26. An epsilon is visible after *pmoou*, but editors disagree about how to read the rest of the line. The original editors of this 2010 fragment left an unfilled lacuna (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 291). Jenott (2011, 154) and Brankaer and van Os (2019, 82) restore simply *e[t-]|m-ptoou et-čose* (“that is on the high mountain”). There may be room for more letters, however. Schenke Robinson (2011, 123) proposes *e[t-kēb] | m-ptoou et-čose* (“the cold water of the high mountain”), and Nagel (2014, 286–87) suggests *e[t-sēk] | m-ptoou et-čose*, which he translates “the water that [flows] from the high mountain” but which could also be “the [flowing] water of the high mountain.” This last option seems most likely but remains speculative.

A pi and an epsilon follow *m-ptoou et-čose* and precede the lacuna at the end of line 26. Because 43.1 begins with *hn-*, most editors have reconstructed *ebol* in the lacuna. The original editors in fact read *p-ebo[l]* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 291; so too Nagel 2014, 286): “that which [comes from]” (cf. Layton 2011, §124). Jenott (2011, 154) and Brankaer and van Os (2019, 82) restore *pe [ebol] | hn-* to create a proposed nominal sentence: “The water [. . .] the high mountain is [from . . .].” But a nominal sentence normally requires an indefinite article before *ebol* in predicating source (Layton 2011, §302); that is, the restoration would need to be [*ouebol*], which may be too long for the lacuna.

43.1–2. *has not come [to water . . .].* The clause *nt-af-ei an e-t[. . .]* is probably a focalizing conversion of a main clause because of the negation of the past tense by *an* (Layton 2011, §452) and because it finds its rhetorical antitheses in 43.6: *alla nt-af-ei e-tco* (“Rather, it has come to water”). The parallelism also supports the restoration of *e-t[so . . .]* in 41.2.

The referent of the masculine singular personal subject is not certain: the most likely surviving candidate is *pmoou* (“the water”) of 42.25.

43.2–3. *spring [. . .] tree of [the fruit]*. Editors differ on how or whether to restore the end of line 2, which seems to have room for about two letters after *[p]ēgē*. The original editors (Kasser et al. 2007, 205) and Brankaer and van Os (2019, 84) read *[p]ēgē m-p|šēn*: “spring of/for the tree.” Nagel (2014, 286) reads *[p]ēgē [n-n]|šēn*: “spring [of/for the] trees.” Jenott (2011, 156) makes no restoration. In line 3 the original editors (Kasser et al. 2007, 205) and Brankaer and van Os (2019, 84) restore only a nu after *šēn*, while my translation follows Jenott (2011, 156) and Nagel (2014, 286), who restore *m-[pka]rpos*.

43.3–4. *[. . .] of this aeon*. At the beginning of line 4, *-ros* survives before *m-peeiaiōn*. Jenott (2011, 156) does not offer a restoration of the end of line 3 to complete the word that ends in *-ros*. The original editors read an iota at the end of line 3 (Kasser et al. 2007, 205). Presumably, that and the appearance of *ouoeiš* (“time”) in line 5 have inspired some to restore *[kai]ros m-peeiaiōn* (“time of this aeon”) (Nagel 2014, 286; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 84). Brankaer and van Os go on to read *teno[u]* (“now”) after *m-peeiaiōn*.

43.6–8. *Rather, it has come to water god’s garden and the [. . .] that will endure*. The referent of the masculine singular personal subject is not certain; my translation suggests that it is *pmoou* (“the water”) of 42.25, but it is possible that another masculine singular candidate is lost in the lacunae (“he has come”). I translate *paradeisos* “garden.” Nearly all editors reconstruct the end of line 7 as *auō p[ge]nos*, meaning, “and the [sort (or race)] that will endure” (Kasser et al. 2007, 205; Nagel 2014, 286; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 84), while Jenott (2011, 156) proposes *auō p[kar]pos*, meaning, “and the [fruit] that will endure.” Both proposals have merit. The only other occurrence of *genos* (44.3–4) is later in this passage, where it occurs with “corruptible wisdom” and seems to have a negative reference, possibly even “the [defiled] sort (or race)” (Note on 44.2–4, *So too [. . .] the [. . .] sort*); possibly this *genos*, the one that will endure, contrasts with the other *genos*. Indeed, the use of *genos* only in this passage and *genea* throughout the rest of the work suggests a translation other than “race” (COMMENTS). In favor of *karpos*, it is possible that Judas’s following question (43.12–14) draws its subject (“fruit”) from Jesus’s statements here, but *karpos* probably appears at 43.3.

43.8–10. *for [it] will not defile the [. . .] of that race.* The lacuna at the end of line 8 is most likely to be restored *če-[n-f-n]a-|čōhm an* (Kasser et al. 2007, 205; and most other editors). Jenott (2011, 156) restores the negative of the focalizing conversion: *če-[n-ef-n]a-|čōhm an*. The referent of the presumably masculine singular personal subject is not certain; my translation suggests that it could still be *pmoou* (“the water”) of 42.25, but it could also be whatever is restored at the end of line 7, whether *genos* or *karpos* (Note on 43.6–8, *Rather, it has come . . .*). Although *ge|nea etmmau* (“that race”) at the end of line 9 and beginning of line 10 is certain, the rest of line 9 is not. Slightly modifying the reading of the original editors (Kasser et al. 2007, 205), Nagel (2014, 286) and Brankaer and van Os (2019, 84) restore *n-tqin-[moose n-t]genea*, giving, “for [it] will not defile the [walking] of that race,” with “walking” meaning “gait, conduct” (Crum 1939, 206a). This reconstruction finds support in the prologue’s reference to people “walking in the way of righteousness” (33.10–11). Jenott (2011, 156) declines to fill the lacuna.

43.10–11. *but [it will exist] forever and ever.* Although the original editors did not fill the lacuna at the end of line 10 (Kasser et al. 2007, 205), a consensus of subsequent editors supports reconstructing *al[la es-na-šō]|pe čn-eneh n-ša-e[neh]*. The feminine singular personal subject could refer to “that race” (*tgenea et-mmau*) or the noun in line 9 that begins *tqinm-* and is possibly “the walking” (*tqin-[moose]*).

43.11–12. *Judas said to him, “[. . .] me.* Only *na-* of *na-f* (“to him”) survives, but the restoration is virtually certain. An epsilon and iota follow the lacuna in line 12. The original editors and others restore *na-[f če-hrabb]ei*, making, “Judas said to him, ‘Rabbi, . . .’” (Kasser et al. 2007, 205; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 84). This restoration may be too long for the lacuna (Jenott 2011, 156); no one otherwise addresses Jesus as “Rabbi,” which would be an odd choice for our author; and the *če-* that follows at the beginning of line 13 suggests a verb. Thus, Nagel (2014, 286) proposes *na-[f če-tsabo-]ei*: “Judas said to him, ‘Teach me’”; and Jenott (2011, 156) suggests *na-[f tamo-]ei*: “Judas said to him, ‘Tell me.’” Jenott’s reconstruction is more persuasive: *če-* regularly follows *tamo* (Crum 1939, 413b), and the length of the lacuna suggests that the scribe omitted the expected *če-* after *peča-f na-f*.

43.14. *this race.* That is, the race just mentioned, which (or possibly its “walking”) will exist forever, rather than the mortal human race (*pace*

Bermejo Rubio 2012, 116). This identification is confirmed by Jesus's answer: "but as for these . . ." (43.16).

43.17–19. *when they have completed the time of the kingdom.* The meaning of the clause is ambiguous; it could also be translated, "when the time of the kingdom has been completed." The placement of *ntoou* immediately before *hotan* suggests that "they"—that is, *nai* ("these")—is the subject of the clause.

44.2–4. *So too [. . .] the [. . .] sort.* "Sort" translates *genos*, which all other scholars translate "race." But only here and possibly at 43.7 does *genos* appear other than *genea*; the different word choice must have significance and should be reflected in a translation. Although "race/nation," "family," or "offspring" is the usual meaning of *genos* in the New Testament, in some passages it means "kind" or "sort" (Matt 13:47; Mark 9:29; 1 Cor 12:10, 28; 14:10). I have chosen "sort" rather than "kind" to avoid the possibility of mistaking the latter for the adjective ("kind and corruptible wisdom"). For further discussion, see COMMENTS.

Some editors read very little other than an omicron and upsilon at the beginning of line 3 before the legible *m-pgenos* at the end (Kasser et al. 2007, 207; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 86). Jenott (2011, 158) restores the entire line *ou[atqo]m pe [e-tčo] m-pgenos*, creating, "Likewise, it is [impossible to sow] the race." "It is impossible to" seems very likely, for the phrase *[ta]i on te the* ("so too, likewise") suggests a parallel construction with the preceding sentence ("it is impossible to"). Space, however, does not allow "to sow upon" (*e-tčo ečn-*), which would complete the parallel (cf. 44.1). The lacuna at the beginning of line 4 certainly contains a phrase that modifies *pgenos*. A mu follows the lacuna, and editors have restored either *[n-čōh]m* or *[et-čoh]m* (Kasser et al. 2007, 207; Nagel 2014, 288; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 4), either of which would mean "the [defiled] race." This is a plausible reconstruction, commended by the occurrence of *čōhm* at 43.9. If *genos* is to be restored at 43.7 (Note on 43.6–8, *Rather, it has come . . .*), then one might like an adjective that contrasts with "that will endure," which "defiled" (in the sense of "spoiled") might do.

44.5. *[. . .] the hand.* The original editors declined to restore the lacuna at the beginning of line 5 (Kasser et al. 2007, 207), but Schenke Robinson (2008, 91) proposed *[mn-]tqič* ("and/with the hand"), which most editors have accepted (e.g., Jenott 2011, 158; Nagel 2014, 288; Brankaer and van

Os 2019, 86). It is a plausible restoration, but without much context, it is difficult to evaluate what sense it would make.

44.6–7. *and their souls go*. The most persuasive reading of the text is *nteneupsukhē* | [*b*]ō*k* (Kasser et al. 2007, 207; Nagel 2014, 288). Jenott (2011, 158) rejects [*b*]ō*k*, arguing that an omega does not match the surviving traces and would be too large for the space; but his reconstruction of *bēk* is unlikely because the stative *bēk* does not occur in nondurative conjugation. Here we have the conjunctive (*n-te-*); the fragmentary nature of what precedes does not permit a precise translation of it.

44.8. *I say to you (pl.)*. The use of the plural when Judas alone is present reflects the formulaic nature of the expression (Jenott 2011, 206; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 118; Introduction III.A).

44.9–10. [*no . . .*] or *angel [or] power*. The readings of “angel” and “power” are certain, as are the occurrences of *oude* before both of them. Scholars differ, however, on whether there is room for the durative sentence’s negator *mn-* before each of them, which the original editors (Kasser et al. 2007, 207; Nagel 2014, 288) restore but others (Jenott 2011, 158; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 86) do not. Presumably *mn-* must be reconstructed following *čē-* in the first lacuna on line 9, but editors do not agree on what noun should be restored. Jenott (2011, 206) claims to see traces that represent *-rkhōn* of *arkhōn* (“ruler”). Other editors do not see such traces and restore either *arkhē* (“authority, ruler”) (Kasser et al. 2007, 207; Nagel 2014, 288) or *siou* (“star”) (van der Vliet 2006, 44; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 86) or *rōme* (“human being”) (Schenke Robinson 2008, 91).

44.11. *those [. . .]*. The lacuna must contain the preposition *e-* that marks the object of *nau* (“see”) and the *et-* of *et-mmau* (“those”). That leaves room for only a very short noun, which must be plural because it is modified by the appositive attributive clause that begins with *nai*. Most editors restore [*e-mma et-*]mmau: “those [places]” (Kasser et al. 2007, 207; Nagel 2014, 288; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 86), which is plausible. The restoration of “those [aeons]” (*e-[naiōn et-]mmau*) (Schenke Robinson 2008, 91; cf. van der Vliet 2006, 44) seems too long. Jenott’s (2011, 158) restoration of [*e-nai et-*]mmau would strangely combine nearer and farther demonstratives (Layton 2011, §§56–57).

44.12. *the [great] holy race*. Although the original editors proposed restoring *t[einoq]* “this great” (Kasser et al. 2007, 207), that seems too long,

and the restoration of simply *noq* enjoys scholarly consensus.

44.13. [*will see*]. Scholarly consensus restores the beginning of the line *n[a-nau e]ro-ou*, which corresponds to “will be able to see” (*na-š-nau*) in line 10. Brankaer and van Os (2019, 174) prefer to restore *n[a-bōk e]ro-ou*, which would mean “to which the [great] and holy race [will go]” and would correspond to 44.6–7 (“their souls will go up to”), although they print the consensus reading in their text (86). I am more persuaded by the parallelism with 44.10.

44.14. *he departed*. Because there is no statement about Jesus coming or arriving before the new dialogue with Judas begins (44.15), the original editors suggested emending *af-bōk* to *au-bōk* (“they departed”), referring to the disciples other than Judas (Kasser et al. 2007, 207). Although the text as it is creates an awkward transition, somewhat similar to John 14:31–15:1 (Sandul 2011, 62), the departure of the disciples would violate the conventions of the dialogue genre, in which the revealer comes and goes, not the interlocutors (Nagel 2009, 129–32; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 118).

COMMENTS

The fragmentary nature of the text makes this passage difficult to interpret, but its structure and primary themes are visible. When Jesus leaves the disciples and speaks to Judas alone, he returns to the imagery of water and to the discussion of what is “impossible” from the preceding conversation with the disciples (41.14–21). He continues to talk about the limitation of salvation to “that race” or “the great and holy race,” but now in more generalized terms, rather than in contrast to the disciples specifically. The water imagery leads to more general agricultural metaphors of watering a garden, sowing, trees, and fruit. The fruit that the great race possesses is that at death their souls will live and ascend to the higher realm, a region inaccessible to lower angels and powers.

Jesus’s opening sentences, as fragmentary as they are, use water imagery to repeat the limited nature of salvation. The high mountain to which the water belongs or from which it comes may function merely as part of the metaphor—water that irrigates can come from mountain regions rather than from rainfall—but in gnostic myth it can also indicate the water’s divine origin. Two of the brief hymns in the *Revelation of Adam* that explain the incarnation of the savior have the savior either being conceived and born on “a high mountain” (*toou ef-čose*) (81.1–14) or being nourished as a child on

such a mountain (78.6–17) before he “arrived at the water.” According to the same work, the “oracles of incorruptibility [and] truth” have been placed “atop a high mountain” (85.3–18). Likewise, the great Seth is said to have placed his *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* in “high mountains” (*hentoou eu-čose*) (Gos. Eg. NHC III 68.1–33), and an immortal instructs the Foreigner to “deposit this book upon a mountain” (Allogenes 68.20–21). The high mountain, then, both works with the metaphor and represents the divine source of whatever or whomever the water represents.

Like the earlier fountain and spring (41.15–21), the water has not come for everyone and everything, specifically not for springs, trees, and fruit that are associated with “this aeon.” Instead, the water irrigates “god’s garden” or “god’s paradise.” Scholars differ on whether to understand this reference as heavenly, that is, a paradise above this realm, or earthly, that is, an area or community within this realm. That the water “has come,” probably from the high mountain, suggests the latter, and Jenott (2011, 204) suggestively cites Irenaeus: “The church has been planted (*plantata*) as a garden in this world (*paradisus in hoc mundo*).” In Irenaeus’s thought the garden of the church functions within Jesus’s redemptive recapitulation as the salvific counterpart to the garden of Eden. God’s permission to eat from every tree of the garden (Gen 2:16) means, “You shall eat from every scripture of the Lord,” who brings into this garden of the church “those who obey his proclamation” (*Haer.* 5.20). Our passage too must allude to Eden, where also a river “comes” (*poreuetai*) to “water the garden” (*potizein ton paradeison*) (Gen 2:10), and which other biblical authors call, as in our passage, “god’s garden” (*ho paradeisos tou theou*) (Gen 13:10; Ezek 28:13, 31:8–9; Rev 2:7) (Gathercole 2009, 482). Unlike the morally destructive fruit that Adam and Eve ate in the garden, something—whether “the water,” “the sort that will endure,” or “the fruit that will endure” (Note on 43.6–8, *Rather, it has come . . .*)—will not defile something belonging to the race—probably its “walking,” meaning its conduct or behavior. In contrast to the mortality imposed as a penalty on Adam and Eve (Gen 2:17), that race (or its walking) “will exist forever and ever.”

Like Irenaeus’s garden of the church, “god’s garden” here is the community of the saved. Not only does this metaphor allude to and reverse the origin of humanity in the garden of Eden, but it draws on a long tradition of representing god’s people as a cultivated, fruit-bearing land, usually a vineyard. Early Christian authors often used this metaphor

polemically to contrast a community that god cultivates and which bears fruit with one that god cultivates and yet which does not (Matt 21:33–41 parr.; cf. Rom 11:17–24). Doubtless the metaphor functions polemically in our gospel as well: the author’s opponents “shamefully have planted fruitless trees” (39.15–17). Because this garden receives the water, the “god” to whom it belongs must be the invisible spirit or the self-originate, as at 54.8–12, where “god caused acquaintance to be brought to Adam and those with him, in order that the kings of chaos and Hades might not rule over them,” another allusion to the Eden story (*pace* Brankaer and van Os 2019, 169–70).

The water imagery may allude to some form of baptism (Jenott 2011, 205), but this possibility is more difficult to assess. As multiple scholars have observed, the gospel lacks any clear reference to the five seals and presiding deities that are characteristic of gnostic baptism (Turner 2000, 87–97). Judas later asks Jesus, “What will those who have been baptized in your name do?” (55.23–25). It is unlikely that this question refers to a ritual that the author values: nowhere in the work is anything positive performed in Jesus’s name; the form of the question echoes Judas’s question here about the damned (“what will the remaining races of the human beings do?”); and Jesus’s response begins with the ominous formula “Truly I say to you” and ends with destruction (COMMENTS 55.23–57.15). Nonetheless, *Judas* shares an abundance of vocabulary with the *Revelation of Adam*, which climaxes with the incarnate savior arriving at the water, the seed receiving “the name” (probably of Seth) “upon the water,” and a dispute over “holy baptism and living water,” which some have “defiled” (77.27–82.17, 83.4–6, 84.4–26) (D. Kim 2015, 209). If our author’s community practiced a baptism, then it probably was not in Jesus’s name, but it may lie in the background of this passage.

Jesus’s response to Judas’s question about the fruit that the great race possesses provides the gospel’s clearest statement of what salvation is. At the ends of their lives in this world, the souls of those who belong to “all human races” will die; on the other hand, the bodies of those belonging to the great race will die, but their souls will live and be taken to the higher realm. The tripartite anthropology assumed here receives more explication in response to a later question of Judas: “spirit” (*pneuma*) is a life-giving substance of divine origin that human beings receive temporarily and may use rightly or abuse; “soul” (*psuchē*) is the substance of the individual’s

identity, which can survive natural death or die with it; and “body” (*sōma*) is the element that cannot live without the presence of spirit (see COMMENTS 53.16–54.12). Death is the departure of the spirit from the soul-body amalgam, at which point the souls and bodies of most people die, but the souls of the great race live on. There is no mention of a resurrected body (Bermejo Rubio 2012, 116). “To complete the time of the kingdom” is to come to the end of one’s limited life span (53.8–16); Saklas imposed that limitation, which represents the domination of the rulers over human beings (53.5–7). Similar vocabulary appears once again in the *Revelation of Adam*: Adam refers to his death as when he will have “completed the times of this race” (67.22–24), and he tells Seth that “the days of our life became few, for I understood that I had come under the authority of death” (67.10–14). That work also seems to use the term “kingdom” flexibly to refer to diverse domains.

Because Jesus has told Judas what will happen to the other human races at death, Judas’s question probably asks what, if anything, those races can do about their situation. To respond, the author has Jesus turn to an appropriate passage in other gospels, the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3–8 parr.; Gos. Thom. 9), but he refers only to one part of the parable—the sowing in the rocky ground, from which it is impossible to get fruit. Some have suggested that the allusion implies a great deal. For example, does the reference to a single rock (*oupetra*) disparage Peter “the rock” in particular (Matt 16:18; Jenott 2011, 205; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 117)? The author studiously avoids singling out any disciple other than Judas, and he uses no names; rather than a reference to Peter, this phrase probably is an example of Coptic’s expansive use of the indefinite article, meaning “some rock” (Layton 2011, §45). (See also Luke’s version, in which the seed falls on “the rock” [8:6, 13].) Does the author want the reader to recall the entire career of the rocky ground—its initial reception of the seed, quick sprouting, and later withering in the sun’s heat due to its lack of soil (Matt 13:5–6)—and apply it to the rival Christians and their eventually false understanding of the gospel (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 172–73)? We shall return to this possibility. Should we detect a message of “determinism” because people “do not choose on which soil they are sown” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 173)? This reading ignores the canonical Jesus’s own interpretation: initially he says that what is sown is the word, but as his allegory progresses, those who hear the word appear to be both the seed and

the ground (e.g., Matt 13:18–23). That is, surely the point is both to explain that people receive the message differently (and not necessarily why) and to exhort the reader not to be like the rocky ground.

The author does have Jesus explain what the allusion means (“So too . . .”), but the fragmentary nature of the text makes that meaning impossible to recover with certainty. The NOTES discuss the thorny problems of reconstruction and translation that the text of 44.2–7 poses. My hypothesis is that after “so too” should come a construction of “it is impossible” followed by *e-* and an infinitive, which would parallel 43.26–44.1 (“it is impossible to”). That infinitive would take as direct objects “the defiled (?) sort (race?) and corruptible wisdom.” The conjunctive would then continue the *e-* plus infinitive construction, as it does at 44.1: “it is impossible to . . . and for their souls to go up to the aeons on high.” This reading seems to make sense of the larger structure of the sentence and its meaning as an interpretation of the parable allusion. It remains to consider what verb may have taken “the defiled (?) sort and corruptible wisdom” as its object and how to include “the hand that created mortal human beings.” As for the verb, “sow” (*tčo*) seems most likely: it is of the right length and would continue the parallelism with 44.1 (albeit without “upon”). The two objects of “sow” would capture an ambiguity in the source parable itself, in which the seed seems to be both “the word” (to which “corruptible wisdom” corresponds) and “those who hear” (to which “the defiled sort” corresponds). It seems odd, however, to sow also “the hand that created mortal human beings,” and thus I suggest restoring the lacuna at the beginning of line 5 with *hn-*, meaning “by” or “with” an agent (Crum 1939, §683b). In sum, my hypothetical reconstruction is, “So too it is impossible to sow the defiled (?) sort and corruptible wisdom by the hand that created mortal human beings and for their souls to go up to the aeons on high.” Jesus’s next statement focuses on the deficiency of the lower powers who collectively represent the hand that created mortal human beings (52.14–21; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 118): they will not be able to see what the great holy race will see, just as their sowing of defiled seed and corruptible wisdom cannot produce the fruit of ascending souls.

The deficiency of the lower rulers as sowers seems likely enough, but we should consider more what they possibly sow. As noted above (Note on 44.2–4, *So too [. . .] the [. . .] sort*), although Judas asks about “races” (*genea*) and *genea* appears throughout the gospel as the term for those who

are saved and those who are not, Jesus here speaks of a *genos*. This shift must be significant, and thus I hesitate to translate, as all scholars do, “race,” as if it were *genea*. Most editors restore *genos* at 44.7 as well: “the sort that will endure.” Perhaps “the defiled sort” represents the opposite of “the sort that will endure,” a contrast that would resonate with the allusion to the Parable of the Sower: Jesus explains that what falls on rocky soil is “temporary” (*proskairos*) (Matt 13:21//Mark 4:17), not enduring. The discourse shifts from different “races,” large groups of saved or damned people, to different “sorts,” perhaps different kinds of people that can be found among different races, or who incline one way or another, or who display different manners of “walking” (cf. 33.10–13). Some people endure; others do not.

The “corruptible wisdom” that the rulers sow would simply refer to their false teachings, that is, the “wisdom (*sophia*) of this age or of the rulers of this aeon who are perishing (*tōn archontōn tou aiōnos toutou tōn katargoumenōn*)” (1 Cor 2:6; translation mine), something similar to “the counterfeit spirit” by which the rulers lead human beings astray according to the *Secret Book According to John* (NHC II 26.20–27.11, 29.23–30.11). Because scholars are familiar with the *Secret Book*’s account of the aeon wisdom’s error and with Valentinian concepts of a lower wisdom, they have scrutinized this passage as an allusion to or remnant of such ideas (e.g., Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 342; Schenke Robinson 2009, 81–82), but there is no reason to do so. When the lower rulers sow corruptible wisdom and defiled kinds of people in this world, it is impossible for such sowing to result in souls that will live and be taken on high. There is certainly a “deterministic” dimension to this teaching, as there is to the parable on which it draws, but the reader of the gospel can, through his or her conduct (“walking”), reveal that he or she is not the result of such sowing.

Jesus then departs, and the third appearance concludes. This discussion of human mortality and its differing consequences may represent the conclusion of “the mysteries of the kingdom” that Jesus promised to tell Judas (35.23–27), for Jesus does not welcome Judas’s subsequent report of a vision, and he announces, “I have told you the mysteries of the kingdom” (45.25–26). Similarly, Jesus’s long response to Judas’s question about domination of the rulers concludes with Saklas limiting the human life span (53.5–7). The fate of the soul after the death of the body is what is at stake for the people to whom the author addresses this work.

Fourth Appearance: Judas's Vision (44.15–46.4)

44 ¹⁵ Judas said, “Teacher, just as you have listened to all of them, listen now to me as well. ¹⁷For I have seen a great vision.”

¹⁸But when Jesus heard, he laughed and said to him, “Why are you training, you thirteenth demon? ²²But speak, and I will put up with you.”

²³Judas said to him, “In the vision I saw the twelve disciples stoning me and 45 pursuing [me . . .] ¹And [I] came also to the place [. . .] after you. ³I saw [a building . . .], and my eyes could not [comprehend] its size. ⁵Great people were surrounding it, and that building <had> a roof of greenery. ⁷And in the midst of the building [. . .]. ¹¹Teacher, take me in along with Those People.”

¹²[Jesus] answered and said, “Your star has led you astray, Judas, especially because no mortal human offspring is worthy to enter the building that you saw. ¹⁷For it is that place that is kept for the holy ones, ²⁰the place where neither the sun nor the moon will rule, nor the day, ²²but they will stand at rest always in the aeon with the holy angels. ²³Lo, I have told you the mysteries of the kingdom, 46 ¹and I have taught you [about the] error of the stars, and [. . .] over the twelve aeons.”

NOTES

44.20–21. *Why are you training.* Judas is engaging in the same activity as the disciples at the beginning of the appearances (*r-gumnaze*) (33.25–26). Without a goal for which he is training, like “godliness” (*e-tmntnoute*) in the case of the disciples, a different translation may be appropriate, for example, “Why are you so worked up?” (Jenott 2011, 159) or “Why do you try so hard?” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 87, 175). Nagel (2014, 289), in line with his translation of 33.25–26, translates, “Warum disputierst du

überhaupt, du 13ter Dämon?” Without the earlier passage this translation would seem likely, but “train” makes more sense than “dispute” for the disciples’ activity (Note on 33.25–26, *training for godliness*, to which our passage alludes).

44.21. *demon*. Although Greek authors used the term *daimōn* to refer to a range of divine or more-than-human beings (“god,” “spirit”), in early Jewish and Christian literature it came to have a solely negative meaning, which the English word “demon” conveys. It is not clear, however, that Judas is meant to be characterized as being as demonic, so to speak, as truly evil demons (Introduction IV.D; COMMENTS).

44.22–23. *and I will put up with you*. The conjugation base *ta-* in *ta-aneke* is a variation on the usual first-person singular conjunctive *nta-*, which functions here as the future conjunctive after an imperative (Layton 2011, §§357–58).

44.24–45.1. *In the vision I saw the twelve disciples stoning me and pursuing [me . . .]*. My translation interprets the clause *ere-pmntsnoous m-mathētēs hi-ōne ero-i* as being in a circumstantial conversion (*ere-*) that provides new completing information about the direct object (“myself”) in the main clause *ai-nau ero-i* (Layton 2011, §426); it could be translated, “In the vision I saw myself being stoned by the twelve disciples” (cf. Nagel 2007, 248 n. 104). The clause that follows (*se-pēt*) extends the circumstantial conversion without a conjunction, a phenomenon that Layton (2011, §433[b]) suggested might be limited to the past tense.

pursuing [me . . .]. Beginning with the original editors (Kasser et al. 2007, 209), there is a consensus to restore the lacuna *pēt [nsō-i mpša]*: “pursuing [me severely].” The first part of the restoration must be correct; there is less certainly about the adverb.

45.2. *to the place [. . .] after you*. The line reads *e-pma e-[. . .] nsō-k*. Editors disagree about how to fill the lacuna, which likely should include a verb in the first-person singular that can be followed by *nca-/nsō-* (“after you”), probably in the past tense to match the main clause. Nagel (2007, 248 n. 105) suggests several possibilities but offers as likely *e-pma e-[nt-ai-ouah-t mmo-f] nsō-k*, meaning, “to the place [from which (or where) I followed] after you” (so too Jenott 2011, 160; Nagel 2014, 288). Brankaer and Bethge (2007, 272) suggest *e-pma e-[t-mmau ai-šine] nsō-k*, “to that place, and I sought] after you” (so too Brankaer and van Os 2019, 88).

Schenke Robinson (2008, 91) proposes *e-pma e[nt-ai-pōt ero-f] nsō-f*, “to the place [where I ran] after you.” All of these proposals seem plausible.

45.3. *I saw [a building . . .]*. The restoration of *ouēei* or *ouēi* (“a building”) (possibly without the initial omicron) at the beginning of the lacuna (*aei-nau e-[ouēei]*) is nearly certain because Judas later refers to “the building” (*pēei, pēi*) (45.7, 8) and consistently uses the masculine singular to refer to what he saw. There is no certainty, however, about how to restore the remainder of the lacuna, which is followed by a sigma before *au|ō* (“and my eyes”). Most suggestions place *topos* at the end of the lacuna to create [*hm-ptopo*]s (“in the place”) or something similar (Jenott 2011, 160; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 88). This reconstruction is plausible, but so too is some phrase modifying “a building.”

45.4. *could not [comprehend]*. Scholarly consensus follows the original editors (Kasser et al. 2007, 209) in restoring *na-š-[šit-f] an*.

45.6–7. *that building <had> a roof of greenery*. Most editors follow the original editors (Kasser et al. 2007, 209) in reading the text as *ne-oustegē nou|ote pe nqi-pēei et-mm[au]*. Jenott (2011, 160), however, reads the first letter of line 7 as an epsilon rather than an omicron. The Greek *stegē* means “roof” (Mark 2:4) but can secondarily mean a “roofed place, chamber, room” (LSJ, s.v. *stegē*); the meaning of *nouote* (or *nouete*) is not obvious, although it is almost certain that the initial nu functions as a mediator in an attributive construction, so that *ouote* modifies *oustegē*. The *ne-* before *oustegē* is almost certainly the preterit converter. The *pe* that follows *nouote* could be the *pe* of the nominal sentence (“it was a . . . roof”) or the invariable *pe* that sometimes follows the preterit converter. But neither of these options explains *nqi-*, which lacks a personal morph for it to expand and does not expand *pe* in the nominal sentence pattern. The sentence without emendation would be an example of what Layton (2011, §275) calls Pattern 6 among nominal sentences. This problem appears to require emending the text. No editor has proposed deleting *nqi-*; instead, most follow the original editors’ plausible emendation to *ne-ou<nt-f ou>stegē n-ouote pe nqi-pēei et-mm[au]*: “That building <had> a . . . roof” (Kasser et al. 2007, 209). This proposal would correct for haplography; the *pe* now functions as the frequent invariable *pe* in preterit clauses (Layton 2011, §438), and *nqi-* makes sense.

a roof of greenery. But what did that building have? The Coptic noun *ouote* means “greens, herbs,” and *ma n-ouote* (“place of greenery, garden”)

can translate *paradeisos* (Crum 1939, 493b). Nonetheless, the original editors labeled the reading “roof of greenery” “difficult” (Kasser et al. 2007, 209). A roof of greenery may not be realistic for second-century architecture (Nagel 2014, 308), but realism is probably not the point. The greens do resonate with the earlier paradisaical imagery of a watered garden with trees and fruit (42.22–44.14) (Gathercole 2009, 487). Among the alternatives van der Vliet (2006, 144–45) proposes that *n-ouote* is a variation of *n-ouōte*, a feminine form of *n-ouōt* (“single, same”) that Layton (2011, §158[b]) calls “rare.” The resulting translation would be “that building <had> a single room,” for *stegē* must mean a roofed space or chamber in this case. Jenott (2011, 207), who reads *n-ouete* rather than *n-ouote*, suggests a variant spelling of *ouēte* (“lightning, fire”), meaning “roof of lightning.” His literal translation of a nominal sentence—“that house was a lightning-roofed one”—does not address the problem of *nqi-*, however, and *ouēte* is poorly attested in Sahidic (Crum 1939, 495a). In support of this proposal, he points to Enoch’s vision of a heavenly temple, which consists of tongues of fire, lightning, and stars; “its roof (*stegē*) was a flaming fire” (1 *En.* 14:10–17) (2009; 2011, 207). The parallels that Jenott adduces between Judas’s and Enoch’s visions are impressive, but the phrase *ou-stegē n-ouote* is intelligible as it is, and a heavenly temple of fire and lightning may not have appealed to our author, for whom fire is a negative image (COMMENTS).

Although the text remains difficult, my translation, on the one hand, acknowledges that the text must be emended and judges that the emendation accepted by most editors is probably correct; on the other hand, it does not emend a Coptic phrase that is intelligible and potentially exegetically meaningful.

