I have argued that Judas Iscariot really existed as one of the disciples of Jesus. Unlike the others, though, he is given a “last name” — Iscariot. But what does the name mean? It turns out, there is a huge debate over that. Here is how I discuss the matter in my book The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot.

The Name Judas Iscariot

Sometimes knowing the names of persons from antiquity can give further information about them. People