45.7–10. *And in the midst of the building [. . .]*. The survival of *er-* before the lacuna in line 8 suggests that a clause in focalizing or circumstantial conversion (*ere-*) followed. Most editors have discerned an eta at the end of line 8 (and possibly a mu before the eta), and on that basis some have restored *oumēēše* (“a multitude”) after the presumed *ere-* (e.g., Kasser et al. 2007, 209; Nagel 2014, 288). This proposal is plausible and has the virtue of extending the parallelism between Judas’s vision and the disciples’ earlier dream of a large building; Judas does refer to multiple people (*nirōme*) who are presumably in the building (45.11–12). It remains

speculative, however, and there is unfortunately no basis on which to reconstruct anything else in lines 9 and 10.

45.14. *especially because*. My translation attempts to capture what is likely the intensifying force of *auō* (= *kai*?) before *če-*.

45.17–19. *For it is that place that is kept for the holy ones*. It is a cleft sentence (*ntof p-et-ou-areh ero-f*) with the focal point (*ptopos et-mmau*) in extraposition (Layton 2011, §472[a]).

45.21–22. *nor the day*. Nagel (2014, 290) emends the text to add *mn-teušē* after *oude pehoou* (“nor the day <and the night>”) to parallel *prē mn-pooh* (“the sun and the moon”).

46.1. [*about the*] *error*. Scholarly consensus supports the original editors’ restoration of [*e-tepl*]*anē* (Kasser et al. 2007, 211).

46.2–4. *and [. . .] over the twelve aeons*. After “the stars,” line 2 reads *au[. . .] tnoous*. After the lacuna in line 3 editors variously read *-pe*, *-te*, and *-ne* before *ečn-* (“over, upon”). Jenott (2011, 162) and Nagel (2014, 290–91) restore in line 2 *au[ō nt-au] tnoou-s*. Jenott notes that the scribe of Codex Tchacos spells the verb *tnoou* (“send”) as *tnoou* multiple times (4.23; 28.7, 15; 62.21), and Nagel takes the sigma to refer to [*tep*]*lanē* in line 1: “and it (the error) has been sent.” Jenott restores [. . . *nsa-t*]*pe ečn-* in line 3 (“on high over”), while Nagel declines to fill the lacuna. Other scholars take *-tnoous* in line 2 to be an error for the last part of [*mn*]*t<s>noous* (“twelve”) and propose either *au[ō m-pmn]t<s>noous | n[aggelos et-amah]te ečn-|pm[nts]noous n-naiōn* (“and [the] twelve [angels that have power] over the twelve aeons”) (van der Vliet 2006, 145) or *au[ō e-pmn]t<s>noous | n-n[arkhōn et-oueh-sah]ne ečn-|pm[nts]noous n-naiōn* (“and [about the] twelve [rulers who give commands] over the twelve aeons”) (Schenke Robinson 2008, 92). The interpretation of *tnoou* as “send” in line 2 may be more probable than the interpretation of it as “twelve” because it does not require emendation of the text, but I am not certain how the error of the stars might be sent and by whom. Otherwise, any restorations are speculative. One advantage of a reference to twelve angels or rulers, however, is that it provides a segue to Judas’s subsequent question about the rulers (*narkhōn*) (46.5–7).

COMMENTS

Jesus’s fourth appearance begins abruptly without the announcement of his arrival that initiated the first three (cf. 33.22–24, 36.11–13, 37.20–21), but

this final appearance differs also from the earlier ones in that only Judas is present. Likewise, the content of the appearance begins and ends with Judas himself and his star: it opens with Judas's vision, which concerns his separation from both the disciples and the holy race, and Jesus's announcement that his star has led him astray; it concludes with Jesus's statement about Judas's sacrifice of the human who bears him within the events at the end of this cosmos (55.23–57.15) and a reference to Judas's star leading the way (57.20–21). If Judas's star was wrong to lead him to the large, leafy building surrounded by great people, at the end his star may lead him to his proper role and place.

In the opening exchange Judas compares himself to the other disciples (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 343), a similarity that Jesus mocks. Judas asks Jesus to listen to him as he listened to the disciples; just as they “saw great dreams” (*hnnoq n-rasou*) (37.23), he has “seen a great vision” (*(o)unoq n-horoma*). Jesus's laughter and question indicate the absurdity of Judas portraying himself as like the disciples; the use of the inflected interjection *ahro-k* (“What's the matter with you?”) suggests that we should imagine emphasis: “Why are *you* training (*r-gumnaze*)?” or “What are *you* doing by training?” The disciples were “training” (*r-gumnaze*) when Jesus encountered them at the beginning of his first appearance (33.25). Judas appears not to have grasped his separation from the disciples, even though he has just seen a vision in which the disciples were stoning him. Jesus's address to Judas—“thirteenth demon”—makes clear that he is not one of the twelve, and in some respect he is not even human.

The title “thirteenth *daimōn*” has generated much scholarly controversy and remains enigmatic (Introduction IV.D), but at least some of its significance becomes clear as the fourth appearance continues. In the last days Judas will “become the thirteenth,” and although “the races” will curse him, he will “rule over them” (46.19–24), an activity that the lower angels and stars and the disciples now perform. Because there are twelve lower angels that correspond to areas of heaven (51.20–23), “the thirteenth aeon,” where Judas's star will rule (55.12–13), must lie above them, where Nebrō and Saklas now hold sway. It appears that these rulers will be eliminated at the end (57.4–10), making space for a new chief ruler, Judas. The gospel's references to “the thirteenth (aeon)” are intelligible within the cosmology that Jesus later teaches and are unlikely to correspond to similar references in later works, including the eclectic *Pistis Sophia* (DeConick 2009a, 254–

55; *pace* Meyer 2009). Jesus's address of Judas as "the thirteenth *daimōn*" here forecasts all of this but explains none of it, and thus Judas remains puzzled and must ask a series of questions to elicit this information.

On the simplest level the term *daimōn*, which is used only here in the gospel, marks Judas as playing a unique role in the eschatological transformation of this realm and its new organization. The disciples and other people are called "human beings," while the saved people are "great human beings" or "*those* human beings" (37.12–13; 45.5, 11–12); such beings must be modeled after the immortal "first human being" (50.20). Judas too must be a human being, but in his future role as ruler and the thirteenth, he must be more than that. It is possible that as a cosmic ruler Judas shares the negative identity of *daimōn* with the disciples in their capacity as rulers (37.15–16); they would be the twelve of which he will be the thirteenth. The gospel uses "angel" for beings that are more than human, whether they are immortals in the upper realm or oppressive rulers in this cosmos; the latter are also "rulers" and "stars" and the like. Other terms, including "kingdom," "race," "aeon," and "cloud," appear with reference to both positive and negative domains and beings (Introduction IV.A; Schenke Robinson 2009b, 102–3). This practice should make us wary of overinterpreting the term "demon," which, within the context of mythological and philosophical works of the period may denote an intermediate place or position in the cosmos more than moral character (S. Petersen 2009, 123–26). And Jesus uses it while laughing in mockery, even "teasingly" (Schenke Robinson 2009a, 102), not necessarily as a way of carefully delimiting Judas's true character.

In contrast to the disciples, Judas reports not a dream, but a vision (*horama*) (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 343). The vision does not present a symbolic tableau that Jesus must interpret; instead, it communicates accurate information clearly (the disciples will persecute Judas) and shows him an actual place. The disciples' stoning of Judas resembles Gos. Thom. 13, where Thomas tells his fellow disciples, "If I say to you one of the sayings that he (Jesus) said to me, you will take stones and stone me, and fire will come out of the stones and burn you up" (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 178). Presumably, Thomas did not risk his colleagues' wrath and tell them even one of the sayings, but in this gospel's narrative world the stoning and pursuit of Judas will happen, just as the races will curse Judas (46.20–22). Because Judas then comes to the place where the holy ones will

go, it is possible that the disciples kill him in the vision. So too the building that Judas sees is apparently real, for Jesus does not identify it as anything other than what Judas saw: it is “the place kept for the holy ones,” but not kept for Judas. Jesus did not show Judas this vision: his star apparently did. The vision is accurate but misleads Judas because Judas’s eschatological role will prevent him from going to the large building with the roof of greenery.

Jenott (2009) and Scopello (2008b; 2009) have demonstrated that our author inherited the elements of what must be a heavenly temple from Jewish apocalyptic literature, especially Enochic traditions. Jenott compiles an impressive set of parallels between Judas’s vision and that of Enoch in *1 Enoch* 14: (1) both men see a building (or buildings) of immense size (14:10, 15); (2) both descriptions include the building’s *stegē(ai)* (14:11, 17); (3) both buildings are located in an *aiōn* (15:3); (4) both men see a “vision” (*horasis* in 14:8, 14); (5) just as myriads stand “in a circle” (*kuklō*) around “The Great Glory” in Enoch’s vision (14:20–22), so too great people surround the building in Judas’s; (6) in both cases entry into the building is not permitted to certain beings (14:21–22); (7) and yet “the holy ones” are permitted to approach or enter (14:23). Judas’s building is surrounded by “great people” (*noq n-rōme*). In the *Revelation of Adam* this term usually designates the descendants of Seth, the forerunners of the gnostics (74.5–6), but Adam uses it also to refer to the angelic beings who appear to him and Eve and make a revelation to them (66.10–11). The great people here function as angels do in other Jewish apocalyptic works by surrounding the building and protecting its sanctity (*1 En.* 14:22; *3 En.* 35:3–4; Scopello 2008b, 131–32; 2009, 593–95). We cannot know what is inside the building because of the lacuna, but it must include people because Judas requests to be taken “in” (*eho[un]*) along with “Those People” (*nirōme*)—gnostic jargon for the saved. This building is the true and eternal temple that the building in the disciples’ dream replicates but corrupts (Pagels and King 2007, 141–42).

Jenott (2009) compiles his persuasive parallels with Enoch’s temple vision in part to support his reading of *oustegē n-ouete* (“roof of lightning”) rather than *oustegē n-ouote* (“roof of greenery”) (Note on 45.6–7, *that building <had> a roof of greenery*). Alternatively, if we accept the reading of most editors, which is intelligible, then it emerges as striking that the building Judas sees, which is otherwise quite similar to Enoch’s temple,

differs from it by being green with plants rather than brightly aflame with “tongues of fire,” “shooting stars and lightning flashes,” and “a flaming fire” (1 En. 14:9–12, 15–17, 22). But such is consistent with the gospel’s imagery. Earlier, the community of the great holy race is called “god’s garden” irrigated by water from a “high mountain” (42.25–43.11). The twelve higher aeons may be luminous and ruled by luminaries (48.1–18), but stars belong to the lower realm, manifest “error,” and can lead people astray. The gospel associates fire with the ruler of this cosmos: Nebrō’s face “pours forth fire” (51.10), and the fall of a “pillar of fire” represents his eventual removal from power (42.18–20). The altar in the corrupt temple of the disciples’ dream is (possibly) ablaze with sacrifices (39.1–3). Jesus compares salvation to a “fountain” extinguishing “the [fire] of the [entire] inhabited world” (41.15–18). No wonder, then, that the heavenly temple reserved for the holy ones lacks lightning, fire, and shooting stars and exists in a place where “neither the sun nor the moon will rule, nor the day” (cf. Rev 21:23; Piñero and Torallas 2006, 132).

The lack of rule by the sun, moon, and day reflects *Judas*’s calendrical focus. The calendar—its year, weeks, and days—provides the numerical structure for the upper regions of the lower cosmos (COMMENTS 48.21–49.24), and Saklas and his angels dominate human beings through the “time” by which they measure out human life (53.6–7). In contrast, the markers of time and their primary unit, the day, do not control the place that Judas sees. Instead, there the holy ones “stand at rest always” (*ōheratou nouoeiš nim*). For them there is no time (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 181), and they are motionless: their standing is what the holy ones and angels do in the divine presence (Jenott 2011, 208, citing 1 En. 62:8; *Ascen. Isa.* 9:8–9) and represents the stability and immutability that characterize true existence (M. Williams 1985). They no longer “move by the stars” (42.21–22).

This is not Judas’s destiny—at least not yet. Jesus suggests that it was Judas’s star that has shown him this vision and that by doing so (whether purposefully or not) it has led him astray, probably by suggesting that because Judas does not belong among the twelve disciples (who stone and pursue him), he belongs in the immense building of greenery among the holy ones. Jesus disabuses him of this notion: Judas may become a *daimōn* in the future, but for now he is a “mortal human offspring,” unworthy to enter the building. Because the vision was not revealed by Jesus, his

announcement that he has now told Judas about the mysteries of the kingdom and taught him about the error of the stories may refer to the teachings that concluded the third appearance (COMMENTS 42.22–44.14). Placed here, however, the announcement may function also as something of a rebuke: because Jesus has so instructed Judas, he should not have thought that he had the possibility of joining Those People in the heavenly temple. Whatever the content of 46.1–3, it concerns the twelve lower aeons and possibly those who rule “over” them. That material provokes the first of a series of questions that Judas will ask about the consequences of Jesus’s teaching for human beings like him.

*EROTAPOKRISEIS (QUESTIONS AND
ANSWERS)*

1. The Domination of the Rulers and the Rule of Judas (46.5–53.7)

46⁵ Judas said, “Teacher, surely my seed does not dominate the rulers, does it?”

⁷Jesus answered and said to him, “Come, and I will [speak with] you [. . .], ¹¹but so that you might groan all the more when you see the kingdom and its entire race.”

¹⁴When Judas heard these things, he said to him, ¹⁶“What more have I received because you have separated me from that race?”

¹⁸Jesus answered and said, “You will become the thirteenth, ²⁰and you will come to be cursed by the rest of the races, and you will come to rule over them. ²⁴In the last days they <will . . . > you, and you will not go on high ⁴⁷ to the [holy race].”

NOTES

46.5–7. *surely my seed does not dominate the rulers, does it?* The question beginning with *mēpote* expects a negative answer. There is no negation of the main verb, so the question could be translated simply, “Does my seed dominate the rulers?” with the expected reply, “No, it does not.” My translation attempts to capture the expectation of a negative reply in an English idiom. The inflected modifier *hō* (“me too,” “for my part”) (variant for *hōōt*) (Layton 2011, §152) places an emphasis on “my”: “my seed” (Jenott 2011, 208).

dominate. Scholars divide over how to translate the verb *hupotasse*. My translation interprets it to be active (“to dominate, subject”) (so too Schenke Robinson 2008, 92; Jenott 2011, 209), but it could be passive (“to be dominated by, subjected to”): “Surely my seed is not subject to the rulers, is it?” (Kasser et al. 2007, 211; Nagel 2014, 291; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 91). In the Sahidic New Testament, *hupotasse* usually carries the passive meaning (“to submit to, be subjected to”) (e.g., Luke 10:17, 20; Rom 8:7;

10:3; 13:1, 5). Once it conveys the active: “God did not subject (*hupotasse*) the coming world to the angels” (Heb 2:5). On the other hand, we find an Egyptian Coptic verb translating the active meaning of *hupotassō*: for example, *thbbio* (“to subject, place under”; Eph 1:22, 2:8). The verb appears six times in the Greek text of 1 Cor 15:27–28, three times with the active meaning and three times with the passive. The Sahidic uses *hupotasse* for all the passive instances. For one active instance, it uses *ka-nka nim ha-* (“place all things under”), and for the other two it uses the causative with *hupotasse* passive in meaning: *tre-nka nim hupotasse na-f* (“cause all things to be subject to him”). The New Testament usage suggests that we should consider the passive meaning (“is subject to”) more likely. On the other hand, Judas’s question expects a negative answer; that is, he thinks that what he is saying is not true. If he asks “surely my seed is not subject to the rulers, is it?,” then Judas’s expectation is mistaken, for his seed is indeed subject to the rulers. If he asks “surely my seed does not dominate the rulers, does it?,” then Judas’s expectation is correct, for his seed does not dominate the rulers. My translation follows the latter course, which takes a less pessimistic view of Judas’s intelligence; after all, he has demonstrated that he has knowledge of Jesus and “exalted matters” that the other disciples lack (35.14–23). The alternative is equally possible, however. Possibly the missing content of 46.2–3 would make clear which is correct.

46.8–11. *and I will [speak with] you [. . .]*. My translation accepts Jenott’s (2011, 162) restoration of the beginning of line 9 as *š[ače n]mm[a-]k* (“[speak with] you”). The remainder of line 9, all of line 10, and the first part of line 11 (except for epsilon and rho at its beginning) are illegible, however, and all the restorations that have been proposed are speculative (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 274; Schenke Robinson 2008, 92; Jenott 2011, 162).

46.16–17. *What more have I received*. My translation is literal: *houo* could mean by extension “advantage” or “profit.”

46.17–18. *you have separated me from that race*. Some have translated *ak-porč-t e-tgenea et-mmau* as “you have set me apart for that race” (Kasser et al. 2007, 211). Although *pōrč e-* can mean “divide into” (that is, “separate for”), the meaning “divide from” is more frequent (Crum 1939, 271b), and Judas’s difference from the holy race has been mentioned several times. On the other hand, Nagel (2014, 291 n. 18) observes that twice in *Judas* “separate from” is expressed by *pōrč ebol mmo-* (35.23–24, 43.19–20). Still, the referent of “that race” is most likely the kingdom’s “entire race,” which

Judas will not see (46.12–14), and the gospel in general seems to differentiate Judas from all other races and assign him to none.

46.20–24. *and you will come to be cursed by the rest of the races, and you will come to rule over them.* My translation reflects the periphrastic use of *šōpe* with the circumstantial conversion to express incipient action (beginning to act, entering into a state) (Layton 2011, §427[b]): *k-na-šōpe ek-shouort*, “you-will-become you-being-cursed”; *k-na-šōpe ek-arči*, “you-will-become you-ruling (*arkhein*).”

46.24. *In the last days.* This phrase could also conclude the previous clause: “and you will come to rule over them in the last days.” The meaning of the passage is probably the same, for all the events described here are in the future and most likely “in the last days.”

46.24–47.1. *they <will . . . > you, and you will not go on high to the [holy race].* One or more words have been inadvertently omitted after *se-* at the end of line 24. Almost certainly *se-* was followed by *na-* (“they will), and the scribe skipped to the *na-* of *na-k* (Jenott 2011, 209). Few scholars have been willing to speculate about what has been omitted; Nagel (2014, 290) suggests *na-hupotasse* (“they will be subjected to you”).

you will not go. The form *nek-* in *nek-bōk* is ambiguous. It could be the long form of the conjunctive *ng-* (Layton 2011, §351); in that case the clause would most likely mean “you will go up” (to continue “they will”), but we cannot be sure how many words the scribe omitted and thus precisely what the conjunctive would continue. The long form of the conjunctive is not attested elsewhere in Codex Tchacos, which regularly uses the standard form. The other possibility is that this is a variant spelling of the negative optative *nnek-* (Layton 2011, §338), which occurs also at 54.10, where we have *neu-* for *nneu-* (Jenott 2011, 209). The latter possibility appears more likely, but one cannot be certain.

to the [holy race]. The original editors’ restoration of *e-t[genae et]-ouaab* in 47.1 (Kasser et al. 2007, 213) receives unanimous scholarly support, although Jenott (2011, 164) reads *et-ou]aab*.

COMMENTS

From here the dialogue follows the literary format of *erotapokriseis* (“questions and answers”): Judas asks only short questions, to which Jesus responds, and Judas’s questions follow up on Jesus’s responses. I count the two questions in this passage as essentially the same question because first,

Jesus provides no answer to Judas's question at 46.8–14 but instead makes a kind of opening invitation to this new section of the dialogues, and second, his long answer concludes at 53.5–7 with the domination of humanity by the rulers, matching Judas's initial question. That is, 46.8–14 represents a brief digression in which Jesus clarifies the role of Judas in the last days but does not yet address the question of his seed's relationship to the rulers.

The general meaning of Judas's question is clear enough: What is the relationship between his seed and the rulers? Who dominates or is subject to whom? Nonetheless, the precise meaning is uncertain because of the ambiguity of the Coptic use of *hupotasse* (Note on 46.5–7, *surely my seed does not dominate the rulers, does it?*) and the enigmatic identity of Judas's "seed" (*sperma*). It is possible that something in the lost content of 46.2–4 prompts Judas's interest in his seed and the rulers. Montserrat-Torrents (2009) suggests that this passage concerns the ascent of the soul past the heavenly rulers to the higher realm, a frequent theme in gnostic, Valentinian, and related literature. In this case Judas's seed is his true self, his incorporeal reality—the Coptic *Revelation of Paul* calls the incorporeal self "an animate seed" (*qraq m-psukhē*) (19.7)—and the enigmatic sentences at 46.24–47.1 concern Judas's soul ascending on high past the lower rulers. Judas's groaning (46.11–12) would represent the groaning of one who seeks to leave the tent of the body for one's heavenly dwelling (2 Cor 5:2). This intriguing interpretation runs aground in the latter part of this exchange, in which Judas interprets his groaning negatively and Jesus most likely tells Judas he will not ascend to the higher realm. The gospel so consistently distinguishes Judas from the holy race that it seems unlikely that he serves as a role model for the individual gnostic's ascent past heavenly powers.

Gnostic works frequently use "seed," whether *sperma* or *spora*, as a collective term, to refer to those who are saved or to their primeval forerunners, as well as to rival groups. The seed usually belongs to ("of") someone: Seth or the great Seth (e.g., Ap. John NHC II 9.15; Gos. Eg. NHC IV 65.30, 67.31, 73.26; Apoc. Adam 85.22), Adam (Ap. John NHC II 20.22), or Noah and his sons (e.g., Apoc. Adam 71.5; 72.24; 73.14, 25, 28; 74.11, 17; 76.12). These men (unlike Judas) are known to have descendants, even if gnostic authors interpreted those descendants in spiritual rather than biological terms. But "seed" can occur without a begetter, so to speak: for example, simply "the seed" (Ap. John NHC II 25.10), "the incorruptible seed" (Apoc. Adam 76.7), or "the holy seed" (Apoc. Adam 85.29). In the *Secret Book According to John* the perfect forethought of the entirety refers

to “my seed” (Ap. John NHC II 30.13). There can be bad “seed,” such as that which the rulers’ angels raise up through their intercourse with human women (Ap. John NHC II 29.19). The seed(s) associated with Noah and his sons in *Revelation of Adam* can be mapped onto religious groups (Jews, gentiles, gnostics) of the second century (Brakke 2002). There is ample precedent, then, for gnostic authors using “seed” as a term of sectarian differentiation. Scholars have suggested such a usage here as well. Judas is not known to have produced offspring or to have descendants, however, and therefore his seed is probably the seed to which he belongs or a seed that he exemplifies rather than a seed that belongs to him. It is unlikely that anyone in the second century, not even the community that our author represents, would have claimed to be “the seed of Judas.” Perhaps, then, our author labels as Judas’s seed the Christian groups that he opposes because they replicate Judas’s sacrifice of the one who bears Jesus by perpetuating the cult of Saklas (Painchaud 2013, 285; cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 124). Brankaer and van Os (2019, 182–83) suggest that the rival Christians are called Judas’s seed because “by celebrating the sacrifice of Jesus by Judas in the Eucharist, the ‘apostolic’ church unwittingly has become the church of Judas.” On the other hand, just as the gospel has consistently distinguished Judas from the holy race, so too it has consistently distinguished him from the disciples that represent the “apostolic” church. Judas appears not to belong to any sectarian group; he has no race: instead, the disciples will stone and pursue him, and the rest of the races will curse him.

Because Jesus’s lengthy response to Judas’s question culminates in the ruler’s domination of general humanity by limiting their life span “by time,” Judas’s seed may simply be mortal human beings. They are people who are not yet members of the holy race but are still the “mortal human offspring (čpo)” to which it seems Judas belongs (45.15–16). The word čpo can translate *sporos* (“seed”) (Crum 1939, 779b), a term that hearkens back to the gospel’s earlier use of sowing imagery to talk about diverse human races (43.26–44.7). The noun form of the infinitive čo (“to sow”; 44.1) can translate *sperma* (Crum 1939, 752b). When Judas refers to “my seed,” he probably means something like “my sort” or “people like me.” Possibly something Jesus said in 46.2–4 suggested that human beings might dominate cosmic rulers, which prompts Judas to ask, “Surely, people like me do not dominate the rulers, do they?” This question gets at the heart of why salvation is needed, why something has to be done if people’s souls are going to live and go up on high after they have completed their times

(43.16–23). Therefore, Jesus must explain the origin of the rulers and their domination of human beings.

Jesus invites Judas to listen to his answer, but first warns that Judas himself will groan because although he will see the kingdom and its entire race—and, in fact, already has in a way (44.15–46.4)—he will not participate in them. Judas asks what, if anything, he gains from being separated from that race. Judas’s question sounds like any number of similar such questions in the Bible (e.g., Eccl 6:11b LXX, Rom 3:1) or elsewhere, but some commentators have discerned an allusion specifically to Gen 37:26, in which Judas, the fourth son of Jacob, asks his brothers other than Joseph, “Of what use is it (*ti chrēsion*) if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?” (Painchaud and Cazalais 2009, 448–49). From this suggestion it has been proposed that the gospel alludes in other ways to the Joseph story in Genesis, such as the vision of stars doing obeisance to Joseph (Gen 37:9) and the interpretation of two symbolic dreams (Gen 40); moreover, like the enslavement and fake murder of Joseph, Judas’s sacrifice of Jesus was an evil act that had good results (Kochenash 2020). Of these alleged parallels, Joseph’s vision of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing to him is the most promising and could indeed inform the gospel’s imagery of Judas’s star ruling and leading other stars (55.12–13, 57.20–21). Nonetheless, this line of exegesis certainly overinterprets the unexceptional phrasing of Judas’s question, which does not really match *ti chrēsion* (“of what use is it?”) in Gen 37:26. Normally *chrēsion* finds its way into Coptic as *šau* or *hēu* (Crum 1939, 599–600, 729a), while our passage has *houo*. Moreover, our gospel does not contain two symbolic dreams that require interpretation, but only one, that of the disciples; Judas, in contrast, receives a vision that presents future and heavenly realities as they are or will be and that Jesus does not interpret (*pace* Kochenash 2020, 486–87). In the end, Judas’s question is simply an obvious one to ask.

Jesus’s reply focuses not on Judas as he is in the present, but on his roles in the future. Judas will “become the thirteenth,” which probably refers both to his separation from the twelve disciples and to his taking on a ruling position in the thirteenth aeon in the cosmos (55.12–13), where he will replace Nebrō and Saklas (Turner 2008, 216). He will be cursed by “the rest of the races,” which likewise probably refers both to hostility from Christians (the disciples and their followers) for his betrayal of Jesus and to general human hostility to him as a cosmic ruler. The “rest of the races” refers to all races other than “that race” from which Judas was separated, that

is, other than the great and holy race, which is to be identified neither with the disciples and their followers, who will show hostility to Judas for his act, nor with the races over which Judas will rule. These things will happen “in the last days,” when “they,” that is, the rest of the races over which Judas will rule, will do something that has to do with Judas (*na-k*, “to you” or “for you”). Nagel’s (2014, 290) suggestion that they “will be subjected to” Judas is plausible, even attractive, but must remain a suggestion (Note on 46.24–47.1, *they <will . . . > you . . .*). Judas’s rulership in the thirteenth position in this realm requires that he will not go on high to dwell with the holy race—at least not “in the last days.”

This description of Judas’s role—the “more” that he receives because he has been set apart—is something of a digression from the topic about which Judas has asked, the relationship of dominance and subjection that exists between mortal humanity and the rulers. But it is a helpful one: it clarifies for Judas that despite his reference to humanity as “my seed,” Judas is not subject to the rulers’ domination in the same way as everyone else. In fact, he will replace the rulers in the last days. The long discourse that follows not only answers Judas’s question, but also gives Judas the information he will need to exercise rule as the thirteenth *daimōn*.

The Primary Aeons (47.1–48.21)

47 ¹Jesus said: “[Come,] and I will teach you about the [. . .] that [. . .] human being will see. ⁵For there exists a great and infinite aeon, the extent of which no angelic race has been able to see. ⁸[In] it is a great invisible spirit, ¹⁰which no angelic eye has seen nor thought of heart comprehended and which has not been called by any name.

¹⁴“And a luminous cloud appeared there.

¹⁶“And it (the invisible spirit) said, ‘Let an angel come into being for my attendance.’ ¹⁸And a great angel, the self-originate, the god of light, came forth from the cloud. ²¹And for its sake four other angels came into being from another cloud, ²⁴and they came into being for the attendance of the angelic self-originate.

²⁶“And 48 the [self-originate] said, ¹‘Let [. . .] come into being.’ ²And it happened [. . .], and it [established] the first luminary to rule over it. ⁵And it

said, ‘Let angels come into being to serve [it].’⁸ And innumerable [myriads] came into being.

⁹“And it said, ‘[Let] a luminous aeon come into being.’¹¹ And it came into being, and it (the self-originate) established the second luminary to rule over it, along with innumerable angelic myriads serving.

¹⁵“And this is how it (the self-originate) created the rest of the aeons of light,¹⁷ and it caused them to be ruled, and it created innumerable angelic myriads for their service.

NOTES

47.2. [*Come*,]. Only the final upsilon of *amou* survives, but the parallel at 46.8–9 makes the restoration certain.

47.3. *about the* [. . .]. Other than a nu that presumably functions as the plural definite article, nothing survives to make a restoration more than speculative. Jenott’s (2011, 164) proposal of “mysterics” is perhaps more plausible than the others that have been offered.

47.6–8. *the extent of which no angelic race has been able to see*. The text reads *pa[i] ete-|mpe-s-laoue n-genea n-[ag]ge|los nau e-peřsi*. The first sigma (*mpe-s-laoue*) is puzzling. Kasser (2007, 70) proposed that it represents a variant of ř- (“be able to, can”), following a suggestion of Wolf-Peter Funk, which my translation accepts. The same construction appears at 48.23–24 (*mpe-s-laoue n-aggelos nau ero-s*). Nagel (2014, 292) suggests, however, that the sigma anticipates the feminine subject, *genea*, and thus *mpes* should be understood simply as the negative past tense conjugation base: “the extent of which no angelic race has seen.” This proposal requires, however, textual emendation at 48.23–24 in order to maintain it consistently there.

47.16. *And it (the invisible spirit) said*. The speaker must be the invisible spirit, which is the only proximate masculine noun (*kloole*, “cloud,” is feminine). Although the invisible spirit, like the self-originate and some other beings, is grammatically masculine in gender and referred to with masculine pronouns, I have chosen to use the neuter pronoun in English when I believe that a being’s identity transcends or has nothing to do with gender. Unlike some other gnostic works, *Judas* deploys little or no imagery of gender, sexuality, and reproduction in its theogony and cosmogony (COMMENTS).

48.1–2. *Let [. . .] come into being.* There are two plausible restorations of the lacuna, which has an ambiguous letter trace before it. Several scholars have proposed *a[damas]* (“Adamas”) (Plisch 2006, 11; Kasser et al. 2007, 215; Pagels and King 2007, 149; Devoti 2012, 219). The restoration of Adamas would make explicit the creation of Adamas that is implied at 48.21–23 (“And Adamas existed in the first cloud of light”). Gathercole (2007, 91) cites Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29.3: “So when all these had been established in this way, the self-originate additionally emits a perfect, true human being, whom they also call Adamas.” This sentence immediately follows a description of the emanation of the four luminaries that “stand around the self-originate” (1.29.2), just as in our work. On the other hand, others have proposed *o[uaiōn]* (“an aeon”) (Jenott 2011, 166; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 130–31; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 94). This restoration makes the self-originate’s statement parallel both to what it says at 48.10–11 (“[Let] a luminous aeon come into being”) and to Jesus’s summation, “And this is how it (the self-originate) created the rest of the aeons of light” (48.15–17). Therefore, “an aeon” appears more likely, but Nagel (2014, 293) may be wise to restore nothing.

48.2–3. *And it happened [. . .].* Before the lacuna in line 3, *auō as-šō|pe* appears, and after it *-os*. Parallelism with 48.11, *auō af-šōpe* (“and it came into being”), may suggest emending the text to *af-šōpe* (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 351), meaning that either Adamas or an aeon came into being (depending on how one restores the lacuna on line 2). Following a suggestion of John Turner, the original editors filled the lacuna with *[nqi-teprood]os*: “And [the emanation] occurred” (Kasser et al. 2007, 215). Nagel (2009, 133–34), however, points out that *proodos* is not attested in Coptic texts. Second- and third-century works in Greek having to do with gnostics and Valentinians use *probolē* for “emanation” (Lampe 1961, s.v. *probolē*). In general, such philosophical vocabulary is foreign to *Judas*. Instead, Nagel proposed *[n-the nt-af-čō]o-s* (“as he said”), which Jenott (2011, 166) revised to *[kata-the nt-af-čō]o-s* (“just as he said”): “And it happened [just as he said].” Something of this kind seems likely.

48.4. *it [established].* Only the initial tau of *taho* is legible, but Jenott’s (2011, 166) restoration is certain because of the parallel at 48.12.

COMMENTS

The repetition of Jesus's invitation at 46.8–9 indicates that the prolonged discourse that follows responds to Judas's question about the relationship of domination between his seed and the rulers (46.5–7), following the brief digression on Judas's own rule. The narration of the gnostic myth begins, as other versions do, with the first principle, the invisible spirit, but it reaches its conclusion with the creation of Adam and Eve by the ruler Saklas and his angels and the subsequent limitation of the human life span by Saklas (52.14–53.7). The assignment of a limited time to human life establishes the rulers' domination of people and prompts Judas's next question. The structure of the immortal aeons that Jesus describes in this section matches the godhead that appears in the *Secret Book According to John* and uses some of the same titles, but while the *Secret Book* mixes abstract philosophical vocabulary with the language of the Jewish Bible and apocalyptic literature, *Judas* sticks to heavenly terms: clouds, aeons, angels, luminaries.

The “great and infinite aeon” (47.5–6) may be the entire spiritual realm that exists above the 360 firmaments rather than an aeon occupied only by the great invisible spirit, for the gospel uses the term “aeon” for all sorts of spaces or realms in which ruling entities exercise dominion. It seems possible that the great and infinite aeon could contain other aeons. Alternatively, other gnostic works do describe the first principle as an aeon or within an aeon (Jenott 2011, 75). For example, according to the *Secret Book*, the invisible spirit possesses an aeon: “his aeon is indestructible” (NHC II 4.10–11, NHC III 6.19). It is not clear in Irenaeus's report about “some” of the gnostics whether an “indestructible aeon” named Barbēlō exists “within a virgin spirit” or an indestructible aeon exists within a virgin spirit named Barbēlō; either way, the unnamable parent exists “within that place” (*ubi*) (*Haer.* 1.29.1). The “great and infinite aeon” may then be either the equivalent of what other gnostic works call “the entirety” (e.g., Ap. John BG 22.19–20) or a realm occupied only by the great invisible spirit.

The first principle, the great invisible spirit, is invisible, unknowable, and unnamable, a point made here much more succinctly than in the long apophatic passages of the Ap. John NHC II 2.26–4.26 and Allogenes 61.32–67.20. The latter passages resemble contemporary Platonist discussions of the first principle, most famously that in Alcinoüs's handbook *Didaskalikos* 10.3–4. Our author instead adapts for this purpose a saying that is best known from Paul's quotation of it:

But, as it is written,
“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. (1 Cor 2:9–10)

Paul must have taken the quotation from a written work (“as it written”); its source is unlikely to be Isa 52:15 or 64:4, as some have argued, but a lost noncanonical Jewish work (Berger 1978; Clivaz and Schulthess 2015). Among sources chronologically and culturally proximate to *Judas*, other variants of this saying appear in 1 Clem. 34.8 and Gos. Thom. 17. It seems that Hegesippus, who spent time in Rome in the 150s or 160s and knew *1 Clement*, criticized as “speaking falsely” (*katapseudesthai*) Christians who cited a version of this saying (Harnack 1923, 208, 231–32). Hegesippus was among the earliest Christians to denounce “heresies,” including “Valentinians, Basilidians, and Saturnilians” (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 4.22.5–6). He may attest, then, the use of the saying in Roman Christian circles related to *The Gospel of Judas*. Indeed, the version here most closely resembles that in the probably Valentinian *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*: “Bestow what angelic eyes have not [seen], what ears of rulers have not heard, what [has not] come upon the hearts of human beings who have become angels” (A.25–30). The *Prayer* probably drew directly on 1 Corinthians (rather than *Judas*), for it retains the full sequence of eye, ear, and heart, but in every case (like *Judas*) it moves the reference up the cosmic scale, so to speak, to angels, rulers, and (because 1 Cor 2:9 has “human heart”) human beings who have become angels. The theologian requests knowledge that surpasses even that of beings that exist between humanity and the true god. Our version omits the ear, does not specify a human heart, and, like the *Prayer*, makes the eye angelic. Here the shift of reference to beings higher than human beings functions only to emphasize the invisible spirit’s complete unknowability; our passage includes neither a statement that god has revealed this hidden knowledge (Paul) nor a prayer that he might do so (Pr. Paul). The reference to the lack of a name echoes Judas’s statement earlier in the gospel (35.19–21).

The two divinities that subsequently emerge complete the classic triad at the heart of the gnostic myth. A luminous cloud appears as the second divine principle and is therefore almost certainly the Barbēlō (“obviously,” Turner 2008, 196; “perhaps,” Schmid 2012a, 101; *pace* Brankaer 2017, 47 n. 57). The emergence of the self-originate from the cloud at the invisible spirit’s command confirms this identification, for in the *Secret Book* the self-originate is the Barbēlō’s “offspring,” conceived by the invisible spirit’s gaze

(NHC II 6.10–18). It is remarkable that the invisible spirit speaks to bring forth the self-originate. Gnostic works normally shroud the first principle in silence (Gos. Eg. NHC IV 50.1–29; Allogenes 61.20–22, 65.18–20) and do not attribute spoken words to it. The third- or fourth-century *Marsanes* even posits an “unknown silent one” above the invisible spirit or triple-powered one (4.19–24) and considers how the triple-powered one has “acted from silence” and “activated the silent one” (7.1–29). According to the *Secret Book*, the invisible spirit “reposes in silence” (BG 26.7–8). Therefore, that work’s long description of the invisible spirit and its attributes does not indicate that people have *gnōsis* of the parent; rather, it is “the one who existed in it,” that is, the Barbēlō, who has “said these things to us” (BG 26.11–14). The invisible spirit is later said to have “rejoiced” over the self-originate (BG 30.9–11), which may imply speech, but nothing is quoted. Valentinus and some of his followers apparently called one member of the primal duality “silence” (*sigē*) (Iren. *Haer.* 1.1.1, 1.2.4, 1.11.1). Our author is not as committed to the absolutely remote nature of the invisible spirit as are these more philosophically engaged works and thus can depict it as speaking. Likewise, how and why a second principle would emerge from a wholly sufficient first principle was a problem that preoccupied Platonizing authors of the first few centuries, and the *Secret Book* offers three metaphors for this evolution: an intellect that thinks itself, an eye that sees itself, and a spring of water that overflows (NHC II 4.15–5.5; Layton 2021, 15). Characteristically, our gospel does not address this question; instead, the luminous cloud simply appeared (*as-ouōnh ebol*) (47.14–15), just as in the *Secret Book* the Barbēlō is said to have appeared (*as-ouōnh ebol*) (NHC II 5.4).

In contrast, the self-originate emerges from the luminous cloud when the invisible spirit calls for it to do so. As Muehlberger (2011, 314–15) has observed of other gnostic works, the term “self-originate” (*autogenēs*) functions as “a title, rather than a description,” for this immortal “is not, in any meaningful way, something self-originate.” The coming forth of the self-originate, “the god of light” (cf. Ap. John NHC II 6.20), finalizes a set of three core immortals: invisible spirit, Barbēlō/luminous cloud, and self-originate. Versions of such a triad appear in other gnostic works—the *Secret Book* (the same three), *First Thought in Three Forms* (invisible spirit, Barbēlō, the anointed), the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (father, mother, son), and *Foreigner* (invisible spirit, Barbēlō, thrice-male child)—and testimonia, such as Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29.1 (virgin spirit, Barbēlōth, the

anointed), and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26.10.4 (parent, Barbēlō, the anointed). Most of these other gnostic works use family language (father, mother, son) for this triad, even if that is not their primary terminology for the characters, and/or the imagery of conception and birth for the generation of the self-originate (M. Williams 1988, 16–17; Turner 2001, 209–14). *Judas* lacks such language, and thus the femininity or androgyny of the second principle (Barbēlō) plays no role (Jenott, 2011, 78–80). Rather than construing this difference as an indication that our gospel’s account is “a late and confused product” (Turner 2009, 101), Jenott (2011, 79) suggests that the author may have “advocated a form of patriarchal theology.” It is possible too that the author was not aware of the gendered and sexualized model of divine emanation. In general, such models provide intelligible explanations or analogies for mysterious divine processes; our author shows little interest in such explanations.

The appearance of four angels for “attendance (*parastasis*) of the angelic self-originate” also parallels structural elements in the *Secret Book* and Irenaeus’s account of the gnostics (Burns 2018, 142–46). In the *Secret Book* four luminaries (Harmozēl, Ōroiaēl, Daueithai, and Ēlēlēth) appear and “stand before” the self-originate; so too according to Irenaeus, but his first three names differ (Harmogenēs, Raguēl, David) (*Haer.* 1.29.2). In the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* the four luminaries and their consorts comprise “the first octet of the divine self-originate” (NHC IV 63.8–64.10); *Zōstrianos* speaks of “four perfect self-originate aeons” (18.13–15) and provides the standard names (29.1–12). The term “angel” appears in other gnostic works referring to all four of the attendants or just one of them (Jenott 2011, 77, citing Iren. *Haer.* 1.29.4; Ap. John NHC II 8.6, NHC III 12.1, NHC IV 12.15, BG 33.9–10; Nat. Rulers 93.8–9), while *Melchizedek* assigns them the angelic-sounding titles “commander” (*stratēgos*) and “commander-in-chief” (*archistratēgos*) (6.2–5, 17.10–19). In *Judas* the quartet does not have names; it seems very likely that Ēlēlēth appears later, but apparently not as one of the self-originate’s four attendants. The origin of the angels in “another cloud” is curious. What is this other cloud, and how did it originate? Is there a source for it other than the invisible spirit? Or was its origination from the invisible spirit simply not narrated? Once again our author is either unaware of or unconcerned about the questions of consistency that “another cloud” raises. The different cloud may serve solely to indicate that the four angels have an origin different from that of the self-

originate and thus that they possess a lower ontological status (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 130).

The relationships between the self-originate and the invisible spirit and between the four angels and the self-originate are described as “attendance” (*parastasis*) or “standing before.” The self-originate comes forth when the invisible spirit calls for an angel to “come into being for my attendance,” and the four angels “came into being for the attendance of the angelic self-originate.” *Parastasis* (“attendance”) and its Coptic equivalent *aherat-* (“stand before, attend”) are gnostic technical terms to describe a disposition of both stability in one’s own being and respect for and subordination to a higher being. (For the equivalence of the Greek and Coptic terms, see, e.g., Ap. John BG 32.6–7, NHC II 7.18, NHC IV 11.13 in comparison to NHC III 11.5.) As in our work, the *Secret Book* describes the self-originate standing in attendance before the invisible spirit (NHC II 6.26–27) and the four luminaries doing so before the self-originate (NHC II 7.34–8.1). Despite differences in terminology for divine beings, the *Secret Book* and *Judas* share a structure among those divine beings.

That shared structure continues in the following sentence. Identified as “the god of light,” the self-originate brings into being aeons described as “luminous aeons” or “aeons of light,” each of which has a luminary to rule it and myriads of angels for its service. The creation of the first two aeons is described: in each case the self-originate says, “Let a luminous aeon come into being”; what it speaks happens; it establishes a luminary to rule the aeon; and the angelic myriads come into being for service. The summary statement explains that the self-originate created “the rest of the aeons of light” in the same way, with a ruler and angelic myriads for their service. There are almost certainly twelve, for there appear to be references at 49.7 to “the twelve [luminaries]” and at 49.18–20 to “the twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries.” This scheme too resembles the structure of the divine realm in the *Secret Book*, where the invisible spirit establishes the self-originate, described as “a luminous spark” and “the light” (NHC II 6.13, 18), as “true god over the entirety” (NHC II 7.22–24). As we have seen, the four luminaries then appear in the *Secret Book*, but they serve as a framework, so to speak, for a set of “twelve aeons” that “belong to the offspring of the self-originate”; in this way “the entirety became strong through the self-originate” (NHC II 8.25–28). In both cases the self-originate functions as the “god” of a structure of four plus twelve, within which “luminaries” preside. Our work has four attending angels, plus twelve luminaries that rule twelve

aeons, while the *Secret Book* has four attending luminaries that are “established over” twelve aeons (NHC II 8.9–10, 13–14, 17).

The structural resemblance between *The Gospel of Judas*’s and the *Secret Book According to John*’s depictions of the core of the divine realm is remarkable: a divine triad of invisible spirit, Barbēlō, and self-originate, the third of which serves as god for a set of four and twelve aeons. On the other hand, the *Secret Book*’s account is more elaborate: it contains more names, uses diverse metaphors of sight and sexuality to explain divine emanation, and has multiple aeons within individual aeons (such as the Barbēlō’s additional four aeons with, it seems, their own consorts). Our gospel’s terminology is limited, with fewer names, aeons, and metaphors for the processes it describes; it uses the language of the sky: clouds, angels, light. Ruling and service characterize its aeons. A historian who seeks to place these two accounts along a trajectory of development may conclude that the author of *Judas* presents a late and fragmentary version of a mythology that he does not really understand (Schenke Robinson 2009a; Turner 2009) or that he presents the myth “in a fairly simple and unadorned fashion that may suggest a rather early stage of development” (Meyer 2009, 60). The latter seems more probable, but rather than reconstructing a development from *The Gospel of Judas* to the *Secret Book* (or the reverse), both of which come from the middle of the second century, we might do better to characterize their differences in terms of the different idioms in which they articulate their versions of the myth. The author of the *Secret Book* engaged with philosophical traditions and seeks to integrate Plato’s *Timaeus*, Genesis, and Jewish wisdom traditions into a new account of god and the cosmos (King 2006), while the author of *Judas* looked to heavenly lore and Jewish apocalyptic literature (Scopello 2010; Cazalais 2016) and made little effort to offer philosophical rationalizations or to ground his account in the details of Genesis (Introduction IV.A).

Adamas, the Incorruptible Race of Seth, and Their Luminaries and Heavens (48.21–49.24)

48 ²¹“And Adamas existed in the first cloud of light, which no angel has been able to see among all those called ‘divine.’ 49 ¹And [. . .] that [. . .] the image [. . .] and according to the likeness of [this] angel. ⁵And he revealed the incorruptible [race] of Seth to the twelve [luminaries . . .] ⁹By

the will of the spirit, he revealed seventy-two luminaries among the incorruptible race.¹² And by the will of the spirit, the seventy-two luminaries for their part revealed 360 luminaries among the incorruptible race,¹⁶ so that their number is five for each.¹⁸ And their parent is the twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries,²⁰ and for each aeon (there are) six heavens, so that there are seventy-two heavens for the seventy-two luminaries.

NOTES

48.23–24. *which no angel has been able to see.* This clause (*mpe-s-laoue n-aggelos nau ero-s*) contains the curious construction *mpe-s-laoue* that appears also at 47.6–8 (Note, *the extent of which no angelic race has been able to see*). As in that passage my translation follows the suggestion of Kasser (2007, 70) and Funk that the sigma is the equivalent of š- (“be able to, can”). Nagel (2014, 294) proposes that in the earlier passage the sigma anticipates the feminine subject *genea*; without such a feminine subject here, he proposes emending the text to add it: *mpes-laoue <n-genea> n-aggelos nau ero-s*. The need to emend the text argues against the hypothesis of Nagel and in favor of that of Kasser and Funk.

48.25–26. *among all those called ‘divine.’* It is not certain what this clause modifies. The sentence could mean that no angel has been able to see, among all those (clouds) called “divine,” the first cloud of light (e.g., Jenott 2011, 167) or that no angel among all those (angels) called “divine” has been able to see the first cloud of light (so Brankaer and van Os 2019, 192–93, although they appear to think mistakenly that it is Adamas that the angels cannot see; the feminine pronoun *tai* and personal suffix [*ero-s*] make clear that it is the cloud, however). I incline toward the second option because the work elsewhere uses the term “divine” or “god” (*noute*) for personal agents rather than aeons or clouds. The correct interpretation is by no means certain, however, and I seek in my translation to reflect the ambiguity.

49.1–5. *And [. . .] that [. . .] the image [. . .] and according to the likeness of [this] angel.* The large lacunae in the first three lines of page 49 are impossible to restore, and they prevent identification of the referent of “[this] angel.” Possibly the sentence refers to the emergence of Seth or the race of Seth, which he (Adamas?) is said to reveal in the next sentence.

49.5–8. *And he revealed the incorruptible [race] of Seth to the twelve [luminaries . . .].* Although only the feminine singular definite article (*t-*) survives, the restoration of *genea* (“race”) in line 5 is certain based on the

parallels in 49.10–11, 14–15. The restoration of *ph[ōstēr]* in line 7 seems nearly certain because of the preceding discussion of the luminaries that preside over the aeons of light. Scholars have differed sharply on how to read the virtually illegible line 8. Some, beginning with the original editors, have seen letters that spell *n-čout[a]fte* (“twenty-four”) (Kasser et al. 2007, 217; Devoti 2012, 220; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 96). In that case, “twenty-four” would have to refer to what follows in the rest of the line: Schenke Robinson (2008, 93) suggests “angels.” Jenott (2011, 86–87), however, construes the letter traces as spelling *n-hoout[shi]me* (“androgynous”), which would modify the reconstructed *phōstēr*: “the twelve androgynous luminaries” (so too Bermejo Rubio 2012, 134). Neither reading is particularly compelling: the number twenty-four does not play a role elsewhere in the work, nor does androgyny (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 194). The latter could be, as Jenott (2011, 87–89) suggests, “nothing more than a vestige of the author’s sources,” and androgyny does appear in *Eugnōstos the Blessed*, which *Judas* closely parallels (COMMENTS). Nagel (2014, 294) leaves the line unreconstructed, which is the most prudent course.

49.18–20. *And their parent is the twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries.* “Their parent” (*peueiōt*) might also be translated “their source”; possibly the Greek was *genetōr* (“begetter”); cf. *Eugnōstos* NHC III 84.14 (COMMENTS). Nagel (2007, 252 n. 114) suggests that the word order has been disturbed and proposes moving *peueiōt pe* to after *m-phōstēr*, so that the sentence reads, “And as for the twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries, he is their father”; “he” would refer to the self-originate. This hypothesis would avoid the problem of the singular *peueiōt* referring to the twelve aeons; on the other hand, a more capacious understanding of *eiōt* as “source” or “begetter” can make sense of the sentence as it stands, and it is not clear why the narration would return at this point to the self-originate as the origin of the twelve luminous aeons.

COMMENTS

This passage expands the core structure of the divine realm by introducing divine archetypes of human figures—Adamas and the race of Seth, and possibly Seth (if he appears in one of the lacunae at 49.1–3)—as well as additional luminaries and (as a new feature) heavens. It prepares for the transition to the corruptible cosmos: Adamas and the race of Seth anticipate

their mortal counterparts, and the seventy-two heavens form a zone between the “great and infinite aeon” (47.5–6) and the 360 firmaments that constitute the uppermost region of the lower realm.

It is a distinctive gnostic teaching that immortal archetypes of Adam, Seth, and other human beings exist in the eternal realm. In the *Secret Book According to John*, for example, the archetypes Geradamas, Seth, “the seed (*sperma*) of Seth,” and the souls of those who lacked acquaintance and then repented dwell in the eternal realms associated with the four luminaries that attend the self-originate (NHC II 8.28–9.24). Possibly “the seed of Seth” in Daeithai refers to the primeval descendants of Seth in Genesis, while the repentant souls in Ēlēlēth are later gnostics. The *Secret Book* identifies the Geradamas, the archetype of Adam, as “the perfect (*teleios*) human being” and places him “upon the first aeon,” that of Harmozēl (NHC II 8.32–9.3). The *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* features a similar arrangement (NHC III 65.12–22) and devotes considerable attention to the production of Adamas, who is “the incorruptible human being,” and his son the great Seth, who is “parent of the immovable and incorruptible race” (NHC IV 60.30–63.17). The saved among earthly human beings are embodied representations of these archetypes; their own divine status derives from their participation in their immortal originals. In the language of *Judas*, the saved can “bring forward the perfect human being” (35.3–4). In the surviving fragments of our gospel only Adamas and the incorruptible race of Seth appear, but it is possible that Seth is mentioned in the lost portions of 49.1–3. Our work lacks the fourth group of “souls” found in both the *Secret Book* and the *Holy Book*; unlike those works it does not distinguish between the primeval descendants of Seth and the more recent and contemporary “souls” of the saved, just as it lacks any narrative of the primeval era (e.g., the birth of Seth, the flood) subsequent to the creation of Adam and Eve.

Other questions arise concerning these archetypes, due to both the fragmentary character of the manuscript and the gospel’s characteristic brevity. What is “the first cloud of light” in which Adamas exists? The possibilities are either the “luminous cloud” that appears at 47.14–16 (likely the Barbēlō) (so Bermejo Rubio 2012, 132; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 192) or the first of the twelve “aeons of light” that the self-originate brings into being (47.26–48.9). In favor of the former are the use of the term “cloud” and its description as not visible to angels. Innumerable myriads of angels, on the other hand, serve the first aeon of light. Nonetheless, arguing in favor of the first aeon of light as Adamas’s dwelling place is the use of the term

“first,” suggesting one cloud of several in a series; also, after the self-originate emerges from the original luminous cloud, the structure of twelve aeons of light over which the self-originate presides as god becomes the focus. It is to the twelve luminaries, for instance, that the incorruptible race of Seth is revealed (49.5–8). Later, “the place where the first human being [i.e., Adamas] appeared with his incorruptible powers” is identified as “the parent and the seventy-two luminaries that are with the self-originate and its seventy-two aeons” (50.14–21), which does not seem to include the luminous cloud that is the Barbēlō. Comparison with other gnostic works also supports Adamas’s position in the first of the twelve aeons of light, which would correspond more closely to the placement of the Geradamas in “the first aeon,” at the luminary Harmozēl, among the twelve aeons of the self-originate in the *Secret Book* (NHC II 8.32–9.3; cf. Gos. Eg. NHC III 65.12–22). The emergence of Adamas in the *Holy Book* from “the great cloud of light,” that is, “the mother of the holy incorruptible beings of the great powers” (NHC IV 60.30–61.8), has been adduced in support of the luminous cloud from which the self-originate derived on the assumption that the *Holy Book*’s great cloud of light is also the Barbēlō (Devoti 2012, 324), but it is not the Barbēlō, rather the Moirothea. In sum, I incline to the first of the twelve aeons of light as the location of Adamas.

Who or what exists “according to the likeness of this angel”? And who is “this angel”? The first question probably cannot be answered; possibly it refers to the missing Seth. “This angel” may be the self-originate, which the author called “a great angel” (47.19–20) (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 353). On the other hand, the author uses the term “angel” for any being above human beings, and thus it could refer to Adamas; possibly Seth exists according to the likeness of his father, Adamas.

Finally, who “revealed” the incorruptible race of Seth to the twelve luminaries and, by the will of the spirit, the seventy-two luminaries among the incorruptible race? Once again the self-originate and Adamas are the likely candidates. Although as “the god of light” that brought the twelve luminaries into being, the self-originate seems probable, Adamas is certainly possible. In the *Holy Book*, which our work now begins to parallel in significant ways, Adamas takes the initiative in producing the four luminaries and the great Seth by making a request for them (NHC III 50.17–51.14). Therefore, it is possible that Adamas plays a role more active than simply existing as an archetype. However one answers these questions, the

immortals Adamas and the incorruptible race of Seth (and possibly Seth) anticipate their earthly counterparts and thus the gnostics themselves.

Likewise, the ensuing seventy-two luminaries and heavens and 360 luminaries provide a transition from the eternal realm's core of the twelve luminous aeons to the 360 firmaments that mark the highest level of the cosmos. Commentators have recognized that this section of Jesus's discourse (49.5–50.11) closely parallels sections of *Eugnōstos the Blessed*, preserved in NHC III and V (e.g., Gathercole 2007, 94–95; Turner 2009, 110–11; Jenott 2011, 88–93).

Gospel of Judas 49.5–50.11

Eugnōstos the Blessed (*NHC III*) (*Pasquier 2000*)
83.10–85.3, 88.17–89.10

⁵And he (Adamas?) revealed the incorruptible [race] of Seth to *the twelve* [luminaries . . .] ⁹By *the will* of the spirit,

83.10–85.3 ¹⁰Then *the twelve* powers that I previously mentioned consented with one another, ¹³and the males appeared, six by six, (and)

he revealed *seventy-two* luminaries among the incorruptible race.

the females, six by six, ¹⁴so that there are *seventy-two* powers. ¹⁵As for the *seventy-two*, *each one* revealed *five* spiritual ones, that is, the 360 powers. ¹⁹The union of them all is *the will*.

¹²And by *the will* of the spirit, the *seventy-two* luminaries for their part revealed 360 luminaries among the incorruptible race,

¹⁶so that their number is *five* for *each*.

¹⁸And *their parent* is the *twelve aeons* of the *twelve* luminaries,

²⁰and for *each aeon* (there are) *six heavens*, so that there are *seventy-two heavens* for the *seventy-two* luminaries. ²⁵“And for *each 50* [of them (the *seventy-two* heavens)] (there are) [*five*]

firmaments, ²[so that there are] 360 [*firmaments*].

²⁰Therefore, our aeon became a type for the immortal human being;

²²time became a type for the first begetter, 84 his son; ¹[the year]

became a type for the [savior; ²the] *twelve* months became types for the *twelve* powers; ⁴the 360 days of the year became types for the 360

powers that became manifest from the savior; ⁸their hours and minutes became types for the *angels without number* that came into being from them (the powers). ¹²After the ones that I have mentioned appeared, the

begetter of all, *their parent*, created for them, ¹⁴first, *twelve aeons* for

service with *the twelve* angels. ¹⁷And in all *the aeons* there were six

(*heavens*) in *each one* of them, ¹⁹so that there are *seventy-two heavens* o

the seventy-two powers that appeared in him. ²²And in all the heavens

there were *five firmaments*, ²⁴so that there are 360 85 [*firmaments*] of the 360 powers that appeared in them.

³[They] were given authority and a [. . .] *angelic army without number for glory and [service],* ⁷while [also] *virgin [spirits] for glory and service* (were given) to all *the aeons and the heavens and their firmaments.*

88.17–89.10 ¹⁷Some, in dwelling places and chariots, in effable glories, which cannot be spoken in any nature, ²¹provided for themselves *angelic armies, myriads without number, for service 89 and glory,* ¹even luminous ineffable *virgin spirits.* ³They have neither sickness nor weakness, but it is only *will:* ⁵it happens immediately. ⁶In this way *the aeons* were completed, ⁷*with their heavens and the firmaments,* to the glory of the immortal human being and wisdom, his consort.

There can be no doubt that a literary relationship exists between the two works. They share the same overall numerical scheme ($12 \times 6 = 72$, $72 \times 5 = 360$) and specific patterns (twelve of/for twelve, seventy-two of/for seventy-two) and significant vocabulary: “the will,” “aeons,” “their parent (*peueiōt*),” “heavens,” “firmaments,” “angelic army(ies),” “without number,” “for glory and service,” “virgin spirits.” On the other hand, our gospel speaks of “luminaries” rather than “powers,” and the relevant passage is brief and continuous, while in *Eugnōstos* the parallel passage is interrupted by a short section that nevertheless contains elements that parallel *Judas* (83.20–84.11) and another significantly longer section (85.3–88.17), not reproduced above, that lacks such parallel elements. It is unlikely that the author of our gospel drew from disparate passages of *Eugnōstos* and condensed them; it is possible that the author of *Eugnōstos* borrowed from and expanded on our gospel; most likely is that both used a common source, to which our work is closer.

Comparison of the two works shows that *Eugnōstos* explains and rationalizes the numbers and processes that it describes in a way that *Judas*, characteristically, does not. For example, gender and sexuality characterize the relationships among the divine beings in *Eugnōstos*: the seventy-two powers include equal numbers of males and females, for the twelve powers from which they derive are described also as “six androgynous spiritual beings” (82.9–10); the “parent” or “father” is clearly a “begetter” (84.14); “virgin spirits” provide glory and service (89.1–2); although the 360 firmaments are “perfect and good,” nonetheless “the deficiency of femininity appeared” (85.6–9). With the exception of the “parent” or “source” and the “virgin spirits for glory and service” (Gos. Jud. 50.7–9), our gospel lacks this gendered imagery. Jenott (2011, 86–87) has proposed restoring “the twelve androgynous luminaries” at 49.7–8, in part on the basis of the parallel with *Eugnōstos* (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 134–35). Possibly the common source

included gender, which *Judas* has mostly eliminated, or possibly only “virgin spirits” goes back to the original, and *Eugnōstos* has added gender.

Similarly, *Eugnōstos* makes explicit that the number scheme is calendrical and represents immortals in the higher realm: our entire cosmos corresponds to the highest god (“the immortal human being”), time to his son (the first begetter), the twelve months to the twelve powers, the 320 days of the year to the 360 powers, hours and minutes to the innumerable angels (83.20–84.11). It does not explain the seventy-two powers, but Lewis (2009, 295) persuasively argues that they refer to a Babylonian lunar-oriented model of seventy-two five-day weeks of the year; Jenott (2011, 90) adduces a possibly second-century CE papyrus roll (P. Oxy. III 465) that shows continuing knowledge of this archaic notion. Although it is possible that the gospel has suppressed or chosen to omit the explicit connection of the numerology to the calendar (cf. Jenott 2011, 90–91), the absence of the explanation of seventy-two in *Eugnōstos* suggests that these correspondences were not present in the hypothetical earlier source. The author of *Eugnōstos* probably added them and did not know what to make of seventy-two. The logic of the number scheme in the original source was calendrical but was not made explicit in that source.

Although, unlike *Eugnōstos*, our work does not make explicit the calendrical basis for the pattern of twelve, seventy-two, and 360, it seems likely that it was that basis which commended it to our author. His narration of the gnostic myth climaxes with Saklas’s limitation of the human life span: “Your life is going to be measured by time, along with your children” (53.6–7). “Times have been assigned to” Saklas as well (54.19–21). The incipit demonstrates the author’s strong if imprecise interest in chronology (33.1–6). The lower realm is where the sun and moon, even the day, “rule,” but in the eternal realm the holy ones “stand at rest always” (45.17–23). The transition from twelve luminous aeons (months) to seventy-two luminaries (weeks) to 360 firmaments (days) marks a transition from the timeless eternal realm to this cosmos, in which times are measured out and assigned. Although this transition can be characterized accurately as “cosmological decay” or “gradually deteriorating reality” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 195), the repetition of the phrase “by the will of the spirit” indicates that it takes place under the providential guidance of the invisible spirit (Bermejo Rubio 2012, 135). Chaos and Hades may already exist; the invisible spirit directs a process that erects a buffer between them and the divine realm or perhaps that moves chaos down and away from that realm.

The 360 Firmaments and the Corruptible World (49.25–51.3)

49²⁵ “And for each 50 [of them (the seventy-two heavens)] (there are) [five] firmaments, ²[so that there are] 360 [firmaments.] ³[They] were given authority and a [. . .] angelic army without number for glory and [service], ⁷while [also] virgin [spirits] for glory and service (were given) to all the aeons and the heavens and their firmaments.

¹¹“The multitude of those immortals are called ‘world,’ ¹³that is, ‘corruption,’ by the parent and the seventy-two luminaries that are with the self-originate and its seventy-two aeons, ¹⁸the place where the first human being appeared with his incorruptible powers. ²²And the aeon that appeared with his race, ²³in which there are the cloud of knowledge and the angel that is called 51 Ēl[ēlēth . . .]

NOTES

49.25–50.3. *And for each [of them (the seventy-two heavens)] (there are) [five] firmaments, [so that there are] 360 [firmaments.]* Although the first three lines of page 50 are very fragmentary, they can be reconstructed with near certainty on the basis of the patterns of repetition on pages 49–50.

50.3–7. *[They] were given authority and a [. . .] angelic army without number for glory and [service].* The first part of the lacuna on line 3 must be restored with *n-stereōma* (“firmaments”) to complete the previous sentence. The next sentence is probably a dynamic passive. The final portion of the lacuna on line 3 almost certainly should be restored [*nto*]ou, that is, “they”: “they were given.” The most probable restoration of the lacuna at the beginning of line 4 would then be [*na-u n-ou*]exousia, that is, “to them” with the direct object marker and the singular indefinite article: “They were given authority” (Nagel 2014, 294). Restoration of the lacuna (and thus what else the firmaments were given) at the beginning of line 5 is less certain. Most editors accept van der Vliet’s (2006, 146) suggestion of *oumnt-[hah n-]stratia n-aggelos* (“a multitude of angelic armies”) rather than the original editors’ proposal of *oumnt-[noq n-]stratia n-aggelos* (presumably “a great angelic army”) (Kasser et al. 2007, 219). Although *mnt-hah* is rare, *mnt-noq* tends to mean “greatness” rather than “great” (Crum 1939, 742a, 251a); therefore, van der Vliet’s suggestion is more persuasive.

50.18–21. *the place where the first human being appeared with his incorruptible powers.* Most translators make this an independent sentence:

“This is the place where the first human being appeared with his incorruptible powers” (e.g., Jenott 2011, 171; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 99). They construe *nt-af-ouōnh ebol* as the focalizing conversion with *pma* in extraposition: “As for the place, the first human being appeared in it (from it?) with his incorruptible powers.” My translation understands *nt-af-ouōnh ebol* to be a relative conversion (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 137). In either case the meaning is the same: “the parent and the seventy-two luminaries that are with the self-originate and its seventy-two aeons” constitute “the place where the first human being appeared with his incorruptible powers.”

50.22–23. *And the aeon that appeared with his race.* My translation, along with most others, takes *paiōn de nt-af-ouōnh ebol mn-tefgenea* to be a new sentence about an aeon distinct from (but possibly contained within) the place of the previous lines; cf. Nagel 2014, 297: “Der Äon aber, der erschienen ist mit seinem Geschlecht.” Jenott (2011, 171), however, understands it to be the same entity: “It is the realm that appeared with its race.” This alternative is possible if one interprets *de* as functioning in an explanatory manner similar to the *de* at 40.23 (Note on 40.22–26, *that is, the deacon of error . . .*).

50.25–26. *and the angel that is called.* The clause *e-šau-moute ero-f čē-* is ambiguous. It could be in focalizing conversion and function as the main clause: “And the aeon that appeared with his race, in which there are the cloud of acquaintance and the angel, is called . . .” (e.g., Nagel 2014, 297). My translation, along with most others, understands it to be a relative conversion modifying “the angel,” for angels are more likely to have names than are aeons, which seem not to function as acting individuals in *Judas* (Introduction IV.A). On the other hand, unless one does not understand the *de* in line 22 as introducing a new sentence (Note on 50.22–23, *And the aeon that appeared with his race*), this interpretation leaves a sentence fragment and requires that the sentence continue onto the top of page 51, where the lacuna would have to include a main verb. The translation must remain uncertain.

51.1. *Ēl[ēlēth.* This restoration (van der Vliet 2006, 146–47) is very likely but not certain. A blank space after *ēl* and before the lacuna has suggested to some that the name is simply *Ēl*, but blank spaces follow the first two letters in each of the first seven lines of the page because of a defect in the manuscript and thus do not indicate word breaks. The close parallel between the passage that follows this (51.4–52.14) and Gos. Eg. NHC III 56.22–

58.22, in which Ēlēlēth plays the leading role (cf. Three Forms 39.13–28), provides strong support for the restoration.

COMMENTS

The appearance of 360 firmaments completes the transition from the beings called “divine” to those called “corruption,” that is, from the eternal realm to this cosmos. The firmaments, whose number corresponds to the days in a year, are ontologically ambiguous. On the one hand, they are immortals that possess their own authority and receive service from virgin spirits and innumerable angels. On the other hand, they are called “world” (*kosmos*) and “corruption” (*phthora*) by the divine beings that are superior to them. As Jenott (2011, 92) has argued, philosophers indebted to Stoicism could call this cosmos both immortal and corruptible, for it is both eternal and subject to “natural decay and periodic dissolution.” Philo attributed this view to the Stoics (*Aet.* 9). According to *Eugnōstos the Blessed*, which drew from a source also used by the author of *Judas*, the 360 heavens are “perfect and good,” and yet in or near them “the deficiency of femininity appeared” (85.6–9).

The firmaments most likely constitute the highest potentially visible sector of this cosmos. Their placement and function may be compared to the 365 heavens in the system that Irenaeus attributes to Basilides of Alexandria, who was active in the 130s and earlier (*Haer.* 1.24.3–4). According to that account, Basilides posited an “unengendered parent,” from which derive five divine beings: intellect, word, prudence, wisdom, and power. From power, the last of these five beings, came authorities, rulers, and angels, who generated 365 heavens, corresponding to the number of days in a year. The lowest heaven is visible to human beings, and the angels resident in it, whose leader is the god of the Jews, directly manage affairs on earth. Like Basilides’s 365 heavens, created and populated by angels and rulers, our gospel’s 360 firmaments, served by angels and virgin spirits, have a divine origin but a diminished ontological status that places them at the lowest level of the divine realm and at the highest level of this world. In contrast to Basilides, however, our gospel uses the term “firmament” (*stereōma*), derived from Gen 1:6–8, where “firmament” is equated with “heaven” (*ouranos*) (1:8). Philo had earlier identified the firmament as marking the transition from “the incorporeal cosmos” to “the sense-perceptible cosmos”; it is “the boundary of all things” and “first of the visible things” (*Opif.* 36–

37). Our gospel resembles Philo in this respect, but, like Basilides, it multiplies the number of firmaments to 360, significantly enlarging the distance between the two realms of existence.

Those who name the firmaments “world” (*kosmos*) and “corruption” (*phthora*) are the collection of divine beings (“the parent and the seventy-two luminaries that are with the self-originate and its seventy-two aeons”) that constitute the realm that transcends this one (“the place where the first human being appeared with his incorruptible powers”). “The parent” should be identified as “the twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries” (49.18–20), and “the seventy-two luminaries that are with the self-originate and its seventy-two aeons” as the “seventy-two heavens for the seventy-two luminaries” (49.22–24). Together these terms refer to the entire divine realm over which the self-originate is “god of light” and in which Adamas (“the first human being”) resides with the incorruptible race of Seth (“his incorruptible powers”). Despite the multiplication of terminology, one can discern a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the purely “divine” realm of the self-originate, the twelve luminous aeons, and the seventy-two heavens and, on the other, the “immortal” but corruptible realm of the 360 firmaments. The invisible spirit and the Barbēlō (“luminous cloud”) exist above either of these zones.

A new aeon begins a seemingly incomplete sentence at 50.22, and it is not immediately clear how it relates to these zones. The aeon “appeared with his race,” that is, with the race belonging to “the first human being,” Adamas. The holy race can be attributed to Adam(as)—“the great race of Adam” (57.11–12)—as well as to Seth. Presumably the aeon appeared when Adamas (or the self-originate) “revealed the incorruptible [race] of Seth to the twelve [luminaries . . .]” (49.5–8). Within this new aeon lies the cloud of knowledge (*gnōsis*) and the angel probably named Ēlēlēth. The parallel with the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (COMMENTS 51.3–52.14) invites comparison of the cloud of knowledge with the cloud that appears in that work when Ēlēlēth calls for something to rule over chaos and Hades and that possibly is named “material wisdom” (*hulikē sophia*) (Gos. Eg. NHC III 56.26–57.1) (Jenott 2011, 210). The only other occurrence of the noun *gnōsis* in our work is when god causes it to be brought to “Adam and those with him” (54.8–10), an action similar to forethought’s sending of wisdom as afterthought to Adam in Ap. John NHC II 20.9–28. That is, here “knowledge” seems to play a role similar to “wisdom” in other gnostic works, as divinely bestowed assistance that enables human beings to gain

liberation from the rulers' dominance. It functions in opposition to "the corruptible wisdom" that the lower rulers sow in this realm (44.2–7). Although some scholars interpret the absence of (higher) wisdom as a purposeful omission or substitution by the author (Jenott 2011, 98; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 138), it is equally possible that the author does not know the role that wisdom plays in other works.

In any event, when the incorruptible race came into being, so too did the potential of having *gnōsis* of the divine, as well as the angel that will evoke the ruling hierarchy of the lower realm in which the earthly incarnation of the incorruptible race will dwell. On the one hand, the rulers that Ēlēlēth calls into being will rebel and exercise a negative domination over human beings; on the other hand, existing alongside that angel is the *gnōsis* that will make deliverance from that domination possible. Jesus's description of the upper realm concludes with this anticipation of the lower rulers and the creation and salvation of human beings. Unfortunately, the lacunae at the top of page 51 prevent us from fully understanding the nature of that anticipation, but the gospel continues to emphasize that the lower world comes into being through the divine will, rather than in opposition to it (Pagels and King 2007, 151).

Nebrō, Saklas, and Their Rulers and Angels (51.3–52.14)

51 ³ "Afterwards [Ēlēlēth] said, 'Let twelve angels come into being [and rule] over chaos and [Hades].'⁸ And lo, from the cloud appeared an angel whose face poured forth fire and whose likeness was defiled with blood.¹² He has [the] name Nebrō, which has been interpreted as 'apostate,' but others call him Ialdabaōth.¹⁶ And another angel came forth from the cloud as well: Saklas.¹⁷ Nebrō created six angels—and (so did) Saklas—for attendance,²⁰ and these produced twelve angels in the heavens, and each one received a portion in the heavens.

²³"And the twelve rulers spoke with the twelve angels:²⁶ "Let each one of you 52 [. . .]'¹ and they [. . .] race [. . . five] angels:

⁴The first is [. . .]th, the one whom they call the anointed.

⁶The [second] is Harmathōth, who is [the eye of fire].

⁸The third is Galila.

⁹The fourth is Iōbēl.

¹⁰The fifth [is] Adōnaios.

¹¹These are the five that ruled over Hades and the first over chaos.

NOTES

51.4. [*Ēlēlēth*] *said*. The restoration is virtually certain because of the survival of *ēl* [. . .] on line 1 and the close parallel to the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (COMMENTS). Nonetheless, its length would require that the scribe wrote smaller to get more letters into the end of the line—something he does elsewhere (Jenott 2011, 172).

51.10–11. *whose face poured forth fire and whose likeness was defiled with blood*. These clauses, coordinated by *de*, are in circumstantial conversion of nondurative conjugations; because “an angel” is indefinite, they function as relative clauses modifying it.

51.12–13. *He has [the] name, Nebrō*. This clause is also in circumstantial conversion and probably also functions as a relative clause modifying “an angel” (“which has the name Nebrō”). I have made it an independent clause only for better style in English.

51.19. *and (so did) Saklas*. The phrase *auō saklas* is simply inserted before “for attendance.” Because Saklas has already emerged from the cloud, and because the name “Saklas” lacks a direct object marker, it is unlikely that Nebrō created both six angels and Saklas. The angels that are said to be created in this sentence subsequently themselves create “twelve angels in the heavens”; then “the twelve rulers” speak to “the twelve angels.” The twelve rulers must be the “angels” created in this sentence, and thus Nebrō and Saklas created six each; otherwise, the origin of the twelve rulers would be unexplained (Jenott 2011, 211–12).

51.26–52.4. *Let each one of you [. . .] and they [. . .] race [. . . five] angels*. Thanks to the list of five angels that follows, *tiou n-* (“five”) can confidently be restored before *aggelos* in 52.4. The first three lines on page 52 cannot be reconstructed, however. The reconstruction of [. . . *ge*]nea (“race”) at the end of line 2 is probable, and it is likely in the plural. The parallel with the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* makes it possible to speculate on the general content of these lines (COMMENTS).

52.5–6. [. . .]*th*. Scholars disagree about what name to restore in the lacuna. Most have seen the letters eta and theta immediately following the lacuna, while Jenott (2011, 212) argues that omega and theta are possible. The name, therefore, must end in either *-ēth* or *-ōth*; otherwise, any

reconstruction is hypothetical and depends on interpretation of the relationship between *Judas's* list and the parallel lists in the *Secret Book According to John* and the *Holy Book*.

the one whom they call. Presumably because the articulated attributive clause *p-ete-šau-mou[te e]ro-f* does not specify a subject, translators have unanimously interpreted it as the dynamic passive (“who is called”). The parallels at Ap. John NHC II 10.29 and Gos. Eg. NHC III 58.9–10 suggest, however, that the meaning is active. The third-person plural subject could refer either to “the twelve rulers” who have spoken just a few lines earlier (51.23–52.1) and who may appear in the conjunctive *nse-* at 52.1 or to the restored *genea* at 52.2 if it is plural. Because “the races” is the subject of “call” in both parallels, the latter is more likely.

the anointed. The reading *pekh(risto)s* (“the anointed”) or *pekh(rēsto)s* (“the kind”), written as a *nomen sacrum*, appears certain. Some have argued that the text is corrupt and should be emended; if not, it remains to be determined what it might mean to call one of these angels the anointed (christ) or the kind. These problems receive discussion below.

52.7–8. *Harmathōth, who is [the eye of fire].* Editors agree on restoring “the eye of fire,” which would conform to the parallel lists in the *Secret Book* and the *Holy Book*. They differ, however, on how much of the required text in line 8 is legible. Brankaer and van Os (2019, 102) read [*pbal n-]kō[ht] pe*; Jenott (2011, 174), [*pbal n-k]ō[h]t pe*; and Nagel (2014, 296), [*pbal n-kōht] pe*. In any event, the restoration is virtually certain on the basis of the parallels.

COMMENTS

In this dense passage the author presents a characteristically terse account of the origin and hierarchy of the rulers of this cosmos. The presumably material realm of “chaos and Hades” already exists below the incorruptible realm, and an agent of the higher immortals calls into being angels to preside over it. The use of the term “angel” for both eternal beings and the lower rulers indicates their shared ontology, and the hierarchical arrangement of the lower angels mimics the arrangement of the eternal aeons. Nonetheless, the leading angel of the lower realm, Nebrō, rebels against his superior origin, with the result that the governance that these powers exercise over human beings is not benign.

Gnostic works agree that a chaotic realm of materiality existed outside the divine entirety of the immortals, that a craftsman and its assistants brought it into order, and that its current rulers are hostile to human beings, but they differ about how those rulers and their malignant nature came to be. In our passage that which is designated “chaos and Hades” appears to designate the material disorder that resulted from or was moved downward by the unfolding of the luminous aeons and heavens and that subsequently was cordoned off by the 360 firmaments. In the *Secret Book According to John*, however, there simply existed a realm “outside” the entirety (NHC II 10.11–12), one of “darkness and ignorance” (NHC III 16.17), which the craftsman had to “put in order (or organize) according to the likeness of the original aeons” (NHC II 12.33–35). The gnostics worked from the opening of Genesis, in which god introduces the distinctions of light and darkness, above and below, water and dry land to an earth that was originally “invisible and unformed” (1:1–10). So too the craftsman of Plato’s *Timaeus* found the material realm “moving in a discordant and disorderly manner” and subsequently “led it into order from disorder” (30a). Combining Moses and Plato, Philo of Alexandria understood Gen 1:1–5 to refer to the creation of the incorporeal cosmos. He attributed to the material realm a “substance (*ousia*) having no beauty of itself,” characterized instead as “disordered” and marked by “inconsistency” and “disharmony.” God brought this chaotic material to “order,” “consistency,” “harmony,” and the like (*Opif.* 21–22). Philo’s position on the origin of matter is not clear (Runia 2001, 152–53), and the same can be said of the gnostics (but cf. Dillon 1999, 71). (Valentinus and his followers appear to have addressed this problem more directly; see, e.g., Gos. Truth 17.4–20 and Iren. *Haer.* 1.5.1–4.) Whatever matter’s origin, gnostics depicted the creation of the material realm as the bestowal of order on “chaos,” even to its lowest extent, “Hades.”

All gnostics taught that, in contrast to Plato’s “good” craftsman who lacks any envy (*Tim.* 29e), the craftsman who gave order to this realm is flawed—ignorant, arrogant, and hostile to spirit-endowed human beings—and bears names like Ialdabaōth and Sakla(s). They offered at least two explanations for the origin and character of this chief ruler (Introduction IV.A). The better known is the error of the aeon wisdom, found in the *Secret Book According to John*, with variations in Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.29.4, 1.30.3–5) and in other works; it is often incorrectly identified with *the* gnostic myth. According to this account, wisdom (Sophia), the last of the twelve aeons associated with the self-originate, conceived a thought derived from herself alone, without

the consent of her male consort. Because she possesses the invincible power of an immortal, her thought was productive, but imperfect. The offspring's imperfection was evident in its appearance—"serpentine, with a lion's face, and its eyes gleaming like flashes of lightning." Lest any of the other aeons see it, wisdom cast the offspring outside the entirety and surrounded it with a "luminous cloud." She granted it a throne within the cloud and named it Ialdabaōth. This first ruler's evil character manifested itself immediately when it stole divine power from its mother. Thanks to this power, Ialdabaōth could create other rulers and give an order to the material chaos of this cosmos, an order that imperfectly reproduces the order of the incorruptible entirety. Ialdabaōth then arrogantly announced, "For my part, I am a jealous god. And there is no other god apart from me" (Ap. John NHC II 9.25–13.13). The ensuing narrative relates the repentance of wisdom, her acceptance by the other aeons, and their shared work to recover the stolen power, now dispersed in gnostic humanity. This story is one of rupture, in which divinity apparently made an error and must rectify it.

Our gospel presents an alternative view. According to this account, Ēlēlēth, an angel from the incorruptible realm, called for a set of twelve angels to come into being to rule over the chaotic material realm (Burns 2018, 146–48). In a manner similar to how wisdom's thought is imperfectly productive, the angel's command came true, but not in a straightforward manner. First appeared two angels, Nebrō (also known as Ialdabaōth) and Saklas; although Nebrō appeared first and seems to be the dominant of the two, he eventually disappears from the narrative, and Saklas takes the lead in ruling over humanity and receiving their misguided worship. Nebrō and Saklas brought into existence twelve angels, who produced another twelve angels in the heavens. This hierarchical structure may not be contrary to Ēlēlēth's intentions, for it replicates the structure of the incorruptible realm. Nebrō/Ialdabaōth corresponds to the invisible spirit, which likewise does not play an active role, while Saklas resembles the engaged self-originate. Imitation of the relationship between the invisible spirit and the self-originate likely motivates the domination of the lower cosmos and its powers by two chief rulers rather than one, which is unusual among gnostic works and receives more discussion below. The twelve angels/rulers and their twelve angels correspond to the twelve luminaries and their twelve aeons. Immediately following this passage, Saklas creates "a human being according to the likeness and according to the image" (52.14–17)—that is, Adam according to his image, Adamas (Barc 2008, 661). Despite these

correspondences to the higher realm, Saklas and the other rulers dominate human beings, illegitimately demand their worship, and lead them into immorality. The origin of their evil is Nebrō, the meaning of whose name —“apostate”—signifies that he has rebelled against higher divinity; fire and defiling blood likewise indicate his wrathful nature. This story is one of rebellion, in which true divinity extended itself to bring order to matter, but lower beings revolted against it and must be defeated or destroyed. The gospel shows no knowledge of the alternative story of wisdom’s error. The only appearance of the term *sophia* in the phrase “corruptible wisdom” seems to refer to the false wisdom (that is, reasoning or doctrine) that the lower rulers disseminate, not to any immortal angel (44.3–4).

Judas is not the only gnostic work that presents a version of Ēlēlēth’s command; so too does the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*. That work, however, contains indications that its author was aware of the story of wisdom’s error. These two works can be placed in parallel.

Gos. Jud. 51.3–52.14

³Afterwards

⁴[Ēlēlēth (?)] said, ⁵“Let twelve angels come into being [and rule] over chaos and [Hades].”

⁸And lo, from the cloud appeared an angel

¹⁰whose face poured forth fire and whose likeness was defiled with blood.

¹²He has [the] name, *Nebrō*,

¹³which has been interpreted as

‘apostate,’ ¹⁵but others call him

‘Ialdabaoth.’ ¹⁶And another angel came forth from the cloud as well: *Saklas*.

Gos. Eg. III 56.22–58.22 (NHC IV 68.5–70.5) (trans. Layton 2021, 152–53, alt.)

²²After five thousand years,

²³the great luminary Ēlēlēth said, ²⁴“Let something rule over chaos and Hades.”

²⁶And a cloud [. . .] “material wisdom” appeared. ⁵⁷ [. . .]

²gazed upon the [. . .],

³with her face resembling [. . .] ⁴in her manner [. . .]

⁵blood.

⁵And [the great] angel Gamaliēl spoke [to (?) great Gabriēl],

⁷the attendant belonging to [the great luminary] ⁸Oroiaēl, [saying, “Let an] angel emanate [to rule] over chaos [and Hades].” ¹¹Next the cloud [. . .] from the two units [. . .]

light [. . .] ¹⁴she established [. . .] ¹⁵within the cloud [. . .]

¹⁶*Sakla* the great [angel] beheld *Nebrouēl* the great demon that was with him,

¹⁷Nebrō created six *angels*—and (so did) Saklas—for attendance,
²⁰and these produced *twelve* angels in the heavens, ²²and each one received a portion in the heavens.

²³“And the twelve rulers spoke with the twelve *angels*: ²⁶*Let each one of you* 52 [. . .]’ ¹and they ²[. . .] race ³[. . . five] *angels*:

⁴*The first is* [. . .]th, the one *whom they call* the anointed.

⁶*The [second] is Harmathōth, who is [the eye of fire].*

⁸*The third is Galila.*

⁹*The fourth is Iōbēl.*

¹⁰*The fifth [is] Adōnaios.*

¹¹*These are the five that ruled over Hades and the first over chaos.*

¹⁸and they [. . .] ¹⁹became an earthborn spirit ²⁰[. . .] helping *angels*.

²¹Sakla [said] to Nebrouēl the great [demon], ²²“Let the *twelve* aeons exist within ²⁴[. . .] aeon(s) . . . worlds [. . .].

²³Through the will of the self-originate, the great angel [Sakla] said, 58 “The [. . .] shall [. . .] ²the quantity of seven [. . .].”

³And it said to the [. . . *angels*], ⁴“Go! *Let [each] of you* rule over its own [. . .],” ⁵and each [of them] went. ⁶[These are the] *twelve [angels]*:

⁷*[The first] angel is [Athōth . . .], whom [the . . .] races of humankind call [. . .].*

¹⁰*The second is Harmas, [who is the eye of fire].*

¹²*The third [is Kalila].*

¹²*[The] fourth is Iōbēl.*

¹³*[The fifth is] Adōnaios, who is called “Sabaōth.*

¹⁵*The sixth [is Kain, whom all (?) the races of] humankind call “the sun.”*

¹⁷*The [seventh is Abel].*

¹⁸*The eighth (is) Akiressina.*

¹⁸*The ninth (is) Ioubēl.*

¹⁹*The tenth is [Harmoupiaēl].*

²⁰*[The] eleventh is Arkheir-[Adōnein].*

²¹*The twelfth [is Belias].*

²¹*These preside over Hades [and chaos].*

A literary relationship must exist between the two works, but direct dependence of one work upon the other seems unlikely. It has been suggested that the author of *Judas* has compressed a longer source because he lists only five angels with names and yet knows the tradition that Ēlēlēth called forth twelve angels (Jenott 2011, 97). Indeed, it seems conceivable

that our author chose to include the names of only five of the twelve angels (from a list another version of which is found in Ap. John) for a reason lost in the lacunae at 51.1–3 or because they not only rule over Hades but also hold special positions as “the first” over chaos. A division of the twelve into sets of five and seven may have occurred earlier than our gospel; such is suggested by the obscure references to “seven” at Gos. Eg. NHC III 58.2 and Ap. John NHC II 11.4–7, where Ialdabaōth makes seven of the twelve “kings in charge of the seven heavens” and puts “five in charge of the depth of the abyss.” In general, one expects these narratives to become longer rather than shorter as authors add names and explanations. In any event, our gospel’s possible abbreviation of the list of angel names does not necessitate that he has abbreviated elsewhere in the passage.

In fact, the *Holy Book* appears to integrate into the story of Ēlēlēth’s command elements of the story of wisdom’s error, including a defense of wisdom. On the one hand, the author makes explicit the primary theological implication of the Ēlēlēth account: that true divinity was in charge of the generation of the chief rulers and their actions. It is “through the will of the self-originate” that Sakla gives a command to his angels (NHC III 57.25–58.1). On the other hand, in accord with the alternative account, “material wisdom” (*hulikē sophia*) plays a role, which is unfortunately obscured by lacunae: she either exists in a cloud or is the cloud, and it appears to be her face that receives a description that suggests corruption (“blood”). Nonetheless, it is still Ēlēlēth that initiates the emanation of the lower angels, and the author inserts the great angels Gamaliēl and Gabriēl between wisdom and the emanation of Sakla and Nebrouēl, rendering her role indirect at best. At the conclusion of the work the author pointedly offers praise to “the incorruptible wisdom” (*taphthartos n-sophia*) (NHC III 69.2–3), the only other time the term *sophia* appears in the surviving text. Is it possible that this author knows the idea that the lower rulers have disseminated “corruptible wisdom” in this realm (Gos. Jud. 44.2–6) and distinguished a higher wisdom from that? This author is certainly aware of the alternative wisdom-oriented account of Sakla’s origin; he inserts a version of this character into the Ēlēlēth account in a way that seems to acknowledge her ambiguous role (“blood”) and to minimize it at the same time.

The author of *First Thought in Three Forms* made a similar attempt to synthesize the two origin stories for Sakla(s)/Ialdabaōth. After the establishment of four eternal realms that correspond to the four luminaries of the self-originate in other works, the author writes, “Next, a verbal

expression (or word) emanated from the great luminary Ēlēlēth, and it said, ‘It is I am who am the ruler. Who is the one of chaos? And who is the one of Hades?’” Because the verbal expression that emanates from Ēlēlēth is said to possess afterthought (*epinoia*), it is almost certainly wisdom, which elsewhere is “of afterthought” and even called “afterthought” (e.g., Ap. John NHC II 9.25). Immediately thereafter “there appeared (*ouōnh ebol*) the great demon [cf. Gos. Eg. NHC III 57.17] that rules over the bottom of Hades and chaos.” This demon is Sakla or Samaēl-Ialtabaōth, who is “misshapen and imperfect” and is said to have taken power from “the innocent one (*tiatpethou*), whom it had first overcome, that is, the afterthought of the light” (Three Forms 39.13–32). This passage shares phrasing and vocabulary with the account in the *Holy Book*, suggesting that they are drawing on similar earlier traditions. It helps us to see the connection between the two alternative stories about Ēlēlēth and wisdom: here wisdom emanates from Ēlēlēth, just as in the *Secret Book* wisdom is an aeon within the eternal realm over which Ēlēlēth presides (NHC II 8.16–20). Although the craftsman takes power from wisdom, he is not her offspring—he simply appears after she asks who belongs to chaos and Hades—and he overcomes her to get the power, and thus she is “innocent.” As in the *Holy Book* and *Judas*, Ēlēlēth is the aeon that initiates this series of events, and the craftsman’s vicious nature arises from himself, not from the mistaken thought of a divine aeon. Nonetheless, the author includes wisdom/afterthought as the source of the craftsman’s ill-gotten power. Like the author of the *Holy Book*, the writer of *First Thought in Three Forms* has worked to combine two traditions concerning the origin and character of the craftsman.

In contrast, our gospel shows no sign of trying to reconcile the two accounts (cf. Jenott 2011, 99): it simply narrates the Ēlēlēth-centered tradition without any role for wisdom. Most commentators claim therefore that our author has omitted wisdom, just as he has omitted the feminine Barbēlō (e.g., Jenott 2011, 98; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 198). This hypothesis acknowledges the diversity of gnostic works on this point, but it still treats the wisdom episode as the more original gnostic account of the rulers’ origin, from which *Judas* has deviated in order to suppress female characters, or to eliminate the problem of divine error, or both. I consider it just as likely, if not more so, that our author does not know the wisdom story and that early gnostics developed two explanations for the origin and character of the craftsman and his rulers. Irenaeus’s account of Saturninos may provide additional evidence for an early version of the gnostic myth

without wisdom's error: "Saturninos refers to a single parent, unrecognizable by all, who made angels, archangels, powers, and authorities. And the world and all things in it were engendered by some seven of these angels." The lower angels, which include "the god of the Jews," have gone wrong, for Christ came in order to destroy the god of the Jews and "all the rulers" (*Haer.* 1.24.1–2; Layton 2021, 211–12). Layton (2021, 211 n. 1.24.1b) speculates that Irenaeus "skips or compresses" the error of wisdom in his report on Saturninos, but it now seems at least as likely, if not more, that Saturninos taught a version of the wisdomless account in our work. Could a treatise by Saturninos have served as the source that the authors of *Judas* and the *Holy Book* used? That conclusion would be merely speculative. In any event, the later authors of the *Holy Book* and *First Thought* inherited these differing narratives, whether directly from the *Secret Book* and *Judas* or from shared sources, and they attempted to reconcile them. Our gospel, however, provides a simple story of an incorruptible angel of the higher realm, Ēlēlēth, calling for new angels to rule the lower realm of corruption; those angels resemble the hierarchy of their immortal counterparts, but rebel against them.

It is not clear why Ēlēlēth became the luminary or angel who takes on this role in the lower cosmos. One possibility may lie in the name itself, the origin of which has been plausibly linked to the Hebrew root *hll* ("to shine," "to give light") or the noun *hyll* ("morning star," "moon") (Giversen 1963, 185). Perhaps resonance with Gen 1:3 led either to Ēlēlēth being given this role or to the name being given to the immortal who performs it. Other possible explanations take their cue from "the great angel" Ēlēlēth's solo appearance as divine revealer to Nōrea in the *Reality of the Rulers* (93.2–10). Schenke (1974) accounted for that incident by citing Ēlēlēth's role as the luminary responsible for the "historical Sethians," that is, the saved people subsequent to the primeval Sethians; this function appears in the *Secret Book*, according to which the souls of engendered beings who lacked acquaintance and then repented reside in Ēlēlēth (NHC II 9.18–24). According to this hypothesis, it is Ēlēlēth's responsibility among the four luminaries to act on behalf of the elect in this cosmos. More recently, Burns (2018, 152–57) has adduced Ēlēlēth's numerous appearances (whether alone or paired with Daueithai) in so-called magical texts from the third century and later. He suggests that Ēlēlēth was already known in the second century from such Egyptian Christian ritual activities to be a "benevolent celestial entity" and that gnostic authors originally adopted him as an independent

angelic figure (158). He was then subsequently incorporated among the four luminaries, a secondary development found in what may be a gloss in the *Reality of the Rulers* itself, when Ēlēlēth states, “I am one of the four luminaries, who stand in the presence of the great invisible spirit” (Burns 2018, 150–51; Nat. Rulers 93.20–22). Even if one is skeptical of the secondary nature of Ēlēlēth’s self-identification in the *Reality of the Rulers*, our gospel may support the hypothesis that the angel Ēlēlēth’s independent role in gnostic mythology preceded his incorporation into the set of four luminaries because in our work the four attending angels lack names and Ēlēlēth acts on his own and seems to have no relationship to them.

It is Nebrō/Ialdabaōth, the lower counterpart of the invisible spirit, who appears at Ēlēlēth’s command and who seems to have rebelled against true divinity. He emerges not from “a cloud,” but from “the cloud” (*tqēpe*), which must refer to an already known cloud. The most likely candidate is “the cloud of knowledge” (*tqēpe n-tegnōsis*) mentioned only a few lines earlier in connection with Ēlēlēth (50.24–51.1). Nebrō comes into existence as a divine being with the knowledge (*gnōsis*) necessary to rule over chaos and Hades, but he turns against his divine origin (Barc 2008, 660). That turning is indicated both in the interpretation of his name and by his physical appearance, which communicates his similarity to the god of the Bible. The name Nebrō, the author reports, “has been interpreted ([*nt*]-*au-hermēneue*) as ‘apostate’ (*ap[os]tatēs*).” The name Nebrō or Nebrōd appears in the Greek Bible as the equivalent of “Nimrod” (Gen 10:8–12), with which ancient readers associated the Hebrew verbal root *mrd* (“to rebel”). The brief account of Nebrōd in the Septuagint inspired a tradition of seeing Nebrō as a rebel against god (Barc 2008, 656–66):

Now Chous became the father of Nebrōd. He was the first on earth to be a giant (*gigas*). He was a giant hunter before the Lord God (*enantion kuriou tou theou*); therefore, they will say, “Like Nebrōd a giant hunter before the Lord.” And the beginning of his kingdom (*archē tēs basileias autou*) came to be Babylon, Orech and Archad and Chalanne in the land of Senaar. From that land he went forth to Assour and built Nineue and Rooboth-city and Kalach, and Dasem between Nineue and between Kalach; this is the great city. (Gen 10:8–12)

The passage suggests that Nebrōd is not only violent (a hunter) and a ruler with a kingdom, but also possibly more than human—a giant (*gigas*), similar to the “giants (*gigantes*) that were of old, the renowned humans,” who seem to be the offspring of the sons of god and the daughters of human beings (Gen 6:4). Already within the Bible the origin of Nebrōd’s kingdom in Babylon and its extension to Assyria and Nineveh supplemented these

characteristics to give an eschatological role to “Assour” and “the land of Nebrōd”; they would oppose a promised ruler who would come from Bethlehem (Mic 5:2–6). The phrase *enantion kuriou tou theou* (Gen 10:9) could be read as “against” or “in opposition to” the Lord God, rather than “before” him. Later interpreters gave Nebrōd a part in the rebellious act of building the Tower of Babel “in the land of Senaar” (Gen 11:2; cf. 10:10), where the audacious human beings want to “build ourselves a city and a tower whose top shall be as far as heaven” (11:4; cf. 10:12). Nebrōd’s violence, rule of a kingdom, opposition to god, and superhuman nature made him an ideal candidate to become a rebellious angel who would establish his own rule to oppose god and oppress human beings.

Philo attests the circulation of the alleged meaning of the name Nebrō as “apostate” among Greek speakers (van der Toorn and van der Horst 1990, 17–19). In fact, he offers two interpretations of the name. In *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, he explains that the name should be translated as “Ethiopian,” presumably transferring to Nimrod an interpretation normally given to the name of his father, Cush. “Ethiopian,” Philo explains, is fitting because “pure evil has no participation in light, but follows night and darkness.” Interpreting *enantion kuriou tou theou* as meaning “opposition to the deity,” Philo argues that Nimrod represents “the impious man”: such a person “fights against and makes war on heavenly things and praiseworthy and wonderful natures, and builds walls and towers on earth against heaven” (QG 2.82). In *On the Giants*, however, Philo writes, “Nebrōd is interpreted (*hermēneuetai*) ‘desertion’ (*automolēsis*).” Nebrōd initiated the desertion of human beings from “the path of reason” in favor of “the lifeless and inert nature of the flesh” (Gig. 65–66). This latter interpretation comes closer to the tradition known to our author, if by a different word (“apostate”) with the same meaning, but the former interpretation’s physiognomic approach to Nebrō/Nimrod anticipates the display in our passage of his violent disposition in his physical appearance.

The imagery of a face that pours forth fire and a likeness defiled by blood has multiple related connotations (Nicklas 2012, 111–12). The fiery face denotes Nebrō as being or related to the god of Israel, to whom the Bible and the Enochic tradition attributed a flaming appearance and specifically a fiery face (Orlov 2006). According to Exodus, the Lord spoke to Moses from “a fire of flame in a bush” (3:2–6) and led the people by “a pillar of fire” at night (13:21–22); “the likeness (*eidōs*) of the Lord’s glory was like a flaming fire on the top of the mountain before the sons of Israel” (24:17). Moses later

tells the people of Israel, “The Lord spoke with you face-to-face at the mountain, from the midst of the fire” (Deut 5:4). Psalm 16(17):15 identifies god’s “face” with his “likeness” or “glory”: “But as for me, I shall appear to your face in righteousness; I shall be fed when your glory appears” (LXX); “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness” (Masoretic Text). That identification builds on Exod 33:18–23, where god appears to speak of “my glory” as equivalent to “my face.” Drawing on all these passages, *2 Enoch* portrays the Lord as having a fiery face: “I saw the view of the face of the Lord, like iron made burning hot in a fire [and] brought out, and it emits sparks and is incandescent” (22:1). Enoch reports, “I have heard the words from the fiery lips of the Lord. For the lips of the Lord are a furnace of fire, and his words are the fiery flames which come out. . . . I am one who has seen the face of the Lord, like iron made burning hot by a fire, emitting sparks” (2 En. 39:3). The Lord’s face is not merely hot and fiery; it also emits sparks, and fiery flames come from his mouth, just as Nebrō’s face pours forth fire.

A face that pours forth fire marks Nebrō also as full of wrath. The Lord “poured out his wrath like fire,” writes the author of Lamentations (2:4). God’s wrath can be “kindled like fire” (Jer 21:12). In Ezekiel the Lord proclaims, “I poured out my ire upon it (the land) with the fire of my wrath to complete it” (22:31). Earlier he adds blood for good measure: “I will pour out my indignation upon you. In a fire of my wrath I will breathe upon you and give you into hands of barbarian men as they devise destruction. You shall be food in the fire; your blood shall be in the midst of the earth” (Ezek 21:31–32; cf. “the blood of wrath” in Ezek 16:38). Defiling blood suggests the deadly consequences of Nebrō’s wrath; at his birth in Genesis he was a “giant hunter,” after all (Gathercole 2007, 97). The pairing with fire, however, suggests sacrifice in particular: “And the bull calf for sin and the goat for sin, of whom their blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place—they shall take them outside the camp and burn them up with fire, and their skins and their flesh and their dung” (Lev 16:27). The anger and violence of Nebrō/Ialdabaōth, the god of Israel, finds its cultic expression in sacrifice, an act of blood and fire, which defiles his “likeness” (*eine*). “Likeness” denotes the pattern according to which lower beings are created, so that they resemble and have affinity with higher beings (Gos. Jud. 49.4–5, 52.16–17). The likeness by which Nebrō corresponds to his incorruptible counterpart has been defiled by his wrath, violence, and demands for sacrifice.

Nebrō/Ialdabāōth so clearly conforms to a stereotypically negative image of the biblical god that the appearance of Saklas, “another angel,” from the cloud seems superfluous. Nicklas (2012, 114) suggests that Saklas is another form of Nebrō, so that they are really a single being. This suggestion might explain the strange syntax of 51.17–19 (“Nebrō created six angels—and Saklas—for attendance”), and Nebrō does disappear from the narrative, leaving it to Saklas to perform the activities of the biblical creator, that is, making human beings, limiting their life spans, and receiving their misguided sacrificial worship. On the other hand, Sakla and Nebrouēl are clearly distinct beings in the parallel in the *Holy Book*, although their roles are reversed: Sakla emerges first and tells Nebrouēl what to do. In *Judas* the structural analogy of Nebrō and Saklas with the invisible spirit and the self-originate, the former of which likewise disappears and leaves all the activity to the latter, also supports understanding them to be separate beings.

The gospel is unique among gnostic works in dividing rule between Nebrō and Saklas. Although Saklas creates human beings, receives their worship, and will preside at their destruction, Nebrō emerges from the cloud first and receives an extended description that conforms him to the biblical god; the two angels together create the rulers subordinate to them. In comparison, Sakla is clearly the chief ruler in the *Holy Book* and commands Nebrouēl, who is subordinate as “the great demon that was with him” (NHC III 57.16–24). The *Reality of the Rulers* divides the lower ruler into two beings, Ialdabāōth/Sakla and its offspring, Sabaōth. When a fiery angel from wisdom’s daughter life consigns the arrogant Ialdabāōth to Tartarus, Sabaōth condemns his father and acknowledges the superiority of wisdom and life, who elevate him to the seventh heaven (95.5–25). Unlike these other gnostic works, *Judas* maintains a more even distinction between the two ruling angels (although Nebrō is the superior) and does not narrate any conflict between them. The *Holy Book* and our gospel probably shared a source with two rulers named Sakla(s) and Nebrō(ouēl). It probably cannot be determined whether one of the two works retained the relationship between these two rulers as it was in the source and the other revised it or both revised the source. In any event, the unique partnership of Nebrō and Saklas in *Judas* serves the function of paralleling that between the invisible spirit and the self-originate in the immortal realm.

It is noteworthy that, as multiple scholars have observed (e.g., Turner 2009, 115), neither Nebrō nor Saklas makes the famous arrogant boast that appears in several gnostic works, including the *Holy Book*: “For my part, I

am a [jealous] god; and none has [come to exist] apart from me” (NHC III 58.24–26). Possibly Nebrō, who emerged from the cloud of acquaintance, is fully aware of the existence of higher gods; as his name suggests, he is truly an apostate. Our author does not provide interpretations of the names Ialdabaōth and Saklas; their origins are probably Aramaic—the former meaning something like “begetter of forces” and the latter meaning “fool” (Layton 1976, 72–74)—and possibly were unknown to our Greek-speaking author.

The list and names of the five angels pose their own mysteries. As mentioned above, our author has reproduced the first five angels from a list of twelve present also in both the *Secret Book* and the *Holy Book*. The names and order of the angels in *Judas*, the *Holy Book*, and the three manuscripts of the *Secret Book* that contain them (see the table below) are, accounting for orthographic variants, “remarkably stable” (Nagel 2014, 309; cf. Greenbaum 2016, 177). But our work’s list of only five of the twelve is puzzling. It has been suggested that at some point in the text’s transmission a scribe mistook the five he listed as the final, lowest five (those who rule Hades) and stopped copying (van der Vliet 2006, 147–48), but that solution has persuaded few. Pagels and King (2007, 149) propose that the five angels imitate the higher pentad of the self-originate and its four angels; this suggestion is attractive, but Saklas seems to correspond to the self-originate in the overall structure of the lower rulers. Perhaps our author lists only these five because they fill the special roles of “the first over chaos” or for a reason lost in the preceding lacuna.

Scholars have accepted Welburn’s (1978, 248–53) argument that the list of twelve found in the *Secret Book* and *Holy Book* corresponds to the twelve signs of the Zodiac and their ruling planets (cf. Tardieu 1984, 277–85), even if some have challenged his precise Zodiacal and planetary correlations (Pleše 2007, 246–51; Greenbaum 2016, 174–79). According to the *Secret Book*, Ialdabaōth divided the twelve into two groups: he “established seven kings in charge of the seven heavens, one per firmament of heaven; and five in charge of the depth of the abyss, to reign” (NHC II 11.4–7). Saturninos attributed the creation of this world to seven angels (Iren. *Haer.* 1.24.1). Welburn (1978, 253–54) suggests that the groups of seven and five reflect the astrological distinction between signs above the celestial ecliptic and equator and those below, although the gnostic list does not quite match that division. Lewis (2009, 297) points out that if that is the case, *Judas* lists only the five in charge of the abyss (“the first over chaos”). Greenbaum (2016,

178–79) proposes that in contrast to Welburn’s scheme, the five angels that *Judas* lists (the first five in the lists of twelve) correspond to Cancer, Gemini, Taurus, Aries, and Pisces. He notes that these five signs, along with Aquarius, “are called the lunar (i.e. night-time, underworld) houses of the planets,” an identification that might explain why our author lists only these five angels as rulers of the underworld, that is, Hades. However the problem of the five is resolved, Lewis (2009, 297–98) persuasively argues that although in our work the number of twelve might function calendrically and/or to invoke the Zodiac, the gospel’s interest is not astrological; the point is the number of twelve—twelve disciples, twelve tribes of Israel, thus twelve luminous aeons above and twelve ruling rulers and angels in the heavens.

<i>Gos. Jud.</i> 52.4–11	<i>Ap. John</i> <i>NHC III</i> 16.20–24	<i>Ap. John BG</i> 40.4–9	<i>Ap. John</i> <i>NHC II</i> 10.28–34	<i>Gos. Eg. NHC</i> <i>III</i> 58.7–15
⁴ The first is [. . .]th, the one whom they call the anointed.	²⁰ The first is Haōth.	⁴ The first is Iaōth.	²⁸ The name of the first is Athōth, whom the races call “[. . .].”	⁷ [The first] angel is [Athōth . . .], whom [the . . .] races of human-kind call [. . .].
⁶ The [second] is Harmathōth, who [is the eye of fire].	²¹ The second is Harmas, that is, the eye of fire.	⁵ The second is Hermas, who is the eye of fire.	³⁰ The second is Harmas, that is, [the eye] of fire.	¹⁰ The second is Harmas, [who is the eye of fire].
⁸ The third is Galila.	²² The third is Galila.	⁷ The third is Galila.	³¹ The third is Kalila-Oumbri.	¹² The third [is Kalila].
⁹ The fourth is Iōbēl.	²³ The fourth is Iōbēl.	⁸ The fourth is Iōbēl.	³² The fourth is Iabēl.	¹² [The] fourth is Iōbēl.
¹⁰ The fifth [is] Adōnaios.	²³ The fifth is Adōnaios.	⁹ The fifth is Adōnaios.	³³ The fifth is Adōnaiou, who is called “Sabaōth.”	¹³ [The fifth is] Adōnaios, who is called “Sabaōth.”

Commentators have reached no consensus either on how to restore the first angel’s name or on what to make of that angel being called “the

anointed.” As for the name restoration, the proposed options are Seth, restoring [*pe s*]ēth, or some form of the first angel name in the parallels, such as Iaōth, Athēth, or Athōth. The original editors suggested the first option (Kasser et al. 2007, 223), which several subsequent scholars have accepted (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 278; Pagels and King 2007, 119; Devoti 2012, 226; Nagel 2014, 296). Most editors interpret the downward stroke that survives after the lacuna as most likely from an ēta. The lacuna must have room for both *pe* to complete the nominal sentence and no more than one or two additional letters: “Seth” works perfectly in that respect. This possibility requires that we ask whether it is plausible that a gnostic would, first, identify Seth as the anointed; second, make Seth a lower angel, one of the rulers; and third, call one of those rulers the anointed.

First, although the identification of Seth as the anointed does not have precedent in gnostic literature, it is plausible (Meyer 2011, 55). According to Epiphanius in the fourth century, the Sethians called Seth the anointed and claimed that he became incarnate in Jesus (*Pan.* 39.1.3). In the *Holy Book* the anointed is one of the incorruptible beings and receives the epithet Telmaēl-Telmakhaēl-Ēli-Ēli-Makhar-Makhar-Seth (NHC IV 59.16–21, 77.2–4). The great Seth is a separate immortal, but it is he who “put on . . . the living reason-born Jesus” (NHC IV 75.15–17); that is, he became incarnate in the human being whom Christians call the anointed. So too in the *Revelation of Adam* it appears to be the great Seth—“That Human Being” after which the human Seth is named (65.6–9)—who becomes incarnate in a human being, who performs signs and wonders, and whose flesh is chastised by the rulers (77.1–18). If the author of the *Revelation* did not intend a reference to Jesus, any Christian reader could have seen one. In sum, it is plausible that a gnostic Christian author would identify a divine being named Seth as the anointed one.

More problematic is the identification of Seth as a lower angel created by and in service to Nebrō/Ialdabaōth and Saklas. To be sure, *Judas* does not teach, as do the *Holy Book* and the *Revelation of Adam*, that salvation comes through Seth, nor does Seth play a prominent role in the gospel, so that the term “Sethian” hardly seems apt (Lewis 2009, 297). Nonetheless, the single surviving mention of Seth in the gospel places “the incorruptible [race] of Seth” among the twelve luminous aeons in the higher realm (49.5–6). Probably the earthly counterparts of the heavenly incorruptible race of Seth constitute “the [fruit (?)] of the great race of Adam” that will be exalted at the end of this world (57.10–12). It would be surprising, then, for this author

to call an angel that rules over Hades and chaos Seth. Meyer (2008, 50–51) explains it as “a peculiarity of the text” or the result of its early, less fully “Sethian” character. He notes that the name of the second angel, Harmathōth, appears to combine the names of the first and second angels in the parallel lists, and he suggests that the author combined the names precisely in order to make room for the addition of Seth. It is possible that the author did indeed combine the two names to make room for something new, but Seth remains an odd choice.

It would be less surprising for a lower angel to be called the anointed (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 358; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 202), even though gnostic works regularly place a being with that title among the immortals. The *Secret Book* identifies the self-originate as the anointed (NHC II 7.19–20), while a source known to Irenaeus considers them to be separate beings (*Haer.* 1.29.1–2). Our gospel’s higher realm has no figure called the anointed, and it never calls Jesus “the anointed,” as does either the author or two of the scribes of the *Secret Book* (NHC II 32.6, NHC IV 49.26). The author’s concern about the use and misuse of Jesus’s name perhaps indicates that he disputes or rejects one or more titles that other Jesus believers used for Jesus, such as “the anointed.” *First Thought in Three Forms* includes an obscure reference to “their anointed,” probably meaning the rulers’ anointed (49.8). In our work it seems that either the twelve ruling angels or “the races” call this lower angel the anointed; therefore, this angel might be considered “their anointed.” Some Valentinians posited, in addition to a spiritual anointed in the fullness, an “animate anointed” emitted by the craftsman (*Iren. Haer.* 1.6.1, 1.7.2; cf. *Clem. Al. Exc.* 62). It is plausible, then, that our author would place an angel named the anointed among the lower rulers, especially if it is other rulers or the non-gnostic “races” who give him that name.

On the other hand, several scholars—especially those who reconstruct a name other than Seth in the lacuna—have suggested that the text’s *pekh(risto)s* is a mistake for something else. One possibility is that the original reading was *čoeis* (“lord”); in his eschatological interpretation of the disciples’ dream, Jesus gives this title to “the deacon of error,” the lower god that receives a sacrifice at the end of time (40.22–23). This name arguably makes more sense than “anointed,” but it requires either multiple stages of error or deliberate alteration because the definite article must also have been changed from the short form to the long. That is, one might have to imagine a scribe mistaking *č(oei)s* for *kh(risto)s*, and then a second scribe correcting

pkh(risto)s to *pekh(risto)s*, or perhaps someone making the change deliberately, although the motivation for such a change is not clear. Elsewhere in Codex Tchacos the *nomen sacrum pč(oei)s* appears with the proper short form of the article (59.17, 62.6; Jenott 2011, 214). Another suggestion, first made by van der Vliet (2006, 149–51) and further elaborated by Jenott (2011, 213–14), is that we have a corruption from *pekrios* (“the ram”), which suits Athōth’s likely association with Aries and its probable etymological root (“he-goat, ram”) (Tardieu 1984, 279). As intriguing as this possibility is, it requires a more convoluted history of corruption than “lord” to produce what appears in the manuscript (cf. Jenott 2011, 214).

Another hypothesis eschews textual emendation but suggests that the meaning is *chrēstos* (“kind, good”) rather than *christos* (Turner 2008, 204). Although Coptic scribes did not frequently write the former as a *nomen sacrum* (*khs*) as in our text, they did do so; it appears multiple times in Budge’s (1898) Sahidic Psalter: Pss 68(69):16, 85(86):5, 99(100):5, 105(106):1. The pun of *chrēstos/christos* (and the confusion of the two) was known among second-century authors (Layton 1979, 44–45). Moreover, in two manuscripts of the *Secret Book* a list of seven other powers begins, “The first is kindness (*tmnt-khr[ēsto]s*), with the first, Athōth” (NHC II 12.15–16; cf. NHC IV 19.15–17); both scribes use an abbreviated form for *khrēstos*. A third manuscript places “kindness” in the third position with Astaphaios but also abbreviates the word: *mnt-khs* (BG 43.15–17). Athōth is the first name in at least one version of our list (Ap. John NHC II 28.28–29) and could possibly be the name to be restored here in our passage.

Emendation in this case, therefore, does not seem to be required: the reading in the manuscript, *pekhs*, can be understood plausibly as either “the anointed” or “the kind.” I find the latter more likely because of the *Secret Book*’s identification of kindness as “first” and its assignment to Athōth. Although it has been suggested otherwise (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 201), we have seen that the Coptic *khrēstos* can be written as a *nomen sacrum*. Perhaps *khrēstos* is what should also be restored at the lacunae in Ap. John NHC II 10.30 and Gos. Eg. NHC III 58.10 (DeConick 2009a, 260). I might find “the anointed” a better possibility if we could be certain that the first angel’s name is indeed Seth.

But several scholars have argued against that restoration and in favor of something closer to the first names in the parallel lists: Athēth (Turner 2008, 204; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 201), Athōth (DeConick 2009a, 259–60), or

Iaōth (Jenott 2011, 212–13). All of these possibilities require that the lacuna contain a total of four rather than three letters, which the reconstruction of “Seth” requires. As we have seen, one argument in favor of “Seth” is the second name, Harmathōth, which can be understood as a deliberate combination of Athōth with Harmas in order to insert a new name in the first position. If our author has moved Athōth to the second position, why keep it in the first position as well? In response to this reasoning, Jenott (2011, 213) suggests that the author knew both Iaōth and Athōth as names for the first angel; he combined the latter with Harmas and kept the former in the first position, possibly because of its similarity to YHWH. Although most scholars have rejected the argument made by both DeConick and Jenott that the letter trace before the theta can be read as an omega, the trace is so slight that certainty is elusive. Another advantage of Iaōth is that the letters iota and alpha take less space than alpha and theta. The author could have created Harmathōth by combining not Harmas and Athōth, but Harmas and Thōth if he understood the former as a variation on Hermes, who was often identified with the Egyptian god Thōth (Gathercole 2007, 99–100). Alternatively, the repeated *thōth* after Harmas could be a scribal error (DeConick 2009a, 260)

The current state of the manuscript makes it impossible to reconstruct the first angel name with certainty, and the appellation “the one whom they call the anointed” poses questions no matter what that name is. I consider “[Ia]ōth, the one whom they call the kind one” to be the best of the available options, especially because “[S]eth, the one whom they call the anointed” presents several exegetical difficulties. The conservative approach, however, is to leave the name unreconstructed and to translate the more frequent meaning of *pekhs*, “the anointed.” The remaining names—Galila, Iōbēl, and Adōnaios—can be understood as having Hebrew origins—Galilee, “trumpet,” and the substitute name for the Lord, respectively (Gathercole 2007, 100).

Possibly the lost content at 52.1–3 would explain why only five angels are listed and provide some basis for the reconstruction of the first name. These lines cannot be reconstructed, but a few scholars have been willing to speculate about their content. Turner (2009, 113), for example, suggests for 51.26–52.4, “Let each of you [create five angels] and let them [rule over the human] generations. [And there came to be five] angels.” This proposal would separate the five listed angels from the twelve, which seems unlikely in light of the parallel lists of twelve, and the reference to “each of you” would suggest the creation of twelve sets of five angels, even though only

one set is listed. More promising is Jenott’s (2011, 174) tentative suggestion for 51.26–52.2: *mare-poua poua mmō-tn | [šē e-pefkosmos au]ō nse-[šē | e-rro ečm-neuge]nea*; “Let each of you go to its world and go to rule over their races.” This proposal borrows from the parallel in Gos. Eg. NHC III 58.4–5, where editors reconstruct Sakla saying to the angels, “Go (*maše*)! Let [each] of you rule over its own [world].” Other passages in *Judas* suggest that the ruling stars have races over which they preside (39.13–14, 54.21–55.6). This proposal leaves unreconstructed 52.3, which marks the transition to the list of five angels. Although one can only speculate about these lines, the parallel with the *Holy Book* suggests assignment to individual angels of areas of rule, which in this work would likely involve races.

Despite this passage’s mysteries and obscurities, its primary points are clear. Ēlēlēth calls forth angels similar in nature to the other immortals to rule chaos and Hades. Nebrō/Ialdabaōth and Saklas emerge from the cloud of acquaintance and create a pantheon of lower angels that is patterned after the structure of the higher realm. But Nebrō the apostate rebels against the higher authorities, and he takes on the violent character of the biblical god who demands bloody sacrifices from human beings. The author drew this account and the list of five angels from at least one source known also to the author of the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*. While that author attempted to reconcile this earlier source with an alternative gnostic account of the craftsman’s origins that focused on the aeon wisdom (attested by Ap. John and Irenaeus), our author either did not know that version or chose to ignore it. Unlike the wisdom story, this version has the craftsman and his assisting angels come into being according to the will of the higher god, against which they revolt. Nebrō resembles most closely the rebellious archangel of 2 *Enoch*, about whom god says: “But one from the order of the archangels deviated, together with the division that was under his authority. He thought up the impossible idea, that he might place his throne higher than the clouds which are above the earth, and that he might become equal to my power” (29:4).

Creation and Mortality of Adam and Eve (52.14–53.7)

52 ¹⁴ “Next Saklas said to his angels, ‘Let us create a human being according to the likeness and according to the image.’ ¹⁸Then they modeled Adam and his wife Eve, ¹⁹but she is called in the cloud ‘Life’ (Zōē). ²¹For it is by this

name (Adam) that all the races understand him, ²³and each one of them calls her by their names.

²⁵“But Saklas did not 53 command [. . .] produce, ²except [. . .] in the races [. . .] which [. . . Adam.]

⁵“And the [angel] said to him, ‘Your life shall be measured out by time, along with your children.’”

NOTES

52.21–23. *it is by this name (Adam) that all the races understand him.* The clause is in focalizing conversion, most likely emphasizing “by this name.” The verb *šine nsa-f* usually translates *zētein*, “to seek,” which can have the sense of “inquire about” or “investigate.” It can also translate *akriboun*, “to make exact or accurate,” or better, “to investigate accurately, understand thoroughly” (Crum 1939, 569b; Jenott 2011, 215–16). Our verb appears in Matt 2:7, where Herod “learns” or “ascertains” (*šine nsa-* = *akriboun*) from the magi “the time of the appearing star.” The sense here is that all the races receive accurate information about the first man by means of the name “Adam.”

53.1–4. *command [. . .] produce, except [. . .] in the races [. . .] which [. . . Adam.]*. At the end of line 1, *čpo* (“produce”) could mean “offspring.” The restoration of “Adam” at the end of line 4 is not certain. Jenott reads and restores [. . . ad]am (2011, 176), but others read [. . .]an (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 104).

53.6–7. *Your life shall be measured out by time.* The text reads *ere-pekōnh šōp[e] e-uēpe n-ouoeiš*. It is likely that *ēpe* translates either *arithmos* (“number, counting”) or *metron* (“measure”) (Crum 1939, 527b) and that *ouoeiš* translates *chronos* (“time”). The final phrase *n-ouoeiš* could be either an attributive construction with *(o)uēpe* (“a chronological measure,” “a time-number,” or the like) or an adverb formed with initial *n-*. The former seems more likely because the latter tends to mean “at a (past) time, once (as opposed to later or now)” (Crum 1939, 499b) or “for a time” (Acts 19:22, Rev 12:14). Because *ēpe* is not associated with a plural of which it could be “a number” (for example, “of days” or “of years”), it likely means “counting,” “reckoning,” or “measure,” in this case of time. The clause would literally mean, “Your life shall be for a time-measure (or even, share).” My translation renders this concept more dynamically than a literal translation would.

53.7. *along with your children*. Adam's children will also have a limited life span. For the construction (*mn-*), cf. 53.12, 15–16; Jenott (2011, 216) rightly refers also to Nat. Rulers 95.3–4.

COMMENTS

With this characteristically brief account of the creation of human beings and the limitation of their life spans, Jesus completes his answer to Judas's question about the potential domination of his seed—that is, of human beings—over the rulers. Humanity does not dominate the rulers; rather, the rulers dominate human beings by measuring out their life by time. That Judas's next question follows up on this point indicates that it is the climax of Jesus's description of the origin and nature of the rulers. The fragmentary nature of the text at the top of page 53 obscures whether Saklas's pronouncement responds to some action on Adam's part or it simply asserts power over the people whom Saklas and his angels have created.

Like other gnostic works, the gospel moves directly from the craftsman's creation of other rulers to that of humanity, with little or no attention to the creation of the universe as a whole or of other things within it (Gen 1:1–25). The *Secret Book According to John* reports simply that Ialdabaōth “put all things in order, according to the image of the original aeons that had come to exist, so as to make all things in the incorruptible manner” (NHC II 12.33–13.1; cf. Three Forms 40.4–6, Zost. 10.1–5); according to the *Reality of the Rulers*, the ruler “made itself a vast realm, an extent without limit” (94.34–95.1). Our gospel and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* lack even such brief references to the creation of this world and instead describe the craftsman and his rulers as ruling or presiding over chaos.

Although Jesus uses some words from Genesis earlier in the discourse (“firmament,” “heaven,” “luminary”), this short passage draws extensively on the first four chapters of that biblical book for much of its vocabulary. The most significant source passages are the following:

Next Saklas said to his angels, “Let us create a human being according to the likeness and according to the image.” (52.13–17)

And God said, “Let us make humankind according to our image and according to likeness . . .” (Gen 1:26)

Then they modeled Adam and his wife Eve, but she is called in the cloud “Life” (Zōē). (52.18–21)

And God modeled the human being . . . (Gen 2:7)

Now Adam knew his wife Eve . . . (Gen 4:1)

And Adam called the name of his wife “Life” (Zōē) . . . (Gen 3:20)

But Saklas did not command . . . (52.25–53.1)

And the Lord God commanded Adam . . . (Gen 2:16)

Like Philo of Alexandria and the author of the *Secret Book*, our author interprets the plural language of Gen 1:26 as the creator speaking with angels, who then participate in the creation of humanity (Philo *Opif.* 75; Ap. John NHC II 15.1–6). Our author combines the two creations of humanity (Gen 1:26–27, 2:7), however, rather than distinguishing between the creation of an animate (*psuchikos*) human being (1:26–27) and that of the material human being (2:7), as we find in the *Secret Book*. In accord with Gen 1:26–27, Saklas and his angels create the male and the female simultaneously according to a likeness and image, but in accord with Gen 2:7, they “model” or “form” (*plassein*) them, that is, fashion their bodies. This conflation suggests that it is the body that is “according to the likeness and according to the image” and which therefore resembles the divine. Such appears to be the case for the animate body of Adam in Ap. John NHC II 15.1–19.12, but in that work the material body is disparaged as a “cave,” “the bond of forgetfulness,” and a “prison” (NHC II 21.10–12, 31.3–4), even as it must visually conform to the divine image. It is the tool by which the rulers hold human beings in ignorance. Our gospel lacks such language for the material body, which possesses a less negative value than in the *Secret Book* and other gnostic works (Creech 2012, 246–47). Nonetheless, it is the body that dies (43.20–21): it is the means by which the human being’s life “is measured out by time” and thus the tool by which the rulers dominate human beings. The immediate creation of the body, rather than its secondary addition to an originally animate being, therefore makes angelic control of humanity possible.

Although the phrase “according to the likeness and according to the image” alludes to Gen 1:26, it reverses the order of “image” (*eikōn*) and “likeness” (*homoiōsis* = *(e)ine*) and does not include any reference to *whose* image and likeness. The reversal of the terms may be meaningless, unless possibly Adam corresponds to the likeness and Eve to the image. “According to the likeness” (*kata-pine*) appears also at 49.4, and it is likely but not certain that “[according to] the image” (*[kata-]thikōn*) occurs just earlier at 49.1–2. That lacunose passage has to do with the immortal Adamas and the incorruptible race of Seth and possibly with the emergence of an immortal Seth. Probably one or more of them are the likeness and image according to which the first human beings are created. Possibly Nebrō as well possesses this divine likeness, for he has a face as a human being does,

although it has been defiled by blood (51.11). In other gnostic works the lower rulers can create humanity according to the divine image because immortals project the image onto the boundary between the entirety and lower world (Ap. John NHC II 14.18–34, Nat. Rulers 87.11–20, Gos. Eg. III 59.1–9); as in our work, the *Holy Book* uses *plassein* (“model, form”) to characterize the creation of the first human being in conformity to the image. Our passage lacks the motif of the image’s projection, however, perhaps because Saklas originated in the cloud of knowledge and therefore is aware of the image and likeness or because, if Nebrō possesses the likeness (and image?), Saklas and his angels can look to him, even if his likeness is defiled. In any case, it does not seem likely that human beings are vulnerable to a limited life span because they are created “only” according to the likeness and image (Nicklas 2012, 115); rather, the likeness and image represent their correspondence to and affinity with immortal beings, and Saklas must impose their mortality upon them.

The problem of the names of Adam and Eve is not an invention of our author but is posed by Genesis, in which the man is referred to only as Adam, while the woman is called Life by her husband (3:20) but referred to as Eve by the narrator (4:1). The author echoes the language of the two passages, and his solution suggests that different races refer to the first woman by the two names. She is called Life “in the cloud” because according to Gen 3:20 she was called Life by Adam, whom the author identifies as Adamas, who exists “in the first cloud of light” (48.21–23). Probably this name is used also by the other incorruptible beings in the higher realm and by the human beings who have the knowledge that originates there. Other people use the name “Eve.” Possibly the higher realm includes an unmentioned being named Life after whose image and/or likeness Eve was modeled. Adam, in contrast, has a single name, whether in the cloud (Adamas) or on earth and whether among the saved or among the ignorant (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 359–60). While the name “Eve” does not correspond to the immortal being in the cloud and thus provides only limited access to her, the name “Adam” does correspond to the incorruptible human being, Adamas, and thus provides knowledge about him.

Thanks to the damaged character of 53.1–4, it is impossible to know how, if at all, Jesus transitions from the creation of Adam and Eve to Saklas’s limitation of their life span. The phrase “Saklas did not command” echoes Gen 2:16, which suggests that the author may be referring to the command not to eat from “the tree for knowing (*ginōskein*) good and evil” (2:17)

(Brankaer and van Os 2019, 204). But later Jesus says that “god caused *gnōsis* to be brought to Adam and those with him” (54.8–10); that sentence is more likely the author’s way of addressing that theme. Instead, the survival of *čpo* (“produce, beget, offspring”) and probably *genea* in the plural (“in the races”) suggests that the author may have in mind god’s instruction to the first human beings to “increase, multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). In other words, Saklas did not in fact command Adam and Eve “to beget”—“except (or unless) . . .” A limitation on human reproduction would lead reasonably to a limitation on the length of human life.

Saklas’s announcement of the latter limitation—“Your life shall be measured out by time, along with your children”—might have biblical inspiration, but it lacks the specifically biblical vocabulary of the creation account. Probably the author has in mind either Gen 3:19 (“for you are earth, and to earth you will depart”); or 3:24 (Adam’s expulsion from the garden and the prevention of access to “the tree of life”); or, most likely, 6:3 (“My spirit shall not abide in these humans forever, because they are flesh, but their days shall be one hundred twenty years”); or all of them. The probable Greek vocabulary of his statement—*arithmos* (“number, reckoning, calculation”) and *chronos* (“time”)—suggests the enumeration of days in Gen 6:3, but it sounds more astrological than biblical. Astrologers wrote a great deal about calculating the duration of life and determining the manner of its end, but the topic was considered difficult and dangerous, and it was illegal; the complexity of its discussions rendered it safely obscure (Bouché-Leclercq 1899, 404–28; Beck 2007, 120–23). Ptolemy’s most extended discussion of the problem (*Tetrabiblos* 3.10) concludes with highly complicated calculations but features the vocabulary of number and time: “The number (*arithmos*) of the addition or subtraction is calculated by means of the location in degrees in each case. For the entire number of years is the same as the number of hourly periods (*hōriaiōi chronoī*) of each degree” (LCL 435.280–82). His “On the Division of Times” (*Peri chronōn diaireseōs*) (4.10), uses *chronos* to label a phase of a person’s life; each phase is governed by a planet “in accordance with its own number (*arithmos*)” (LCL 435.442). It is the stars that “rule (*kurieusōsin*)” over “the times” (*chronoī*) (LCL 435.456). Our author almost certainly had not read Ptolemy or any other astrologer, and he does not seem to think that human beings are powerless to resist the rule that the angels and stars exercise. Nonetheless, he appears to agree that the limited duration of human life is tied to calculations of time, that is, the calendar, over which the stars preside.

2. The Life Span of Humanity (53.8–16)

53 ⁸And Judas said to Jesus, “What is the maximum that a human being will live?”

¹⁰Jesus said, “Why are you amazed? For Adam received his time measured out, along with his race, ¹³in the place where he received his kingdom measured out, along with his ruler.”

NOTES

53.8–10. *What is the maximum that a human being will live?* Without a new fragment that appeared in 2009, the original editors reconstructed the end of line 8 [če-ou], creating the question, [ou] *pe pehouo* (Kasser et al. 2007, 225), which would repeat the beginning of Judas’s question at 46.16–17 (“what more have I received?”); scholars offered exegesis based on that repetition (Painchaud and Cazalais 2009). The new fragment revealed, however, that a šai is visible at the end of line 8, resulting in the question, [a]š *pe pehouo* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 291). The difference in specifier helps to make sense of *pehouo*, the meaning of which scholars earlier found puzzling (e.g., Kasser et al. 2007, 225 n. 9). While *ou* tends to ask “what?” or “what kind of?” *aš* usually means “which?” (of several persons or things) (Layton 2011, §72). That is, out of the several possible *houos*, which is the one that a human being will live? That suggests *houo* does not mean “more,” but “greater(est) one” or “maximum.” Out of the possible maximum amounts of time, what is the one that a human being will live?

a human being. Editors agree that the text should be restored [p]rōm[e]. The definite article expresses the general class of human beings, any human being (Layton 2011, §45).

53.11. *For Adam*. The clause that begins [č]e-*adam* may be understood as continuing Jesus’s question: “Why are you amazed that Adam received . . . ?”

53.13–15. *in the place where he received his kingdom measured out.* In lines 14–15 *nhēt-s* should be emended to *nhēt-f* (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 280). The original editors suggested deleting *hn-ouēpe* (“measured out”) in line 15 as a repetition of the phrase in line 13 due to dittography (Kasser et al. 2007, 225; cf. Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 280; Nagel 2014, 298), but the text makes sense as it stands (Jenott 2011, 176).

COMMENTS

Judas’s question underscores the importance of Saklas’s imposition of mortality on Adam and his descendants. The question does not seem particularly fraught, but Jesus’s use of the inflected interjection *ahro-k* in his response suggests Judas asked in some heightened emotional state: “What’s the matter with you that you are amazed?” (Layton 2011, §243[a]; cf. 44.20–21). Jesus does not answer Judas’s actual question but addresses it as an indication that Judas is astonished that human beings have a limited life span. Jesus correlates the limitation of humanity’s time to “the place” in which they exist or in which they have a “kingdom” and in which they have a ruler. The measurement and allotment of time corresponds to the measurement and allotment of the kingdom of this place.

The passage indicates that the gospel uses “kingdom” (*mnt-ero*) much as it does “aeon,” to refer to a variety of domains in which rule is exercised (Introduction IV.A). The kingdom to which Judas will not go (35.24–27) but that he will see (46.11–14), which will inspire him to groan, must belong to the higher realm. But the kingdom that Jesus mentions here as belonging to Adam is the one whose time people complete when the spirit separates from them and their bodies die (43.17–21); it belongs to this lower realm. That Adam has a kingdom means that he must exercise some form of rule, but he does so under the aegis of “his ruler.” The author likely has in mind the creator’s (that is, Saklas’s) charge to Adam and Eve to “rule” (*archein*) the other forms of life in the world (Gen 1:28). Jesus adds that Adam’s ruler also has a kingdom that is measured out—that is, the ruler’s kingdom is limited just as the human life span is limited—and thereby anticipates his statement that Saklas has times that have been assigned to him that he will complete (54.18–21). According to most early Jewish and Christian eschatologies, the ultimate god has limited the length of time during which lower rulers will hold sway in this world. For example, the *Community Rule* of Qumran declares, “God, in the mysteries

of his knowledge and in the wisdom of his glory, has determined an end to existence of deceit and on the occasion of his visitation he will obliterate it forever.” There is “the time appointed for judgment” (1QSa 4.18–20; García Martínez 1996, 7). The Epistle of Enoch presents a set time scheme in terms of ten weeks, a plan that is written in “heavenly tablets” (*1 En.* 93:1–10, 91:11–17). Paul speaks of an “appointed time,” which is coming soon to an end (1 Cor 7:29). Although Saklas is the immediate agent who limits Adam’s kingdom and life span, ultimately it is true divinity that has determined the times for kingdoms in this realm.

3. The Fate of the Human Spirit (53.16–54.12)

53 ¹⁶Judas said to Jesus, “Does the human spirit die?”

¹⁷Jesus said, “This is how god commanded Mikhaēl to give the spirits of the human beings to them while they serve—as a loan. ²²But the great one commanded Gabriēl to give the spirits to the great undominated race, the spirit along with the soul. ²⁵Therefore, the rest of the souls shall 54 [. . .] ²light [. . .] chaos [. . .] ⁵spirit within you (pl.), which you have caused to dwell in this flesh among the races of the angels. ⁸But god caused acquaintance to be brought to Adam and those with him, ¹⁰in order that the kings of chaos and Hades might not rule over them.”

NOTES

53.17. *Does the human spirit die?* “The human spirit” (*pn(eum)a n-rōme*) lacks an article, and thus the question does not concern any specific human spirit, but is a general question (Layton 2011, §47). It might also be translated, “Do human spirits die?” or “Does any human spirit die?” The morph *ša-* is almost certainly the conjugation base *šare-*.

53.21–22. *as a loan.* The alternative translation—“as a (prenuptial) gift”—parses the bound group as *e-peu-šap* (“for their prenuptial gift”; Crum 1939, 574b) rather than *e-pe-ušap* (“for the loan”; Crum 1939, 503a–b) (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 206). The expression *e-pe-ušap* is idiomatic in Coptic expressions for lending, however, and the idea of the spirit or life as a loan is a commonplace (COMMENTS). Nuptial imagery does not appear to play a role in the gospel.

54.5–6. *spirit within you (pl.), which you have caused to dwell.* Because of the lacuna that precedes this text, it cannot be determined whether *pn(eum)a* has an article and, if so, which one, nor is it clear to whom the plural “you” refers. The following clause (*nt-[a]tn-tref-ouōh*) seems to read

as a relative clause, but it could also be a focalized independent clause; the masculine singular object (“which . . .”) probably but not certainly refers to “spirit,” which would mean *pn(eum)a* does not have a plural article.

COMMENTS

Judas’s question logically follows from the previous answer. If the human being can live only so long, does that mean that the human spirit (*pneuma*) also dies? Jesus’s response provides the gospel’s clearest statement of an anthropology, but we can expect neither clarity nor consistency on this point. The lacunae in the first five lines of page 54 are impossible to fill, and the author in general does not show much interest in philosophy and thus in systematic positions on fundamental questions such as the constituent parts of the human being and people’s varying capacities for *gnōsis* and thus salvation. Still, it seems that at least here spirit (*pneuma*) is what gives life to human beings on earth and that how they receive that spirit determines the fate of their true self, which is their soul (*psuchē*). The invisible spirit or the self-originate has made it possible for at least some human beings to have acquaintance (*gnōsis*) and thus to escape domination from the lower rulers.

Commentators disagree about whether the “god” that commanded Mikhaēl is the same figure as “the great one” that commanded Gabriēl. The latter is probably the self-originate (or possibly the invisible spirit), and some have concluded that the former must be Saklas because there are two different angels, two different things that are given (spirits only vs. spirit and soul), and two different groups (human beings vs. the great undominated race) (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 361–62; Nicklas 2012, 116). The *de* that follows “the great one” may support this reading, for it often follows extraposed subjects when the subject changes (e.g., 34.22; 35.21; 38.1, 13; 43.16). Mikhaēl and Gabriēl do play contrasting roles in other gnostic works. As famous an angel as he is, Mikhaēl appears briefly in only one other gnostic source, the *Secret Book According to John*, where he is a lower angel who plays a role in the creation of the first human being (NHC II 17.30). That appearance may support the idea that Saklas is the god that commands him, and commentators point to the several biblical and early Jewish and Christian works that make Mikhaēl a high-ranking angel in service to the god of Israel (e.g., Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev 12:7; *T. Levi* 5:6–7; *T. Dan.* 6). Gabriēl, in contrast, appears in two gnostic works,

in both instances as one of the immortals. The *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* makes him an attendant of the luminary Oroiaël (NHC IV 64.17–18). In *Zōstrianos* Gabriël seems to play a role similar to his assignment in our passage: called “the spirit-giver,” he “bestows [a] holy spirit” (possibly) on an elect human being, whom he seals with a wreath (58.20–26). Gabriël is most famous for announcing the births of John the Baptist (to Zacharias) and Jesus (to Mary) (Luke 1:10–20, 26–38). On the basis of these and other passages, Brankaer and van Os (2019, 208) conclude that in our gospel “Michael represents . . . the world of Judaism (and thus of the archons), whereas Gabriel stands for (true) Christianity,” even though Gabriël is also a well-known servant of the god of Israel (Dan 8:16, 9:21; *1 En.* 9.1–3, 10.9, 20.7, 40.9). The different ways in which he and Mikhaël appear in gnostic literature do lend support to the hypothesis that the “great one” that commands the former (invisible spirit or self-originate) differs from the “god” that commands the latter (Saklas).

Other considerations argue against that conclusion, however. Later in our passage the “god” that causes acquaintance to be brought to Adam and those with him must be either the invisible spirit or the self-originate. If the god that commands Mikhaël is Saklas, then the author uses the unmodified term “god” in contradictory ways within a few sentences. Moreover, the use of the term “god” to refer to Saklas without any modification occurs elsewhere only once in the gospel, where it is voiced by the star powers that serve Saklas (40.19–22). Otherwise, the application of the term “god” to Saklas is qualified—for example, “their (the disciples’) god” (36.4) (Introduction IV.A). It seems likely, then, that throughout his short answer Jesus refers to the same divine being who ultimately orchestrates the destinies of human beings (Jenott 2011, 216–17). Because the self-originate is called “the god of light” (47.20–21) but the invisible spirit “has not been called by any name” (47.8–13), the former seems more likely than the latter, which still remains possible.

In addition, the actions that the two angels perform cannot be easily (or at all) mapped directly onto two different groups of people, the saved and the damned. Jesus’s initial statement coheres with his previous answer: human beings have their spirits only temporarily. God’s command to Mikhaël reflects what Layton (1979, 87) calls “a popular and widely-used figure for death in Greek and Latin epitaphs and the closely related *consolation* literature, that life is on loan, a debt that must be paid up, surrendered

(*apodidonai, reddere*) to the creditor at its close.” One line on a second-century sarcophagus in Rome reads, “Receiving spirit (*pneuma*) as a gift from heaven, I completed (my) time (*chronos*) and paid it back” (Kaibel 1878, 248, no. 613). As in our work, human beings have a limited time, during which they have *pneuma* from above, which they give up at death. Jews and Christians could look to a biblical basis for this idea in Gen 6:3, which we have seen may have inspired our author’s depiction of Saklas limiting the human life span: “My spirit (*pneuma*) shall not abide in these humans forever, because they are flesh, but their days shall be one hundred twenty years.” Philo of Alexandria told his reader that “you received the interval between your birth and death as a loan (*chrēsis*) from god” (*Spec.* 1.295). According to Josephus, those who die “in accordance with the law of nature” rather than by suicide “repay the loan which they received from god when he who lent is pleased to reclaim it” (*J.W.* 3.374). The Christian author of the *Treatise on Resurrection* plays on this language when he writes that “you will not pay back the superior element when you depart”: the dead Christian gets to keep his or her true self, the intellect (47.21–22). Pseudo-Phocylides declares:

For the souls (*psuchai*) remain unharmed among the deceased.

For the spirit is a loan of god to mortals, and (his) image (*pneuma gar esti theou chrēsis thnētoisi kai eikōn*).

For we have a body (*sōma*) out of earth, and when afterward we are resolved again into earth we are but dust; and then the air has received our spirit. (105–8; *OTP* 2:578)

The soul is what continues from this life to the next; *pneuma* is a divine loan that vivifies mortals, bears god’s image, and goes to the air after death; the body returns to dust.

Likewise, our gospel understands *pneuma* to be the life that god, through Mikhaēl, lends to human beings temporarily, as a loan to be repaid at the end of their time. The human life span is “while they serve (*šmše*),” almost certainly while they serve the rulers of this cosmos; according to the *Secret Book According to John*, after the first ruler made Adam and Eve forget true divinity and their true nature, their posterity “remained, rendering service” (*hupourgein*) (NHC II 25.7–11). Although the rhetorical commonplace applies the giving of spirit as a loan to all human beings, the following sentence in our passage might suggest that the great undominated race is permanently given their spirits, connected with their souls, and thus, like the Christian in the *Treatise on Resurrection*, they do not have to return the spirit, and this is why their souls continue after the death of the body. Yet

Jesus's earlier declaration about the saved race—"When they have completed the time of the kingdom and the spirit separates from them, their bodies will die, but their souls will live and be taken up" (43.17–23)—is at odds with that understanding.

The few other references to "spirit" and "soul" seem to confirm that "soul" is the center of individual identity and suggest that "spirit" is a vivifying force from above, which can be used rightly or wrongly. As in other gnostic works, the biblical basis for the distinction is probably Gen 2:7, in which god breathed into the first human being's face the "breath of life" (*pnoē zōēs*), and "the human being became a living soul (*psuchē*)." When the disciples react negatively to Jesus's statement about their inability to know him, Jesus says that it is their souls that have joined with their god in being irritated (34.25–35.1). The soul seems to be the center of the personality. The souls of "every human race" will die, but those of the saved will live and be taken up when their bodies die (43.14–23), and certain fortunate souls will "go up to the aeons on high" (44.6–7). It is the soul that either continues after death and enters the higher realm or perishes; it is the person.

The spirit, on the other hand, is what makes human beings alive in this realm: it is given as a loan, and death is described as the spirit separating from the person (43.19–20). It functions as the divine element among people—god's image, Pseudo-Phocylides would call it, or a gift from heaven, as the Roman sarcophagus reads—for the highest god is "a great invisible spirit" (47.8–9), and immortals (probably) can be called "virgin spirits" (50.7–8). And yet the spirit possessed by the disciples is too weak to stand in the presence of Jesus (35.7–9), and Jesus's description of the mighty and holy race leaves the disciples "disturbed in their spirit" (37.18–19). A possible explanation for the poor condition of the spirit within the disciples may lie in this passage, where Jesus refers (after a lacuna) to "spirit within you (pl.), which you have caused to dwell in this flesh among the races of the angels" (54.5–8). Because of the fragmentary nature of the preceding text, we cannot know who the plural "you" are, nor can we be certain that it is the spirit within people that they have caused to dwell in flesh, but that seems likely. It is possible that every person receives the vivifying divine spirit, temporarily for their life span on earth, but that they can, through the choices of their soul, treat that spirit poorly or, in the gospel's terms, cause it to dwell in flesh—the only occurrence of this word

in the gospel—among the ignorant and the sinful (“the races of the angels”). This language recalls Romans, in which Paul calls a sinful lifestyle living “in the flesh” (8:8) or “according to the flesh” (8:5) in contrast with living “according to the spirit” (8:1–17; cf. 7:14–18). Even more relevant is Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian Christians about how they should deal with a man who is living with his father’s wife: “When you are assembled, and my spirit (*pneuma*) is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (*sarx*), so that the spirit (*pneuma*) may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:4–5). Paul believed that the flesh could corrupt or even pollute the divinely given spirit within the person (and within the church), so that the destruction of flesh would mean salvation for the spirit (D. Martin 1995, 168–74). Our author appears to have shared this view. The disciples in our gospel have caused the spirit to dwell in the flesh, rendering the spirit within them weak and vulnerable to disturbance. The answer to Judas’s question, then, is that the human spirit does not die but can be ill-treated, but also that it is not really human.

How is it, then, that some people become members of the great undominated race? On the one hand, the first part of the answer suggests that they received their spirits and souls from Gabriēl rather than from Mikhaēl, although the reference to receiving spirit “as a loan” must apply to all human beings because the spirit leaves even members of the holy race at death (43.19–20). Possibly the souls that the members of the undominated race receive from Gabriēl are immortal, while those given to other people are mortal; such a notion would resemble the Stoic view that although all creation shares *pneuma* given by god, *psuchē* can differ, for example, in whether it is rational (human beings) or irrational (animals) (Jenott 2011, 217). Along these lines we may compare the *Revelation of Adam*. In that work, after the flood and the lower god’s covenant with Shem, the ancient representatives of the gnostics (“Those People”) enter the land inhabited by “the great people, who neither have become defiled nor will become defiled by any desire.” The author explains, referring either to Those People or to the great people or to both, that “it was not by a defiled hand that their souls came into existence, rather they came from a great commandment of an eternal angel” (74.30–75.8). The souls of the saved have an origin different from those of the damned. Our passage suggests that *The Gospel of Judas* may share this view, as might the fragmentary passage at 44.2–8.

On the other hand, Jesus does not say that Mikhaēl gives anyone souls, rendering uncertain a contrast in the souls that people receive or from whom people receive them. The last part of Jesus’s answer raises the possibility that human activity plays a significant role: people can degrade the divine spirit that they have received by bringing it to dwell in flesh. Moreover, Jesus concludes the answer by stating that “god caused acquaintance (*gnōsis*) to be brought to Adam and those with him, in order that the kings of chaos and Hades might not rule over them.” “Adam and those with him” could refer in a restricted sense to a predestined set of saved human beings: “the great race of Adam” whose fruit (?) will be exalted at the end (57.10–12). A more inclusive reading of “those with him” to mean Adam’s wife and children seems more plausible within the context of the anthropogony that runs from 52.14 and concludes here. In that case all human beings have the possibility of drawing on the *gnōsis* made available by god to recognize the truth, worship rightly, and behave ethically—in short, to elude the rule of the lower powers and become members of the great undominated race (Luttikhuizen 2012, 311–12). To be sure, the contrast between the two angels with which Jesus begins his answer argues against this reading, but that contrast has its own problems: all human beings must receive the spirit as a loan, not just those who receive it from Mikhaēl, and all human beings must receive souls, even though they are mentioned as being given only by Gabriēl.

One may compare our work’s confused and even inconsistent anthropology with the more philosophically consistent and elaborated teaching of the *Secret Book According to John* (NHC II 25.16–27.30) (Luttikhuizen 2012). Just as our gospel claims that god made acquaintance available to Adam and his descendants as a means of evading domination by the rulers, so too in the *Secret Book* forethought sends “a helper, a luminous afterthought,” to Adam because the rulers were about “to gain control over” or “rule” Adam’s “animate and perceptible body” (NHC II 20.9–24) (Jenott 2011, 217). As in our work, the savior’s discussion of human souls and the spirit comes in response to questions from the disciple John after the savior has described the creation of the first human being and (in Ap. John) the early history of Adam, Eve, and their sons. In the *Secret Book* as well, the soul is what defines the individual person: “Will all souls then be saved and go into the uncontaminated light?,” John asks. According to the savior, all people receive “the spirit of life”—“for without it no one

can stand up”—but a second spirit circulates among human beings, a “counterfeit spirit” that the lower rulers created (NHC II 29.23–26). The fates of individual souls are determined by whether the spirit of life “increases” within them and “strengthens” the soul or the counterfeit spirit increases within them and “weighs down the soul, and beguiles it into the works of wickedness.” Even souls that succumb to the counterfeit spirit will achieve salvation, but only after one or more reincarnations. Only those souls that “have gained acquaintance and then turned away” will be punished eternally. As coherent and nondeterministic as this scheme sounds, passages within the discussion sound more absolute: for example, “Those upon whom the counterfeit spirit descends will be beguiled by it and go astray.” Nonetheless, the *Secret Book* shares with our gospel the idea that human beings are souls, that a divine “spirit” gives them life, and that how human beings respond to or relate to that spirit determines the fates of their souls.

The discussion of soul, spirit, and body in *Judas* is briefer, less consistent, and more dualistic than that in the *Secret Book*. This difference suggests our work’s less philosophical character and reflects its more polemical agenda: it is a “report of judgment” against apostates (Luttikhuisen 2012, 314) rather than “the mystery of the immovable race,” intended for “those who are like you (John) in spirit” (Ap. John NHC II 31.29–32). Other gnostic works that share vocabulary and mythological motifs with our gospel, such as the *Revelation of Adam* and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, lack such an explicit discussion of these anthropological questions. They are not dialogue gospels like *Judas* and the *Secret Book*, but a revelatory testament (Apoc. Adam) and a heavenly message performed in a liturgical setting (Gos. Eg.). That *The Gospel of Judas* contains this admittedly unsatisfying attempt to rationalize its mythological account reflects its use of the *erotapokriseis* format within a dialogue in order to address personally relevant questions about anthropology and salvation.

4. The Corruption of Humanity (54.13–55.14)

54 ¹³And Judas said to Jesus, “What, then, will those races do?”

¹⁵Jesus said, “Truly I say to you (pl.), it is the stars that bring completion upon all these. ¹⁸When Saklas completes the times that have been assigned to him, ²¹their first star will come with the races, and the things that have been said will be brought to completion. ²⁴Next they will fornicate in my name and kill their children, 55 ¹and [. . .] wicked, ²and [. . .] ⁴the aeons, ⁵bringing their races and presenting them to Saklas. ⁷And next [. . .] will come, bringing the twelve tribes of [Israel] from [. . .], ⁹and all [the races] will serve Saklas, sinning in my name. ¹²And your (sing.) star will [rule] over the thirteenth aeon.” ¹⁴But then Jesus laughed.

NOTES

54.14–15. *those races*. The original editors rightly emend the text to *ng<en>ea et-mmau* (Kasser et al. 2007, 227).

54.17–18. *it is the stars that bring completion upon all these*. My translation interprets *nsioou eu-čōk ebol* as a durative sentence in focalizing conversion with the subject in extraposition as the focal point: “*the stars* (rather than those races) bring completion.” Nagel (2014, 300) emends the text to *eu<e->čōk ebol*: “the stars shall bring completion (or become complete).” I translate the phrase *čōk ebol* as an objectless transitive infinitive: “complete, fulfill” (Layton 2011, §169). Most translators, however, have considered the phrase to have an ingressive meaning (Layton 2011, §174): “are coming to fulfillment” (Jenott 2011, 179); “<werden> vollendet werden” (Nagel 2014, 301). For translations that suggest a finished process—“the stars are completed” (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 107; cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 149)—we would expect the stative (*eu-čēk ebol*). The ingressive meaning of *čōk ebol* appears a few lines later (54.23–

24), but in this sentence it would raise the question of the meaning of *ečn-nai tēr-ou*. Jenott (2011, 179) translates, “the stars are coming to fulfillment over all of these” (cf. Brankaer and van Os 2019, 107). Nagel (2014, 301) thinks that the prepositional phrase does not modify the verb but refers to the stars’ location or position with respect to “all these,” presumably referring to “those races” of Judas’s question: “Die Sterne über ihnen alles <werden> vollendet warden” (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 149). Crum (1939, 762b) documents only a few cases of *ečn-* with *čōk ebol*. In one instance the meaning of *čōk ebol* is transitive with an object: “I shall complete (*čōk ebol*) my wrath upon (*ečn-*) the wall” (Ezek 13:15). In another the meaning is ingressive: “The word that is written has come to fulfillment (*čōk ebol*) upon you (*ečō-k*)” (Bouriant 1892, 246). The active meaning of *čōk ebol* seems more likely here. Judas asks what “those races will do,” and Jesus replies that it is the stars that will act, not those races. Earlier Jesus referred to “the stars that bring everything to completion” (*nsiou et-čōk ebol n-hōb nim*) (40.17–18) in a passage with other parallels to this one. Therefore, *ečn-nai tēr-ou* refers to those upon whom or with respect to whom the stars bring things to completion, namely, those races about which Judas asked.

54.19–20. *the times that have been assigned to him*. I leave untranslated the personal element in the possessive pronoun (*nefouoeiš*, “his times”) as expressing the same idea as “that have been assigned to him.”

55.1. *and [. . .] wicked*. A *nu* appears before the lacuna, and the restoration *auō n[se . . .]* (“and they will”) seems probable (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 291). The word *thoou* survives after the lacuna and could modify a noun or be the last part of *pethoou* (“wickedness”).

55.2–5. *and [. . .] the aeons*. Nothing of meaning can be restored in lines 2–4 before *nai|ōn* at the end of line 4 and the beginning of line 5 (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 291; Nagel 2014, 300).

55.7. *[. . .] will come*. The subject of “will come” is *p[. . .]raēl*. Scholars have suggested as candidates for restoration three names of angels attested in other Coptic texts or in magical amulets: *Israēl*, *Istraēl*, and *Ezraēl* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 292 n. 17; Nagel 2014, 301 n. 37). All three suggestions are plausible.

55.8–9. *the twelve tribes of [Israel]*. The restoration of “Israel” is certain, but the size of the lacuna requires that it be written as a *nomen sacrum*: *p[iēl]* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 292).

55.9. *from* [. . .]. It cannot be determined from what the twelve tribes of Israel will be brought, but Nagel (2014, 300–301) offers the intriguing restoration of *ebo[l h] n-[ppōne]*: “from the dispersion.” Meyer (2011, 19) proposes “from Egypt.”

55.10–11. *all [the races]*. The survival of *-ea* at the end of line 10 makes the restoration of *genea* virtually certain (Jenott 2011, 180), but the lacuna, which must include *nqi-*, may not have room for the entire word; it is possibly then *[nqi-ng<en>]ea* (cf. 54.14–15; Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 292; cf. Nagel 2014, 300).

55.12. *And your star will [rule]*. The original editors’ restoration of *f-na-p-e[ro nqi-]peksiou* is certain (Kasser et al. 2007, 229). The line mistakenly contains a second instance of *auō*, which must be deleted.

COMMENTS

Prodded by Judas’s question, Jesus turns from the creation and mortality of human beings to their ultimate destinies, and the remainder of the dialogue concerns the end of the current world order. In contrast to such works as the *Secret Book According to John* and the *Revelation of Adam*, the revealer does not provide a “true history” of humanity after Adam and Eve as an alternative to the narrative in Genesis. This passage describes an escalation in human corruption that culminates in total service to Saklas in the name of Jesus. It returns to Jesus’s eschatological interpretation of the disciples’ dream (40.2–26), adding to that earlier scenario the gathering of Israel and the imminent rule of Judas.

“Those races” about which Judas asks are probably “the races of the angels,” that is, people who have misused the spirit that they have been given and therefore are not among the saved (54.5–8). What can they do at the end time? The answer is that “those races” will not act; rather, the stars will. It is “those races” upon whom the stars will bring completion and whose “first star” will come with them; they too are the ones who fornicate in Jesus’s name and kill their children and who will be presented to Saklas. “Those races” do not at first include the Jews, “the twelve tribes of Israel,” but some angel will bring them, so that “all the races will serve Saklas.” Judas’s star, which is not one of the stars that govern the races, will then move into the thirteenth aeon and take a leading position.

The primary features of this scenario—movement among stars (and other heavenly bodies), widespread moral corruption, and the gathering in of

peoples—characterize most early Christian eschatologies. In the Synoptic “Little Apocalypse” and Revelation, stars fall from heaven (Matt 24:29//Mark 13:24–25; Rev 6:13, 8:10–12, 12:4). In our passage stars guide or represent races of people; so too in Revelation seven stars correspond to the seven angels that guide or represent seven churches (1:20). Several commentators have proposed that “their first star” could refer to Judas’s star as the leading star (57.20–21) that rules over the thirteenth aeon or even to Judas himself (Jenott 2011, 218; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 149; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 210). Judas’s star, however, is an unlikely candidate to bring forward the doomed races for service to Saklas. The referent of “their” is most likely still “those races”; “their first star,” then, may simply indicate that this star is the first of several stars that will perform the action of bringing their multiple races, a process that the author compresses into his reference to “the things have been said” being brought to completion. Similarly, the author recounts the origin of the first and second luminous clouds in the higher realm and then summarizes the creation of the remaining ten, without stating their numerical total of twelve (47.26–48.18). The races that these stars will bring may be “the races of the stars” to whom the building in the disciples’ dream belongs (39.11–15). Fornication recurs throughout Revelation as representative of the human wickedness that precedes the end time (2:14, 20–21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2–4; 18:3, 9). Although modern scholars tend to read it metaphorically as referring to idolatry in Revelation, here it probably refers literally to sexual immorality. According to the Synoptic Gospels, angels will gather the elect from the four winds (Matt 24:31//Mark 13:27; cf. Rev 14:14–20), while in this scenario the stars come with their races, and (probably) an angel brings the twelve tribes of Israel from somewhere. Our passage belongs squarely in an early Christian tradition of eschatological heavenly movement, wickedness, and in-gathering of peoples.

At the same time this eschatological vision reflects the author’s specific interest in misdirected worship, for elements of it are carried over from the disciples’ dream and Jesus’s interpretations of that dream (COMMENTS 37.20–41.9, especially the table there). These include the sins of fornication and child murder, the roles of the stars in bringing everything to completion and presenting people to the altar/Saklas, devotion or service to the altar/Saklas, and the misuse of Jesus’s name. In this revision of the earlier dream interpretation, the original altar and human priests have disappeared

completely (at least in the surviving text) in favor of those that they represent: Saklas and the ruling stars. It is service to Saklas that the doomed races, including the Jews, share, a service to which their stars (or angels) have led them. Jesus sums this all up as “sinning in my name,” which configures this behavior as false devotion to Jesus and retains the author’s polemical focus on his fellow Christians, even with the addition of the Jews to the eschatological scene. The inclusion of the twelve tribes of Israel, like the mention of Judea at the start of the dialogues (33.22), reminds the reader that the misguided worship of the rival Christians derives from that of Israel and is directed to the same god. At the conclusion of this grim scenario Jesus laughs, a stark indication of lack of concern for the doomed races, their stars, and their god, Saklas. The laughter, as we learn after Judas asks about it, mocks the error of the stars and their destruction (55.15–22).

Judas’s star, in contrast, will ascend above all of this eschatological turmoil to rule the highest aeon of this cosmos, the thirteenth, a sign of Judas’s future role as cosmic ruler. The ascent of a star or some other heavenly sign associated with the advent of a messianic figure occurs in several early Jewish and Christian eschatological scenarios. Some of these appearances draw on Num 24:17:

A star shall dawn out of Jakob,
and a person shall rise up out of Israel,
and he shall crush the chiefs of Moab,
and he shall plunder all Seth’s sons.

For example, the *Damascus Rule* identifies this star as “the Interpreter of the Law who shall come to Damascus” (CD VII:18–20), and an anthology from Qumran includes Num 24:17 among its messianic testimonia (4QTest). According to the *Testament of Judah*, after a period of immorality (“licentiousness and witchcraft and idolatry”) and of destructive punishment from the Lord (“famine and plague,” etc.), “there shall arise for you a star from Jacob in peace, and a man shall arise from my posterity like the sun of righteousness” (23:1–24:1). We have seen that the priests’ sins in the disciples’ dream resembles those attributed to corrupt priests in the *Testament of Levi* 17 (COMMENTS 37.20–41.9). That work claims that after the temple’s priests descend into adultery and pederasty, “the Lord will raise up a new priest,” whose “star shall rise in heaven like a king” (18:2–3). Without specifically calling it a star, Matthew places the appearance of “the sign of the Son of Man . . . in heaven” immediately after the fall of

stars from heaven (24:30). The ascent of Judas's star resembles the rise of these messianic stars as a sign of the removal of the current powers of this world in favor of a new ruler, in this case not the anointed one or messiah, but "the thirteenth demon" (44.21, 46.23–24).

The coupling of the ascent of Judas's star with the destruction of other stars resembles also the so-called tradition of the star that some second-century Christians developed around the star that appears to the magi in Matt 2:1–12; Christians associated the rise of that star with the decline of other stars and the termination of the negative forces and practices that they represent, such as magic and fate (Hegedus 2003, 89–95). For example, in the *Proto-Gospel of James*, the magi report, "We saw a magnificent star shining among these stars and overshadowing them, so that the stars disappeared" (21.2). Closer to the worldview of *Judas* is Ignatius of Antioch's so-called hymn of the star, which several historians have characterized as "gnostic":

How, then, did he (Christ) appear to the aeons? A star shone in heaven beyond all the stars, and its light was ineffable, and its novelty caused astonishment; all the other stars, together with the sun and moon, became a chorus for the star, but its light surpassed them all; there was confusion: whence the novelty, the dissimilarity to them? Thence all magic was undone, and every bond of evil disappeared, ignorance was destroyed, and the ancient kingdom was abolished, while god appeared in a human way for the novelty of eternal life. What had been prepared by god received its beginning; as a result all things were moved because the dissolution of death was taking place. (*Eph.* 19.2–3)

Interpreters disagree about whether the star is Christ or a sign of Christ (Lookadoo 2017) and about whether Ignatius composed this passage himself or repeated something that he had received, but the passage contains clear resonances with gnostic literature (Schoedel 1985, 87–94)—and with our gospel in particular. These include the use of the term "aeons" to refer to lower powers, the undoing of both the current world order and fate ("bond of evil"), the overthrow of a kingdom (cf. Gos. Jud. 57.4–6), even the statement that the light "surpassed them all" (cf. Gos. Jud. 56.19–20). The tradition appears also in Clement's *Excerpts from Theodotus*:

This is why a strange and new star arose, bringing to an end the old astral order and shining with a new, not worldly light, tracing new and salvific courses, <just like> the lord himself, the guide of humanity, the one who descended to earth in order to transfer those who have faith in the anointed (Christ) from fate into his forethought. (74.2)

Here too the star signals the end of the current astral order and victory over fate. In *Judas* the ascending star that signals these changes is that of Judas, not of Christ, and it appears at the end of time, not at the birth of Jesus.

Nonetheless, the ideas are strikingly similar, suggesting that our author may have known this tradition and deliberately appropriated it. It is not the birth of the human being Jesus that accomplishes this cosmic dissolution and reorganization, which is most visible in the stars, but the sacrifice of that human being by Judas Iscariot.

5. The Destruction of the Stars (55.15–22)

55 ¹⁵[Judas] said, “Teacher, why [are you laughing at me?”]

¹⁶[Jesus] answered [and said,] “I am laughing not [at you, but] at the error of the stars, ¹⁹because these six stars go astray with these five combatants, ²¹and they all will be destroyed with their creations.”

NOTES

55.15–18. [*Judas*] said, “*Teacher, why [are you laughing at me?] [Jesus] answered [and said,] “I am laughing not [at you].”* Editors are agreed on the restoration of these fragmentary lines, which is in general virtually certain, with one exception. The original editors reconstruct “why [are you laughing at us (*nsō-n*)]” and “I am laughing not [at you (pl.) (*nsō-tn*)]” (Kasser et al. 2007, 229; Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 292; so too Bermejo Rubio 2012, 150–52; Devoti 2012, 232). As a variation on this option, Wurst (2017, 51) restores only “laughing” (without any phrase containing *nsō-*) in line 16 and the plural “at you” (*nsō-tn*) in line 18. My translation accepts the restoration by others of “laughing at me (*nsō-i*)” and “laughing not at you (sing.) (*nsō-k*)” (Jenott 2011, 180; Nagel 2014, 302; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 108). There is no strictly paleographic way to choose between these two options on line 16, where the entire hypothetical phrase *k-sōbe nsō-i/n* is lost in the lacuna. Instead, the matter hinges on the reconstruction of the middle of line 18, which is either *n[sō-k a]n a[ll]a* (with some variation in the last part of the line) or *n[sō-t]n a[n al]la*. How should the sequence *na* at the center be understood? The text is very difficult to read, but the spacing of the singular option seems slightly more persuasive, and throughout this dialogue with Judas, Jesus otherwise uses the second-person plural only in the “Truly, I say to you” formula (54.14–16, 56.8–9) and at 54.5–6.

COMMENTS

Judas's question prompts the explanation for Jesus's laughter. As in the case of Jesus's laughter at the disciples' eucharist, Jesus laughs not at Judas but at the lower false gods who have gone astray, a laughter probably derived from Ps 2:4 ("He who resides in the heavens will laugh at them, and the Lord will mock them") and other passages that describe god laughing at the destruction of sinners and enemies (Pss 36[37]:12–13, 58:9[59:8]; Prov 1:26) (Bermejo Rubio 2012, 152; COMMENTS 33.22–36.10). If this Jesus "has something of a wicked and merciless streak" (Gathercole 2007, 205), that may be a trait of divine beings in the biblical tradition. We learn for the first time clearly that the stars will be destroyed "with their creations," probably not referring to the total elimination of the cosmos, but either to the dissolution of the oppressive structure that the lower gods have established or to the destruction of their races (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 213), or to both.

The puzzle of this passage is why there are eleven heavenly beings, divided into six stars and five combatants (*polemistēs*). The movement of Judas's star into the thirteenth aeon (55.12–13) suggests that the total of eleven stars corresponds to the other eleven disciples (Jenott 2011, 218; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 152), even though the earlier reference to Judas's replacement may indicate the restoration of the total number of heavenly bodies associated with the disciples (*stoicheia*?) to twelve after Judas's separation from them (36.1–4) (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 213). In this eschatological scenario Judas's star does not go astray (*planē*) as the other stars do, but takes the ruling position that it has been assigned. The sets of six and five are more perplexing. Multiples of six and five occur in the unfolding of heavens and firmaments as the higher realm transitions to the lower realm (49.12–50.3; Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 366–67), but it is not clear how those multiples would apply here. It is more promising to identify the five combatants as the five named angels that rule over Hades and chaos (52.4–14) (Bermejo Rubio 2012, 152) or the five planets known to the ancients (Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 367; S. Kim 2008, 304). If they are the five planets, it may be their violations of a regular pattern of movement that justify their characterization as combatants. Alternatively, Meyer (2011, 58) proposes that the six stars that go astray are the five planets plus the moon.

The characterization of stars as warriors or constituting an army is common in biblical and early Jewish literature (Jenott 2011, 218) and appears earlier in our gospel (37.3–6 with COMMENTS). The term *polemistēs* (“fighter, warrior, combatant”) is not known to have been applied to stars, however, and its use here for only some rather than all stars suggests that it may have a specific nuance. In general, the word appears more often in Greek literature later than *Judas*, especially Christian works whose authors made use of the Septuagint, where it occurs frequently in reference to human warriors. Most biblical instances are neutral references to military men among the Israelites, but some prophetic works do use the term in describing the violent events that will accompany the day of the Lord (e.g., Joel 2:7, 3:9). According to Isaiah, the *polemistēs* is among the leaders whom the Lord “will take away from Judea and from Jerusalem” (3:1–2). The Lord instructs Ezekiel to tell Tyre that its *polemistai* are among those who “shall fall in the heart of the sea in the day of your fall” (27:27). According to Jeremiah, Babylon’s “combatants shall be thrown down” (27[50]:30; cf. 28[51]:32, 30:15[49:26]). These passages provide biblical precedent for the use of the term to describe warlike enemies that will be defeated at the time of judgment.

A curious reference to the *polemistēs* as enemy appears also in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* and is probably the only other known use of the term in a Christian work in the general context of our gospel. Defending marriage as an honorable choice for Christians, Clement attacks pseudo-celibate Christians who have given themselves over to lust, live licentiously, and “seek after impurity and teach their neighbors to do the same.” “According to the prophet,” Clement writes, they are “‘combatants (*polemistai*) struck by their own tails (*ourai*),’ which the Greeks call *kerkoi*. Those whom the prophecy hints at might be lecherous men, incontinent men, those who fight (*polemistai*) with their tails, children of darkness and wrath, bloodthirsty killers of themselves and murderers of their neighbors” (*Strom.* 3.106). The prophetic passage to which Clement refers is unknown, although Revelation refers to the scorpion-like tails of the warriors in a locust army (9:10) as well as to horses whose power is “in their tails” (9:19). Clement notes that another word for tail is *kerkos*, which could also refer to the penis. Thus, sexually immoral men are men who fight by means of their tails/penises, as well as suicides and murderers. Clement’s “combatants” are not stars, but they are enemies of true divinity and moral

righteousness. Clement urges his readers to shun fellowship with such combatants; the author of our gospel warns and assures his readers that the astral combatants against the true god will be destroyed, along with all that they have made.

Judas is not the only gnostic work to include the destruction of heavenly beings and their control of humanity in its eschatology. *First Thought in Three Forms* makes the annihilation of planetary and astral fate a prominent aspect of eschatological salvation. Invoking the traditional eschatological image of a woman in labor, the narrator forecasts (in the past tense) earthquakes and fire. And then “the lots of destiny and those which traverse the houses were greatly disturbed by a sharp thunderclap.” The planets complain, “All our house has moved; the whole circuit of our ascent has gone to ruin” (43.4–26). Alarmed and puzzled, the lower powers confront Ialtabaōth with his apparently false claim to ultimate power and divinity, and they lament, “For the undoing of our bonds has already come, spans of time are falling short, days have dwindled; our time has been fulfilled” (44.14–17). In addition to heavenly destruction, *First Thought’s* association of the powers with the calendar (spans of time, days) resonates with *Judas*. Our gospel, however, links the destruction of the stars that fight against the true god to the ascent of Judas’s star and, as the following passage reveals, to the crucifixion.

6. The Fate of the Baptized (55.23–57.15)

55 ²³And Judas said to Jesus, “Come then, what will those who have been baptized in your name do?”

²⁶Jesus said, “Truly I say [to you], this baptism 56 [. . . in] my name [. . .] ⁴will destroy the entire race of Adam, the earthly man. ⁶Tomorrow the one who bears me will be tortured. ⁸Truly I [say] to you, no hand of a mortal human being [will . . .] me.

¹²“Truly [I] say to you, Judas, as for those who offer sacrifice to Saklas, they all shall [perish], ¹⁵for the [. . .] upon the [. . .] and all [. . .] ¹⁸everything that is [evil]. ¹⁸But as for you, you will surpass them all, ²⁰for you will sacrifice the human being who bears me.

²²“Already your horn has been exalted,

²³and your anger has been kindled,

²⁴and your star has passed by,

²⁵and your heart has [. . .].

57 ¹ “Truly [I say to you,] your final [. . .] ⁵of the aeon have been [defeated, and] the kings have become weak, ⁶and the races of the angels have groaned, ⁸and the evils that [they sowed . . .] the ruler being destroyed. ¹⁰And next, the [. . .] of the great race of Adam will be exalted, ¹²for prior to heaven, the earth, and the angels, that race exists through the aeons.

NOTES

55.26–27. *Truly I say [to you]*. Although this formula can use the plural “you” even in discussions with Judas alone (e.g., 54.16–17, 56.8–9), the lacuna appears to have room only for the singular form *na-k* (Kasser et al. 2007, 229).

55.27–56.4. *this baptism [. . . in] my name [. . .]*. Jenott (2011, 182) reconstructs 56.1 as *nt-[au-či mmo-f hn-]paran*: “this baptism [that they have received in] my name” (so too Nagel 2014, 302). This restoration is plausible, even probable; however, 56.2–4 (with the exception of the last three letters on line 4) is impossible to reconstruct.

56.4–5. *will destroy*. The subject of *na-fō[t]e* (“will destroy”) is masculine singular (*f-*); it could refer to a male person or being (“he”) or to a nonpersonal entity that is grammatically masculine in gender (“it”).

56.6. *Adam, the earthly man*. My translation takes *prmmkah* to be in apposition to “Adam,” specifying to which Adam or aspect of Adam the race to be destroyed belongs or corresponds. It is grammatically possible, however, that *prmmkah* begins the next sentence, with *p-et-r-pho[rei] mmo-i* in apposition to it: “Tomorrow the earthly man, the one who bears me, will be tortured.” In that case, it is argued, “‘Adam’ alone would be the code word for the earthly and mortal human beings and ‘earthly’ alone an epithet of the avatar (or apparent body) of Jesus” (Schmid 2018, 386). The later reference to the saved human beings as “the great race of Adam” with no qualification of “Adam” (57.12) and the allusion to 1 Cor 15:47–49 render that alternative unlikely, however. “The earthly man” serves to distinguish this doomed race of Adam from the saved race of Adam.

56.9–11. *no hand of a mortal human being [will . . .] me*. After the lacuna in line 11 the text reads either [. . .]*obe ero-i* or [. . .]*ōbe ero-i*. Some editors restore [*na-n*]*obe ero-i* (“will sin against me”) (Wurst 2017, 52; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 110), while others restore [*na-č*]*ōbe ero-i* (“will touch me”) (Jenott 2011, 182; Nagel 2014, 302). Although Wurst (2017, 53) favors the former option, he states that either is possible.

56.13–14. *as for those who offer sacrifice to Saklas*. The *če-* is part of the formula “Truly, I say to you” and should be left untranslated. The clause “those who offer sacrifice to Saklas” is not preceded by a conjugation base and so must be in extraposition (“as for those who offer sacrifice to Saklas, they . . .”), probably in contrast to *ntok de* (“but as for you, you . . .”) at 56.18–19.

56.14. *they all shall [perish]*. In his most recent reading of the text, Wurst (2017, 52–53) reconstructs the relevant section of this line as *eue-[fot-]ou tēr-ou* (“they all shall be destroyed”). Nagel (2014, 302), on the other hand, reconstructs [*se-na-tako-*]*ou tēr-ou*, which has roughly the same meaning with a different conjugation base and verb. Schenke Robinson

(2011, 127) suggests [se-na-m]ou tēr-ou (“they all will die”), which Wurst considers too short. My translation relies on Wurst’s claim that *eue-* (“they shall”) is visible but accepts Nagel’s suggestion of the verb *tako* rather than *fōte* because there is no *ebol*, which follows *fōte* at 56.5.

56.15–18. *for the [. . .] upon the [. . .] and all [. . .] everything that is [evil]*. Except for a few letters at the beginning and end of each line, most editors agree lines 15–17 cannot be reconstructed. Wurst (2017), however, offers the following through line 18: *če-nh[ethn]os t[ēr-ou e]t-hi|čn-p[kah] mn-[n(eu)genea] tē|r-ou n[e]u-[plana: n]-se-[r-]|hōb nim e[u-]soou*, which I translate, “so that [all the nations] upon the [earth] with all [the(ir) races] might not [go astray] and [perform] everything that is evil.” This reconstruction would make a significant difference for the meaning of the passage and the gospel as a whole (COMMENTS). Although nearly all of it relies on few legible letters, the crucial sites are the two conjugation bases on line 17 (*neu-* and *nse-*), especially the first, which creates an adverbial clause of purpose or result with the negative optative, followed by the conjunctive. Wurst (2017, 53) claims that *n[e]u-* in line 17 is “the most likely reading of the traces,” but his reconstruction has not persuaded the only editors of the text since his proposal (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 216–17). The restoration of “evil” in line 18 has scholarly consensus.

56.18–19. *But as for you*. The initial *ntok de* (“but as for you”) presumably contrasts Judas with the subject of the previous sentence (“those who offer sacrifice to Saklas”).

56.23. *and your anger has been kindled*. There are two verbs *mouh*, one meaning “fill, become full” and the other “burn” (Crum 1939, 209–20). Both are possible and reflect usage in the Septuagint. For example, in Jer 6:11, the Lord says, “My anger I have filled” (*ton thumon mou eplēsa*), and thus Judas’s anger could become filled. On the other hand, in Isa 30:27 the Lord’s anger “is burning” (*kaiomenos*), and in Ps 2:12 “his anger is kindled (*ekkauthē(i)*) quickly.” My translation reflects the earlier use of fire imagery (41.15–18, 42.18–20, 51.10), but the translation “and your anger has been filled” seems equally possible.

56.25. *and your heart has [. . .]*. The missing verb ends in *-te*. Subsequent editors have rejected as too long for the lacuna the original editors’ proposal of *amahte* (“your heart has become strong”) (Kasser et al. 2007, 231). Schenke Robinson (2008, 96) suggests *hite* (“your heart has convulsed”); Turner (apud Jenott 2011, 182; cf. Turner 2008, 236), *sobte*

(“your heart has become ready”); Nagel (2009, 136), *sōte* (“your heart has been redeemed”); and Jenott (2011, 182), *kōte* (“your heart has strayed”). Of these options, although it is the longest, *sobte* is the most appealing. In multiple Psalms the heart is described as “ready” (*sbtōt*): for example, “My heart is ready (*pahēt sbtōt*), O God, my heart is ready” (Ps 56:8[57:7]; cf. 107:2[108:1], 111[112]:7). The other suggestions make less sense in context.

57.1–4. *Truly [I say to you,] your final [. . .]*. Although it is lost in the lacuna, “to you” is almost certainly singular (*na-k*) because “your” contains the singular personal element (*nek-*).

your final [. . .]. The article phrase that begins with or is “your final” is plural: *nekhaeo[u . . .]*. Several editors have suggested *nekhaeo[u n-nehoou]* or the like: “your final days” (e.g., Nagel 2014, 304). Alternatively, the plural *haeou* can be used absolutely to mean simply “end” (Ps 72[73]:17; Shenoute CSCO 73:193); thus, “your end.” From here on, nothing meaningful can be reconstructed in lines 2–4.

57.4–5. *[. . .] of the aeon have been [defeated]*. From line 4 to line 5 -*onos* appears before *m-paiōn* and *au-* survives after, indicating that a Greco-Coptic noun precedes “of the aeon” and is probably in the plural. Jenott (2011, 184) suggests *nethronos* (“the thrones of the aeon”), and Nagel (2014, 304) proposes *diakonos* (“deacon of the aeon”). My translation follows Jenott’s reading *au-qō[tp]* (“have been defeated”), which makes great sense, but it must be admitted that no other editor has discerned *qō* after *au*.

57.8–9. *and the evils that [they sowed . . .]*. In the phrase *m-pet-hoou*, *pet-hoou* functions as a noun (“evil, wickedness”) with the plural definite article. My translation accepts Jenott’s (2011, 184) reconstruction of the last part of the line as *nt-a[u-č]oou* (so too Brankaer and van Os 2019, 112). Jenott restores also *eu-fōt[e auō]* in the middle of line 9, but all other editors find nothing legible until *par-* at the end of the line.

57.9–10. *the ruler being destroyed*. Commentators differ about how to understand *par|[khōn] ef-fōte ebol*. Nagel (2007, 258) proposes emending the text to *ef<e->fōte* (“the ruler will be destroyed”) to bring the clause into the future in alignment with the verbs that follow (so too Schenke Robinson 2008, 92). Jenott (2011, 220), however, argues against this emendation and takes the clause to be a durative conjugation in focalizing conversion (“the ruler is wiped out”), claiming that “sudden shifts in tense are not

uncommon in apocalyptic literature.” Alternatively, it could be a circumstantial conversion, modifying the main clause lost in the preceding clause (“. . . with the ruler being destroyed”) (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 113). My translation follows this last option as the most neutral of the alternatives; if the preceding main clause is in the past tense like the clauses that precede it, then it would mean something like “as the ruler was being destroyed.”

57.11–12. *the [. . .] of the great race of Adam*. Editors differ on the restoration of the lacuna in line 11. The original editors read *pt[u]pos*: “the [image (*tupos*)] of the great race of Adam” (Kasser et al. 2007, 57; so too Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 284); similarly Nagel (2014, 304) reads *p[tu]pos*. Jenott (2011, 33–34) agrees with Nagel that only the pi is visible before the lacuna, but he argues that there is space for three rather than two letters and proposes *p[kar]pos*: “the [fruit] of the great race of Adam” (so too Brankaer and van Os 2019, 112). It is probably impossible to decide between these alternatives paleographically; both can make sense exegetically, but perhaps Jenott’s reading more so (COMMENTS).

COMMENTS

This concluding section of the dialogues brings Jesus’s eschatological discourse to a close. The evident importance of its content for understanding the role of Judas and the significance of the crucifixion makes its fragmentary character particularly disappointing. The section divides into three units, defined by Jesus’s three uses of the formula *alēthōs ti-čō mmo-s na-k* (“Truly, I say to you”) with “you” (most likely) in the singular, in response to Judas’s question about those baptized in Jesus’s name: (1) a contrast between the destruction suffered by “earthly” human beings and the invulnerability of Jesus; (2) a contrast between the fate of those who sacrifice to Saklas and that of Judas; and (3) a contrast between the defeat of lower rulers and the exaltation of the saved people. The first unit concludes with a statement introduced by *hamēn ti-čō mmo-s nē-tn* (“Truly, I say to you”) with “you” in the plural. In each unit a prophecy of the destruction of some beings (the race of the earthly Adam, those who sacrifice to Saklas, and the lower rulers) precedes a reference to a better fate for others (the divine Jesus, Judas, the great race of Adam). The entire section is tied together by an inclusio: it begins with the annihilation of “the

entire race of Adam, the earthly man,” and concludes with the exaltation of the fruit, image, or something else “of the great race of Adam.”

Jesus’s reference to cosmic destruction prompts Judas to ask about those who have been baptized in Jesus’s name: what will they do in the coming turmoil? The question concerns that portion of the gospel’s likely audience composed of Christians who are not affiliated with the author’s gnostic community. Jesus’s response cannot be reconstructed, but it does not seem promising. Jesus almost always follows the “Truly, I say to you” formula with a warning; he has had nothing positive to say about anything performed in his name (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 213); and when the text becomes legible, he is prophesying the destruction of “the entire race of Adam, the earthly man.” On the other hand, it seems unlikely that the author would make salvation impossible for baptized Christians affiliated with rival groups, whom he presumably would want to convert to the true message of Jesus. It is probable that the baptism received in Jesus’s name will not provide security from the destruction that will consume the race of the earthly Adam, unless one gives up worship of and sacrifice to the false god Saklas.

The race that will be destroyed belongs to Adam, but specifically to the Adam who is “the earthly man” (*prmmkah*). The Coptic term *rmmkah* might translate *gēgenēs* (“earth-born”), *epigeios* (“earthly”), or *choikos* (“made of earth” or “of dust”) (Crum 1939, 131b). Our author’s use of the term is likely indebted to 1 Cor 15:47–49.

The first man [Adam] was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust (*ho choikos = pebol hm-pkah*), so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven (*ho epouranios*), so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Our gospel’s concept of “Adam, the earthly man,” probably takes from this passage the importance of Adam’s creation from earth and his resulting mortality (52.18–19, 53.5–7) based in his body of earth (43.20–21); moreover, there are people “of the dust” who correspond to him or, in our gospel’s language, who belong to his race. The earthly man in 1 Corinthians exists in contrast to “the man of heaven”; according to Paul, the heavenly man is Christ, but here the superior counterpart to the earthly man may be the heavenly Adamas, whose “great race” exists before “the earth” (57.13). In Paul’s view all people bear the image of the man of dust, but the saved can and will bear the image of the man of heaven. Among second-century

Christians, the Valentinians most fully exploited Paul's terminology in 1 Corinthians 15—which includes not only *choikos* (“made of dust”), but also *pneumatikos* (“spiritual”) and *psuchikos* (“animate”)—in order to speak about human salvation and damnation and about different kinds of people (e.g., Iren. *Haer.* 1.5.5–7.5; Clem. Al. *Exc.* 50–56). Others employed the vocabulary of “earthly” in more general ways: *1 Clement* seems to consider *gēgenēs* (“earthborn”) as synonymous with *thnētos* (“mortal”) (39.2), and Ignatius of Antioch and the *Shepherd of Hermas* employ *epigeios* (“earthly”) as the opposite of “heavenly” (Ign. *Eph.* 13:2, *Trall.* 9:1; Herm. Mand. 11.6–19).

Gnostic works do not use the vocabulary of “earthly” or “of dust” as frequently as or in the sectarian sense that Valentinian authors do, but they do associate mortality with being modeled of earth. In the *Secret Book According to John* the creation of Adam's material body from fire, earth, water, and wind makes the human being mortal (NHC II 20.35–21.13). According to the *Revelation of Adam*, “the entire (multitude of) modeled form that came into existence out of mortal earth (*pikah et-moout*) will dwell under the authority of death. But those who think in their hearts upon acquaintance with god the eternal will not perish” (76.17–24). The rulers in the *Reality of the Rulers* say to one another, “Come, let us create a human being that will be soil from the earth (*oukhous ebol hm-pkah*).” The narrator reports, “They modeled their creature as one wholly of the earth (*e-urmnkah tēr-f*)” (87.24–27). The rulers' human being of earth cannot move until a spirit (*pneuma*) descends and dwells within him, at which point “that human being came to be a living soul (*psukhē es-onh*)” (88.11–16). Later, when the female spiritual principle departs from the snake in the garden, the snake is left merely “a thing of the earth” (*rmnkah*) (90.12). The *Reality of the Rulers*'s implied anthropology of a mortal body of earth, a life-giving spirit from above, and the human identity as soul matches that of *Judas*. Our passage's reference to the eschatological destruction of the race belonging to the “earthly” Adam coheres with the gnostic location of mortality in the earthly body; those who have not, as the *Revelation of Adam* puts it, thought upon “acquaintance with god the eternal” will perish. They are, as Paul would have it, “those of dust” as was “the man of dust.” Possibly the bodies of saved people are included in this destruction because bodies belong to the race of the earthly Adam.

Jesus places the torture of the human being who bears him within the context of eschatological violence and destruction but assures his followers that he cannot be harmed by any mortal human being. The description of the human bearer of Jesus as “tortured” (*basanizein*) is rare for Jesus’s suffering and death, but early Christians used it regularly for the eschatological punishment of sinners (Luke 16:23, 28; Rev 9:5; 14:10; 18:7, 10, 15; 20:10; Herm. Sim. 6.3–5). One may compare Adam’s prophecy in the *Revelation of Adam* that the rulers will “punish (*kolazein*) the flesh of the human being upon whom the holy spirit has come” (77.16–18). The torture of the one who bears Jesus functions as an example of the violence that will come upon the entire race of the earthly Adam (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 214). Nonetheless, that human being will not be “destroyed” like that race, the world ruler (57.9–10), and the stars and their creations (55.21–22); rather, he will be tortured (*pace* Brankaer and van Os 2019, 214). It is uncertain whether that difference is significant and, if so, how. The “sacrifice” of the human Jesus implies his death (56.20–22), but perhaps the gospel envisions his resurrection. According to Irenaeus, some gnostics taught that the human Jesus into whom the divine anointed descended did rise from the dead (*Haer.* 1.30.13–14). Whatever the fate of his human bearer, no mortal human hand can harm the divine Jesus, whether he says “sin against me” or “touch me” (Note on 56.9–11, *no hand of a mortal human being [will . . .] me*). If the correct reading is “sin,” then its use here likely does not have the theological sense (cf. Brankaer and van Os 2019, 216); that is, Jesus would not be saying that torturing the human being is not a sinful deed that offends Jesus. Rather, it would have the sense of “violate” or “harm”; no mortal hand can violate or harm the divine Jesus. The divine Jesus and the human being who bears him are different, and the former is not affected by what the latter suffers.

Because the author does not use the term *christos* for Jesus, “Christology” is an unsatisfactory term for how the gospel understands the relationship between the divine Jesus and his human bearer; nonetheless, it is the usual scholarly term for the area of Christian thought that includes this problem. As Jenott (2011, 11–17) rightly argues, it is not illuminating to characterize the gospel’s Christology as “docetic,” if one means by that adjective that the body of Jesus is not real, or that the suffering and death on the cross are not real, or that the divine element or person abandons the body before the suffering and death (*pace*, e.g., Ehrman 2006, 108–10;

Gathercole 2008, 94). Jesus's appearances are not characterized by the polymorphism that might indicate immateriality (Note on 33.18–21, *But many a time . . .*); the human being who bears Jesus certainly has a real body and does suffer (“tortured”) and die; and it is possible that the divine Jesus is present in the human being who bears him when he is crucified (COMMENTS 57.16–58.6). Likewise, the gospel does not teach a substitutionary theory of the crucified one, that is, that another person suffered in Jesus's place, whether that substitute is Simon of Cyrene, as Basilides taught (Iren. *Haer.* 1.24.4), or he is simply “someone else,” as in the *Second Discourse of Great Seth* (NHC VII 55.9–56.20) (e.g., Nagel 2007, 265–70). The human being who is tortured and sacrificed does not substitute for Jesus: he is Jesus's human bearer, in whom Jesus appears on earth (cf. Schmid 2012b, 91–93). The crucified one is a human being (*rōme* = *anthrōpos*), who presumably walks and talks, enters a guest room to pray, and endures torture (58.10–12). According to the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, the Jesus whom the great Seth “put on” was “living” and “reason-born” (*logogenēs*) (NHC III 64.1–3). There is no basis, then, for the conclusion that Judas hands over “an empty human body” (Turner 2008, 219; cf. Meyer 2008, 52; Schenke Robinson 2018). Jenott (2011, 17–22) labels our work's Christology one of two natures, a characterization of “Gnostic Christology” that he traces back to Adolf von Harnack (cf. Tröger 1977). There is a human Jesus and a divine Jesus: the former “bears” (*phorein*) the latter; the former is vulnerable to suffering, while the latter is not.

To be sure, the language of the human being “bearing” the divine being is peculiar, but it lends itself to analogies with a person's body and soul or with the embodied human being and the divine presence in general, and thus it need not imply a lack of unity between the two levels of being. As Nagel (2007, 266) observes, some early Christians did use the language of “bearing” in Christology and anthropology, but in reverse: the soul or divine being bears or wears the flesh or human being. According to one Valentinian excerpt, “those who bear (*phorei*) the flesh are the ones who are naked” (Gos. Phil. 56.29–30). In the *Epistula Apostolorum*, Jesus states, “Although I am without flesh, I have borne (*phorei*) the flesh” (21). As we have seen, the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* asserts that the Great Seth “put on” Jesus (NHC IV 75.16–17). But the metaphor, if we can call it that, can go the other way. Jenott (2011, 17–18) points to Plato, who

describes the body as “bearing (*pheron*) on top the residence of our most divine and holiest part” (*Tim.* 45a), and to Philo, who says that the human being is “the one who carries (*pherontos*) and bears around (*agalmatophorountes*)” the intellect “as a divine image” (*Opif.* 69). Schmid (2012b, 89–90) notes similar language among second-century Christians. Ignatius of Antioch refers to Christians as “god-bearers” (*theophoroi*) (*Eph.* 9.2). In more directly Christological contexts, Melito of Sardis writes that Jesus “bears (*phorei*) the Father and is borne (*phoreitai*) by the Father” (*De pascha* 105). Irenaeus claims that through Christ “we receive adoption, as the human being bears (*portante*), receives, and embraces the son of god” (*Haer.* 3.16.3); thanks to the Holy Spirit, people can become “gradually accustomed to receive and to bear (*portare*) god” (*Haer.* 5.8.1). These examples suggest that although “bearing” describes a relationship between two different beings (father and son, god and human beings) or different levels of being (intellect and soul/body), it does not necessarily entail sharp separation. Presumably, Philo would agree that in the virtuous person, the human body/soul that bears the intellect can be harmed or tortured without harming the intellect, even though they somehow form a single person.

In *The Gospel of Judas* it is not clear to what extent the divine Jesus and the human being who bears him form a single person. Tröger (1977, 47) distinguished among four types of “docetic” Christologies in Nag Hammadi works: (1) only the passible fleshly “covering” (*Hülle*) of the savior suffers; (2) the savior actually does suffer “but is basically impassible”; (3) the savior only apparently suffered and died on the cross; and (4) the question of the savior’s suffering is left open or is even judged positively within a gnostic understanding of the cross’s significance for salvation. Although this division is too schematic, it does provide some rubrics from which to assess our work. On the one hand, when Jesus refers to only the human being who bears him as tortured and sacrificed, the gospel seems to belong to the first type: only the human Jesus suffers. On the other hand, Jesus’s assertion of his own invulnerability and the gospel’s statements that Jesus “celebrated the Passover” (33.5–6) and was handed over by Judas (58.25–26) suggest, in accordance with the second type, that a single person (divine and human) undergoes these experiences without any harm to the divine Jesus. As one potential parallel, the gnostic work *Zōstrianos* cryptically mentions “the one who (that which?) experiences suffering although unable to suffer” (*pē et-čī-mkah ef-e n-at-čī-mkah*) (48.27–28). The third type does

not seem to apply. In accordance with the fourth type, the gospel does ascribe a positive role to the crucifixion, as I discuss below.

Christologies that, like *Judas*, clearly distinguish between human and divine aspects, elements, or natures of Jesus appear in second- and third-century Christian works of diverse theological orientations and varying perspectives on Christ's suffering and death (Jenott 2011, 19–21). The *Epistle of Barnabas*, for example, characterizes the incarnation as “the Lord” being “revealed (*phanerōthēnai*) in the flesh” (5.6) and the crucifixion as when he “offered the vessel of the spirit (*to skeuos tou pneumatos*) as a sacrifice (*thusia*)” (7.3), a formulation remarkably close to our work. That which was sacrificed appears to have been a fleshly container for the spiritual Jesus. The author seems to think that although the divine Jesus was invulnerable to suffering, he nonetheless suffered on the cross: “The son of god was unable to suffer (*ouk ēdunato pathein*)—except for our sake” (7.2). Presumably, the fleshly vessel explains how the one unable to suffer could suffer. Melito of Sardis, who we have seen uses the language of “bearing” in his Christology, writes that Christ “accepted, through the body that is able to suffer, the sufferings of the one who suffers, but by the spirit that is unable to die he killed the human-killing death” (*De pascha* 66). And yet Melito can say about the single Christ that “he endured many things in many (people)”; for example, “he was murdered in Abel . . . persecuted in David . . . hanged on a tree” (69–70). Again, the possession of a body able to suffer explains how a savior who could not die could do so. Tertullian sharply distinguishes between two “substances” (*substantiae*) in Christ, divine and human, and attributes the “powers” (*virtutes*) to the former and the “sufferings” (*passiones*) to the latter. He does so, however, to show that “god was really crucified” and Christ was not merely a “phantom” (*phantasma*) (*Carn. Chr.* 5). These so-called proto-orthodox authors differentiate human and divine natures in Christ in terms of (in)vulnerability to suffering and death, but as a way of explaining how an impassible divine being could suffer and die.

Heresiologists attribute a similar distinction between two natures to teachers and groups whom they call heretics, but without such explanatory context. According to the *Refutation of All Heresies*, the followers of Basilides teach that Jesus's “bodily part (*sōmatikon meros*) suffered” and returned to “chaos,” but his “animate part” (*psuchikon meros*) was resurrected and returned to its heavenly origin (7.27.10). Irenaeus reports

that Cerinthus taught that the divine Christ descended upon the human Jesus at his baptism and then departed from him before the crucifixion, so that “Jesus suffered and was resurrected, but Christ remained impassible (*apathēs*) because he exists spiritually” (*Haer.* 1.26.1). He elsewhere claims that nameless Christians who “prefer” the Gospel of Mark “separate (*separant*) Jesus from Christ and say that Christ remained impassible while Jesus truly suffered” (3.11.7). The reports of Irenaeus come closest to what we find in *Judas*. In light of the gospel describing the human Jesus as tortured but not destroyed, it is intriguing that Cerinthus taught that the human Jesus who suffered was also resurrected. The partisans of Mark are not described as teaching that Christ left Jesus at the crucifixion; probably they “separate” Jesus from Christ in the sense of “distinguish.” These accounts emphasize the differences between the two natures, but, as the examples of Pseudo-Barnabas, Melito, and Tertullian suggest, it is possible that the Christians they describe did so in order to explain the death of an impassible divinity and would have spoken in more unitary terms as well. Moreover, they suggest that in our work the divine Jesus could be present during the crucifixion of his human bearer without suffering harm and that that human bearer could be resurrected. After all, the incipit probably refers to “the three days” from the crucifixion to the resurrection (COMMENTS 33.1–6).

Not long before his discussion of *The Gospel of Judas*, Irenaeus attributes to some gnostics a Christology more detailed and thought-out than his brief reports about Cerinthus and the partisans of Mark (*Haer.* 1.30.12–14). According to this account, a divine figure called Christ descended into a human being named Jesus, who was generated from Ialdabaōth but secretly enhanced by wisdom, at the latter’s baptism. Christ’s presence in him enabled Jesus to perform miracles and proclaim the higher god, although many of his disciples did not recognize that presence. Christ departed from the human Jesus before the crucifixion but bestowed on the human being a certain power that enabled him to rise from the dead, teach “great mysteries” to a few of his disciples for another eighteen months, and then ascend to heaven. It is possible that Irenaeus refers to this account when he says that the promoters of *The Gospel of Judas* claim that Judas “thoroughly knew these things, and he alone knew the truth more than the others” (*Haer.* 1.31.1) (Layton 2021, 233 n. 1.31.1e). This version of gnostic Christology resembles our gospel in its emphasis on Jesus’s

miracle-working and the oblivion of many or most of Jesus's disciples. On the other hand, the teachings of the gnostics to whom Irenaeus attributes it differ from our gospel in important ways: for example, they prominently feature a character named "vulgar wisdom," do not include the Barbēlō, call the divine presence in Jesus "Christ," and claim that Jesus spent eighteen months after the resurrection teaching some of his disciples. Therefore, it seems perilous to use this account as a framework for understanding our gospel's Christology.

The gospel characteristically does not provide second-order reflection on or a full explanation of its attribution of torture and sacrifice to the human Jesus and invulnerability to the divine Jesus. Within Codex Tchacos one might compare what the risen Jesus says to James in the (*First Revelation of*) *James*:

James, do not worry about the nation (*laos*) or about me. For I am the one who preexists in myself (*p-et-šoop čn-nšorp [n]hēt ouaa-t*). For I did not suffer at all, nor did I die. And this nation (*peeilaos*), which is < . . . , > did nothing evil, but this exists as the image of the rulers (*pai de ef-kē ehrēi m-ptupos n-narkhōn*), for which (or whom) <it was necessary> to prepare it (or him). <It is> the rulers <who> prepared it (or him). Then it (or he) came to fulfillment (*tote af-čōk ebol*). (18.4–16)

The parallel in NHC V is somewhat different:

James, do not worry about me or this nation. I am the one who existed within me always (*pē ete-nef-šoop nhēt n-ouoeiš nim*). I did not suffer at all, nor did I trouble myself, and this nation did nothing evil to me, but this existed [as] an image of those rulers (*nere-pai de ke ehra[i n-]outupos nte-niarkhō[n]*) and was worthy of being [destroyed] by them. (31.15–26)

Interpreters have divided over the identity of the "this" (*pai*) that is an image of the rulers and that was worthy of or prepared for destruction: Is it "this nation" or the human Jesus? Whichever is the case, this Jesus's claim that the nation did nothing evil to him resembles our Jesus's assertion that no mortal hand will harm him, and his description of himself existing within himself suggests a two-nature Christology that identifies both natures as somehow both Jesus. Possibly such is the case with *Judas*.

Some scholars have argued for a capacious definition of docetism that includes "heretical" two-natures Christologies because such a definition would be closer to the understanding of docetism held by Irenaeus and other heresiologists (Slusser 1981). Like the analogous definition of "Gnosticism," however, that strategy obscures more than it reveals about individual works like *The Gospel of Judas* (Hoklotubbe 2019). It is particularly unhelpful as a characterization of two-natures views because a

wide range of Christologies, well into the fourth and fifth centuries (e.g., Nestorius), likewise “distinguished strictly between the different levels of being *within* the Savior” in terms of suffering and impassibility (Koschorke 1978, 44; cf. Tröger 1977, 46). In our passage the distinction between the divine Jesus and his human bearer serves the first unit’s contrast between the eschatological destruction and violence that will affect the embodied descendants of Adam, including the human being who bears Jesus, and Jesus’s own divine invulnerability.

The second unit has been the subject of scholarly controversy since the original publication of the text: In what sense will Judas “surpass (*r-houo*) them all”? Many, probably most, commentators have taken the phrase in relation to what immediately precedes it (“everything that is evil”) and have concluded that Judas’s sacrifice of the human being who bears Jesus exceeds in its wickedness the evil acts committed by those who sacrifice to Saklas (e.g., Schenke Robinson 2008, 68–70; Creech 2012, 250; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 217). But the syntax makes it more likely that the contrast is with the fate of those who sacrifice to Saklas: “As for those who offer sacrifice to Saklas, they all shall [perish], for (*če*) . . . everything that is [evil]. But as for you (*ntok de*), you will surpass them all, for (*gar*) you will sacrifice the human being who bears me” (Wurst 2017, 54). Unlike “all” those who sacrifice to Saklas, Judas will not perish but instead will surpass them “all” in a spatial or cosmic sense; that is, as Jesus has already informed Judas, he will become (that is, ascend to) the thirteenth and rule over the rest of the races (46.19–24). Just as the clause “for you will sacrifice the human being who bears me” explains why Judas will transcend those who perish, so too the missing content in lines 15–17 probably explains why those who sacrifice to Saklas will perish. Wurst’s proposed restoration of that content—“so that [all the nations] upon the [earth] with all [the(ir) races] might not [go astray] and [perform] everything that is evil” (Note on 56.15–18, *for the [. . .] upon the . . .*)—does not follow that reasoning, introduces an optimism uncharacteristic of the gospel as a whole, and requires too much reconstruction to be more than speculative. Nonetheless, his proposal may be correct in its implicit identification of those who offer sacrifice to Saklas not as all non-gnostic human beings nor even as all non-gnostic Christians and Jews, but instead as the leaders of the Christian groups that the author opposes, just as it is the disciples (and by implication those who claim them as their predecessors) who offer the

sacrifices in the disciples' dream. Judas's fate will differ from that of the eleven disciples and the leaders whom they represent. This reading understands this second unit to conform to the pattern of the first and third units, in which a negative fate (destruction) is followed by a more positive one (lack of harm for Jesus, exaltation for the great race of Adam).

This interpretation does not mean that Judas's sacrifice of the human being who bears Jesus is a noble act, however: as numerous commentators have noted, the gospel does not seem to approve of any sacrifice. Sacrifice is wrong, as is torture (56.6–8). The death of Jesus's human carrier is not the means by which salvation (that is, *gnōsis*) comes to individual human beings—rather, long ago “god caused acquaintance to be brought to Adam and those with him” (54.8–10)—but it does appear to be a necessary episode, even the crucial turning point, in the chain of events leading to the end of the current cosmic order and of the domination of humanity by the rebellious lower angels. It is possible that Judas's sacrifice of the human being is the single sacrifice that the lower god (“the deacon of error”) will accept before “the last day” (40.18–26) and thus the climactic sacrifice, wicked but necessary. It is not, then, “insignificant” (Perkins 2015, 209).

The necessity of Judas's act is confirmed by Jesus's encouragement of Judas in the short psalm that combines biblical imagery and the gospel's astral mythology. The first line echoes passages in the Psalms, in which an exalted horn is associated with action against or victory over enemies (Pss 74:5–6[75:4–5], 88:25[89:24], 91:11[92:10], 111[112]:9, 148:14) (Turner 2008, 219). The second suggests passages in the Psalms and elsewhere that speak of god's anger as being kindled (e.g., Ps 2:12, Isa 30:27). It would be appropriate for Judas to be angered by the domination of the rulers and by the sins that they have led human beings to commit and for him to act on the basis of that anger. The fourth line reworks (possibly) Psalms in which the speaker's heart is “ready” to honor god (Ps 56:8[57:7]; cf. 107:2[108:1], 111[112]:7) (Note on 56.25, *and your heart has [. . .]*). The opening of the song of Hannah might also be in view: “My heart was made firm in the Lord; my horn was exalted in my god” (1 Kgdms 2:1) (Meyer 2011, 13). It has been suggested that these biblical allusions mock Judas as “deluded in his self-image” (Emmel 2008, 37), but Judas has not said anything that suggests deluded self-importance since he described his vision as “great” (44.17–18). The overall effect of these biblical allusions is to characterize Judas as now prepared to act as he must.

The psalm's third line ("and your star has passed by") does not have any clear biblical background, with the possible exception of Num 24:17 (Bermejo Rubio 2012, 156; COMMENTS 54.13–55.14). Several commentators have read the reference to the star as meaning that Judas's sacrifice of Jesus is the result of "astral determinism" (Painchaud 2006; Thomassen 2008, 166; Turner 2008, 219; Bermejo Rubio 2009b, 648; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 218), but it more likely refers to the movement of Judas's star into the thirteenth aeon that Jesus mentioned earlier (55.12–13). The verb *čō(ō)be* normally takes an object—to "pass by, surpass, or reach" something—but even without an object, it implies upward movement (Crum 1939, 759a). Therefore, the star's rise functions as a sign that Judas should act, which coheres with the other three lines. Jesus encourages Judas to do now what is required (cf. Meyer 2008, 52–53), something that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel does as well, albeit less poetically (John 13:27). Judas will surpass the leaders of Saklas worship because he will perform the single conclusive sacrifice that will usher in the last day.

The third and final unit of this section makes a third and final contrast, in this case, a typical eschatological contrast between the fall of the lower powers and the exaltation of the elect. Although some interpreters have attempted to identify precisely who or what the "thrones of the aeon," "the kings," "the races of the angels," and "the ruler" are (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 219–21), specificity on this point does not seem required; this passage consists of poetic language that vividly evokes the dissolution of the current cosmic order through the defeat, debilitation, and destruction of the angels, rulers, and stars that control it. Fallen kings and lamenting angels appear in a wide range of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic works (Jenott 2011, 219–20; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 157). In other gnostic works, for example, "their angels will weep over their destruction" (Nat. Rulers 97.11–12), and the rulers cry, "Let us weep, let us mourn with great mourning!" (Three Forms 44.10–11).

It remains mysterious what Judas's "final" thing(s) might be—possibly "final days" or just "end" (Note on 57.1–4, *Truly [I say to you,] . . .*)—but they or it must be connected with or even cause these final events; these events follow also from the sacrifice of the human being who bears Jesus, which Jesus just mentioned and encouraged. It is reasonable to conclude that the handing over and crucifixion of the human/divine Jesus figure lead

to the destruction of the lower powers and the dissolution of the cosmos, just as Irenaeus implies (*Haer.* 1.31.1) (F. Williams 2008, 393; Meyer 2011, 19, 60; King 2013, 310–11; Cahana 2017; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 52, but cf. 221–22). In support of this reading, Cahana (2017, 117–18) cites from Nag Hammadi the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (58.13–59.19) and *Concept of Our Great Power* (41.13–42.29); in both of these works the crucifixion of the savior leads to the destruction of the lower rulers, and the latter mentions Judas’s role in this event. They draw from the eschatological imagery that the earlier gospels apply to the crucifixion. The *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (58.26–59.3) includes explicitly the ripping of the temple curtain, earthquake, and resurrections found in Matt 27:51–53. Paul first attests the understanding of the crucifixion (and resurrection) as a victory over lower powers (1 Cor 15:20–28, Phil 2:5–11; cf. Col 2:14–15). The author of Mark included in his passion narrative the idea that the crucifixion initiated the events that would lead to the return of Jesus and the end of the present world order, especially the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (11:12–24, 13:1–37, 15:33–38); Matthew retained this theme. Neither Matthew nor Mark makes the line from the crucifixion to the end time explicit, but they make it clear enough by including in their passion narratives both explicit eschatological discourse (Matt 24, Mark 13) and symbolic elements like the withered fig tree and the tearing of the temple curtain. The author of *Judas* likewise includes references to the torture and sacrifice of the human Jesus in his eschatological discourse, and the theme of sacrifice ties together the destroyed Jerusalem temple, current worship in Christian groups, the death of the human Jesus, and “the last day” (38.1–40.26 and the present section). In comparison with Matthew and Mark, the link between the death of the human Jesus and the end of the current world order in our gospel does not seem particularly opaque (*pace* Gathercole 2014, 364).

Other gnostic and non-gnostic works also place the crucifixion of Jesus within their eschatological narratives of the demise of the rulers and the salvation of the elect (Jenott 2011, 26–28). The *Revelation of Adam* includes the punishment of “the flesh of the human being upon whom the holy spirit has come” (77.16–18) in a series of events marked by the repetition of “next” (*tote*) (77.4, 7, 16, 18; 83.4, 8; 84.4; cf. Gos. Jud. 57.10–11). The progression of the series is interrupted by the poetic explanations of the incarnation by the thirteen kingdoms and the

undominated race, but it culminates in the final acclamation of the seed of Seth and the lament of the damned. According to the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, after the great Seth put on the living reason-born Jesus, “he nailed down the powers of the thirteen aeons and made them inactive” (NHC IV 75.15–20). The highly fragmentary pages 25 and 26 of *Melchizedek* likewise appear to present the death and resurrection of Jesus as a victory over the rulers. Without mentioning the crucifixion, Irenaeus reports Saturninos as teaching that “because the parent wished to destroy all the rulers, the anointed (Christ) came for the destruction of the god of the Jews” (*Haer.* 1.24.2; Layton 2021, 212). Speaking from an opposing theological perspective, Justin Martyr claims that Jesus commanded that Christians should offer the eucharist “for remembrance of the suffering that he endured” and that in so doing they should also thank god “for the complete destruction of ‘the rulers and the authorities’ (Col 2:15) through the one who by his own will became subject to suffering” (*Dial.* 41.1). Whatever “your final” may refer to, the gospel gives Judas a role in the downfall of the lower rulers, almost certainly through his sacrifice of the human being who bears Jesus.

That sacrifice leads also to the exaltation of something belonging to the great race of Adam, that is, to the salvation of the elect (Townsend 2012, 170–71). Commentators are divided over what will be exalted—the *tupos* (“image,” “pattern”) of the great race or its *karpos* (“fruit”) (Note on 57.11–12, *the [. . .] of the great race of Adam*). In favor of the former is the reference to its existing “through the aeons” (eternally?) before heaven, the earth, and the angels. Presumably, the referent of *tupos* would be Adamas in the first cloud of light (48.21–23). On the other hand, the gospel elsewhere uses *hikōn* (49.3, 52.17, 58.2?) and *eine* (49.4, 51.11, 52.17), not *tupos*, to refer to higher images or models for lower beings (cf. Pearson 2017, 112). “Fruit” has the advantage of cohering with the probable reading of “sow” at 57.8 (Note on 57.8–9, *and the evils that [they sowed . . .]*). In that case, this passage returns to the earlier garden imagery of sowing and fruit (COMMENTS 42.22–44.14). I have suggested that 44.2–7 contains a reference to the lower rulers sowing the defiled race and corruptible wisdom, which cannot lead to human souls ascending to the eternal realm. In contrast, the “fruit” belonging to “the great holy race” is that their souls will be taken up when their bodies die. Here Jesus possibly returns to this imagery to explain that at the end the evils sowed by the rulers will be

destroyed, while the fruit of the great race will be definitively raised up or exalted.

Several details of this eschatological vision may be missing, but its general drift is clear. In three passages introduced by “truly (*alēthōs*) I say to you,” (1) Jesus contrasts the violence and destruction to be suffered by “earthly” human beings, including the human being with which he is united, with his own invulnerability to harm; (2) he asserts that those who offer sacrifices to Saklas will perish, but that Judas will transcend them and take an elevated position in the cosmos because of his sacrifice of the human being who bears him; and (3) he announces the downfall of the lower rulers and the exaltation of the saved. On the one hand, those human beings and that element of the human being (body) associated with the “earthly” Adam will come to an end; on the other hand, the souls (true selves) of those human beings associated with the great race of Adam that preexists “the earth” will be exalted. The cosmos will soon be dissolved and reordered, with Judas having a prominent role in that transformation and in the new order (Trompf and Kim 2018, 183). In this way Jesus explains to Judas the part that he must play in the overthrow of Saklas and his angels, namely, why Judas must hand over the human being who bears him for torture and sacrifice.

Conclusion of the Dialogues (57.16–58.6)

57¹⁶ “Lo, you have been told everything. ¹⁷Look up, and see the cloud, the light within it, and the stars surrounding it. ²⁰And the star that leads the way is your star.”

²²And Judas looked up and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it. ²⁴Those standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud, saying, 58¹ [“. . . the] great race [. . .”] ⁵And Judas no longer saw Jesus.

NOTES

57.23–24. *and he entered it*. The Coptic text is ambiguous about who enters the cloud. Throughout the work a change in subject is frequently indicated by a change in name (e.g., 34.3, 18, 22; 35.21; 36.15–16; etc.), and thus the natural reading of the text is that Judas enters the cloud. However, the subsequent statement that “Judas no longer saw Jesus” (58.5–6) suggests that it is Jesus who has entered the cloud, and the convention of dialogues such as this is for the revealer to depart.

58.1–4. [“. . . the] great race [. . .”]. Most of these lines cannot be restored. Editors agree that [t]noq n-|ge[nea] (“the great race”) can be reconstructed at the end of line 1 and beginning of line 2. Most editors have accepted the original editors’ restoration of [hi]kōn (“image”) toward the end of line 2 (Kasser et al. 2007, 235), but Jenott (2011, 186) does not find the kappa to be certain. The phrase *ethrai* appears at the end of line 4.

COMMENTS

This brief passage brings the series of dialogues to an end and returns the work to the narrative world of the widely known gospels, whose general narrative resumes “at once” (58.6). Nonetheless, it raises several exegetical puzzles: What are the cloud and the light that Jesus invites Judas to see and

that Jesus (it seems) enters? What does it mean that Judas's star is "the star that leads the way"? What does Jesus's entrance into the cloud mean for his relationship with the human being who bears him? What does the voice from the cloud proclaim?

Except for it mentioning "the great race," the content of the voice's announcement cannot be determined, but we can approach, if not definitively resolve, the other questions by starting with what seems certain: here the author concludes the dialogues and returns to the narrative world of the generally known gospels by reworking the transfiguration scene from the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 17:1–9//Mark 9:2–10//Luke 9:28–36), especially the versions in Matthew and Mark (Sullivan 2009, 194–99; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 159). Although the ascension scene in Acts 1:9–11 also includes a cloud that removes Jesus from the disciples' sight, there are more certain echoes of the transfiguration. The cloud Jesus enters here is a "luminous cloud" (*qēpe n-ouoin*), just as the cloud that overshadows Jesus, Moses, and Elijah is a "luminous cloud" (*kloole n-ouoein*) (Matt 17:5). In our passage Judas "looked up" (*af-fiat-f e-hraei*), as do the disciples in Mark 9:8 (*nterou-fiat-ou e-hraei*). That Judas no longer sees Jesus is closer to the phrasing in Matt 17:8 and Mark 9:8 than to that in Acts 1:9 ("a cloud took him out of their sight"). A voice comes "from the cloud" (Matt 17:5//Mark 9:7) rather than from two men standing nearby (Acts 1:10). The puzzling appearance of other people present in our scene "standing on the ground" completes the allusion to the transfiguration scene, at which three disciples were present and, according to Matthew, "fell to the ground" (17:6). Finally, the transfiguration occurs before the passion narrative rather than after it.

Correspondence with the ascension in Acts would support the claim that Jesus's entrance into the cloud represents the definitive separation of the divine Jesus from the human being who bears him before the betrayal and crucifixion (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 227–28), but there are arguments against this interpretation. For one thing, Jesus has departed and arrived multiple times during the gospel; this departure can indicate the end of the dialogues without precluding further activity of Jesus on earth. One might compare the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, also in Codex Tchacos. At the conclusion of its dialogue, we read that "then lightning came with thunder from heaven, and the one who appeared to them (*p-et-af-ouōnh na-u ebol*) there was carried up to heaven" (NHC VIII 138.3–7; cf. CT 6.14–17). As

definitive as this ascension seems, Jesus later returns to the disciples to grant them peace and send them on their missions (NHC VIII 140.15–23; cf. CT 9.1–8). Our gospel may share with this work “a flexible understanding of ascension” (Parkhouse 2019, 100). Indeed, Jesus has told Judas that even if his human counterpart is tortured, he cannot be harmed (56.6–11); the divine Jesus need not separate from the human being who bears him in order to maintain his divine integrity, and perhaps the author includes this statement precisely because Jesus will not separate. Moreover, after the entrance into the luminous cloud, the narrator says that “[he] had gone into the guest room for his prayer” (58.10–12). It has been suggested that because the narrator refers to Jesus only as “he” in the epilogue, the divine Jesus is no longer present but only the human being who used to bear him (Schenke Robinson 2008, 68). But in our passage “he” is used also for the one who enters the cloud (Jenott 2011, 17 n. 30). The incipit informs the reader that Jesus spoke with Judas “before he celebrated Passover” (33.1–6): the same Jesus who has been speaking with Judas in “the secret report” is in the guest room when Judas is arranging the betrayal. Moreover, are we to imagine that when Jesus enters the luminous cloud, the human being who bears him is left behind even though “Judas no longer saw Jesus”? It seems most likely that the entire Jesus—divine being and human bearer—enters the cloud. In general, the gospel does not explain precisely how the divine Jesus who appears to the disciples and Judas throughout the dialogue relates to the human being who bears him and will be tortured and sacrificed, except that what the latter suffers cannot harm the former (COMMENTS 55.23–57.15). Therefore, Jesus’s entrance into the luminous cloud, the voice that comes from it, and Judas’s failure to see Jesus any longer do not function as the key to the gospel’s Christology but as the conclusion to the nonlocalized dialogue and the return to the narrative world of the generally known gospels. The revealer must depart (Introduction III.A; Hartenstein 2000, 275–76).

Jesus’s statement to Judas must also be viewed as a concluding statement to the dialogues. Judas has been told everything, and Jesus invites him to look up and observe the sky above, presumably with a new understanding of the upper regions of the cosmos and his role in their destruction and reorganization. Some interpreters have attributed significance to Judas looking up here in contrast to his inability to look Jesus in the eyes and turning his face away at the beginning of the dialogues (35.11–14). This

physical gesture may indicate Judas’s enhanced understanding (Gathercole 2007, 107; Pagels and King 2007, 164; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 226). Because luminous clouds exist in the eternal realm (e.g., 48.22–23), it is possible that the cloud that Jesus invites Judas to see and that has a light within it is one of them, but the surrounding of the cloud by stars argues against that possibility. Although the upper realm includes luminaries, stars belong to this world. A more likely candidate is the cloud from which Nebrō and Saklas emerged (51.8–17), “the cloud of knowledge” (50.24), which seems to exist at the boundary between the upper and lower realms and thus can plausibly be surrounded by stars of the lower realm (Introduction IV.A; Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 370). The light within the cloud may then represent the *gnōsis* that it contains or represents. On the other hand, the natural reading of the text is that the cloud surrounded by stars is also the cloud that Judas sees when he looks up and that Jesus enters. One wonders whether the cloud of knowledge, which must be very high even if somewhat within this cosmos, makes sense as a space into which Jesus would enter and from which an audible voice would come (cf. Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 370–71). This objection may expect more realism than one should from this narrative.

That Judas’s star is the star that “leads the way” (*proēgoumenos*) most likely refers once again to his star having taken the leading thirteenth position (55.12–13, 56.24), an astral realignment that Judas should now understand. The verb *proēgeomai* is a fairly common word that means simply to “lead the way” or “go first” (LSJ, s.v. *proēgeomai*); it appears only once in the New Testament (Rom 12:10), but it becomes frequent in patristic literature, often to refer to the exercise of leadership (Lampe 1961, s.v. *proēgeomai*). It has been argued that the word functions as a “technical astrological term” and thus that its use here indicates that Judas remains under “astral domination,” which is what causes him to betray Jesus; the word’s frequent appearance in astrologers like Ptolemy is adduced in support of this interpretation (Adamson 2009, 322–23). It is true that astrological works frequently use *proēgeomai*, a usage that reflects the importance of sequence in astronomical description. Ptolemy, for example, treats the signs of the Zodiac not only spatially, but also temporally, as they move across the horizon, and he divides each sign into “the leading portion” (*ta proēgoumena*), “the middle portion” (*ta mesa*), and “the following portion” (*ta empomena*) (*Tetrabiblos* 2.11). Rather than the employment of

a technical term, however, this usage is a specific application of a generally used word. Other scholars have suggested an allusion to Judas leading the crowd to Jesus in Luke 22:47 (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 225), although the verb is different (*proagō*); or an analogy to the star that leads the magi in Matt 2:9 (Cazelais 2012, 220–21), although here too the verb is *proagō*; or a similarity to Joseph’s dream of the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars doing obeisance to him (Gen 37:9; Gathercole 2007, 107; cf. Kochenash 2020, 490). Of these the Matt 2:9 suggestion is intriguing, but the leading role that Judas’s star plays is intelligible within the gospel’s scenario of his star ruling in the thirteenth position, which suggests that Judas’s star leads with respect to the other stars, not with respect to Judas. Possibly in accord with Gen 37:9, the stars that surround the light-containing cloud are those of the disciples, and it is now Judas’s star that leads the disciples’ stars (Meyer 2011, 61). The rise of Judas’s star indicates that the events that Jesus has described to Judas are under way and that it is time for him to perform his role of sacrificing the human being who bears Jesus.

Epilogue: Judas Hands Jesus Over (58.6–26)

58⁶And at once there was a disturbance among the Jews, more than [. . .]
9⁹Their chief priests grumbled because [he] had gone into the guest room for his prayer. 12¹²But some of the scribes were there watching closely, so that they might arrest him during the prayer. 16¹⁶For they were afraid of the people because they all regarded him as a prophet.

19¹⁹And they approached Judas and said to him, “What are you doing here?”
22²²You are Jesus’s disciple.”

23²³For his part, he answered them as they wished. 24²⁴And Judas took money and handed him over to them.

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NOTES

58.7. *disturbance*. The noun *katastasia* appears to be otherwise unattested but is surely related to the rare verb *katastasiāzō*, which refers to violent factionalism (LSJ, s.v. *katastasiāzō*) (COMMENTS).

58.8–9. *more than [. . .]*. The original editors read *ehoue e-[. . .]* (“more than”) after [*nio*] *judai* (Krosney, Meyer, and Wurst 2010, 293; so too Nagel 2014, 306). Jenott (2011, 186), however, discerns only *eho-* (so too Brankaer and van Os 2019, 114). The rest of line 8 and the beginning of line 9 cannot be reconstructed.

58.10. [*he*]. It is possible that the text should be restored *nt-a[u-]bōk* (“they”), meaning Jesus and the disciples, but the subsequent reference to “his prayer” argues against that possibility.

58.11. *the guest room*. The Greek *kataluma* comes from Mark 14:14 and Luke 22:11; it connotes temporary lodging.

58.27–28. *The Gospel of Judas*. The title is centered after a line of decorations.

COMMENTS

Like the prologue, this epilogue evokes the narrative world of the widely known gospels, especially the Synoptics, through a remarkable use of phrases and vocabulary from Matthew and Mark, less so from Luke and John. The author has taken “great care for authenticity,” so that “no one will see in it an artificial construction” (F. Williams 2008, 392). That is, the reader should recognize this passage as a standard account of the hours before Jesus’s arrest. The scene’s conventional and laconic character should make us reluctant to conclude that if the author does not explicitly narrate something that occurs in the New Testament, he denies it. For example, the final sentence, “And Judas took money and handed him over to them,” does not necessarily mean that the author places the arrest of Jesus within or at the guest room (rather than in the Garden of Gethsemane), much less that the scribes are in the guest room with Jesus (Brankaer and van Os 2019, 230). Nor does the absence of any explicit mention of the Romans mean that the author blames only the Jews for the execution of Jesus (Pagels and King 2007, 165); the center of attention is Judas, who interacts only with Jewish leaders (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2013, 609). Indeed, our author emphasizes the actions of the “chief priests” and “scribes” and does not place blame on “the people,” who “all regarded him as a prophet.” In this respect, our gospel shows more restraint on this question than does, say, Matthew (27:25), and its focus on Jewish leaders rather than ordinary Jews parallels its criticism of Christian leaders rather than their followers (Brankaer 2013, 588; Bermejo Rubio 2013, 607–8). The gospel ends with Judas doing what Jesus has encouraged him to do, and it leaves the reader to return to the generally known gospels, now in a better position to evaluate them and the events that they recount.

The gospel’s abrupt conclusion leaves significant events probably already known to the reader untold (the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus), and it lacks a scene that implies the salvation of any of its characters. In this respect it resembles the original conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, which lacks any appearances of the risen Jesus and leaves its flawed disciples with no redemption. King (2015) has persuasively compared the two endings as appropriate to works of apocalyptic eschatology. In each gospel Jesus prophesies events that the reader knows to have occurred, increasing confidence in the work’s veracity, and the savior’s true identity is known only to a few characters within the narrative.

Neither Mark nor *Judas* has many positive characters with which the reader can identify, and both appear to criticize mistaken views of Jesus that other Christians hold. Because the reader knows the truth, however, he or she is invited to think of himself or herself as one of the elect. The suspended ending suggests that the true end of the story lies in the future, and the reader must act accordingly in the present.

Unlike the author of Mark, however, the author of this gospel can enhance the authenticity of his “secret report” by conforming his work to gospels that the reader may already know. Allusions to earlier gospels are densest in 58.9–22 (Nagel 2007, 259; F. Williams 2008, 392; Jenott 2011, 221; Bermejo Rubio 2012, 160–62; Dubois 2012a, 123):

“Their chief priests grumbled (*krmrm*) because [he] had gone into the guest room (*kataluma*) for his prayer.” The word *krmrm* usually translates *gonguzein*, possibly *aganaktein* (Crum 1939, 116a).

“The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining (*egonguzon*).” (Luke 5:30)

“But when the chief priests and scribes saw . . . they became angry (*ēganaktēsān*).” (Matt 21:15)

“The Teacher asks, ‘Where is my guest room (*kataluma*) where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” (Mark 14:14; cf. Luke 18:10)

“But some of the scribes were there watching closely (*paratērei*), so that they might arrest (*amahte*) him during the prayer.” The word *amahte* can translate *kratein* (Crum 1939, 9a).

“The scribes and the Pharisees watched (*paretērounto*) him.” (Luke 6:7)

“So they watched (*paratērēsantes*) him and sent spies.” (Luke 20:20)

“The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest (*kratēsantes*) Jesus.” (Mark 14:1)

“They (the chief priests and the Pharisees) wanted to arrest (*kratēsai*) him.” (Matt 21:46)

“For they were afraid of the people (*laos*) because they all regarded him as a prophet (*ne-f-ntoot-ou tēr-ou hōs prophētēs*).”

“They (the chief priests and the Pharisees) wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him (Jesus) as a prophet (*ne-f-ntoot-ou hōs prophētēs*).” (Matt 21:46)

“They were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet (*ere-iōhannēs gar ntoot-ou ontōs če-ouprophētēs*).” (Mark 11:32; cf. Matt 21:26)

“The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people (*laos*).” (Luke 22:2)

“And they approached Judas and said to him, ‘What are you doing here? You are Jesus’s disciple.’”

“When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, ‘You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.’” (Mark 14:67; cf. Matt 26:69)

“Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple.’” (John 9:28)

“The woman said to Peter, ‘You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?’” (John 18:17)

The author seeks to make his narrative sound like those of the earlier gospels, a goal that likely takes priority over the construction of an account that “makes sense.” These echoes are so abundant that two divergences from the familiar vocabulary stand out: the reference to an immediate

katastasia among the Jews and the use of the term *proseuchē* for Jesus's activity in the guest room.

The *katastasia* is an enigma, even though its general meaning seems to be clear from the verb *katastasiazein*, which refers to violent factionalism (LSJ, s.v. *katastasiazō*). The verb appears in the early third-century *Refutation of All Heresies* (wrongly attributed to Hippolytus of Rome), which reports that the controversial Christian Callistus attempted to provoke his own murder by barging into a service in a Jewish synagogue, where he “disturbed (*katestasiazen*) them” and violence resulted (9.12.7). It is possible that the lost content in 58.1–4 would explain the disturbance here, but more likely the statement provides the context for the grumbling of the chief priests and the attempt of the scribes to arrest Jesus. Perhaps the author has in mind such divisions among Jews over Jesus as those reported in John 7:40–52, 9:16, 11:45–53. Although nearly all the verbal allusions in this passage are to the Synoptic Gospels, the scenario that it envisions—Judas outside the room where Jesus prays—coheres with the Fourth Gospel's account of the Last Supper, in which Judas leaves the room after Jesus tells him to do what he must do quickly (John 13:27–30) (Emmel 2008). Johannine influence on this account is therefore possible, but even if the clause refers to divisions over Jesus among the Jews, the meaning of the phrase that seems to follow (“more than . . .”) remains mysterious.

The use of the term *proseuchē* (“prayer”) for Jesus's activity in the guest room may indicate that the author avoids referring to the Last Supper, which provided the basis for the eucharist that he condemns (cf. Bermejo Rubio 2012, 161; Brankaer and van Os 2019, 229–30). On the other hand, the incipit acknowledges explicitly that Jesus “celebrated Passover” (33.5–6), which must refer to the Seder meal. In the earlier gospels' passion narratives, the noun *proseuchē* appears only in the so-called cleansing of the temple scene (“house of prayer”: Matt 21:13//Mark 11:17//Luke 19:46), Matthew's version of the cursing of the fig tree (21:22), and Luke's account of the Garden of Gethsemane (22:45), while the verb *proseuchomai* appears several times in all the Gethsemane accounts and once or twice in the Synoptic “Little Apocalypse” (Mark 13: 18; cf. Matt 24:20, Mark 13:33?). Our gospel appears to have alluded to the temple and the fig tree earlier (39.15–17); thus influence from these passages should not be ruled out. The author may use *proseuchē* in a sense wider than personal prayer, to refer to worship in general; some second-century instances of the term appear to

concern collective prayer and perhaps even simply communal worship (Did. 4.14; Ign. *Eph.* 5.2, *Magn.* 7:1, *Smyrn.* 6:2, *Trall.* 12:2). The scribes' interest in apprehending Jesus "during the prayer" (*hrai hn-teproseukhē*) echoes the plan of the chief priests and elders in Matthew to arrest Jesus "not during the festival" (*hrai hm-pša an*), also for fear of "the people" (*laos*) (26:5). It seems possible that rather than a deliberate avoidance of terms like "Passover" or "supper," "prayer" may function as a general term for a period of religious observance.

The final sentences bring the gospel to a swift conclusion that shows Judas performing the task that has been given to him. The author pointedly remarks that Judas answered the scribes "as they wished," suggesting that he undertakes his task reluctantly. After all, Jesus warned him that his disclosure to Judas of his role and the mysteries of the kingdom would make him groan (35.27, 46.11–12), and Judas's vision showed him the persecution that lay ahead for him (44.24–45.1). The author flatly informs the reader that Judas did indeed hand Jesus over, an event whose details she or he likely knows from the other gospels. But now the reader knows the truth about why Judas carried out this sacrifice, an event that will lead to the end both of the domination of Saklas over human beings and of the sacrifices that ignorant Christians mistakenly offer to him in Jesus's name.

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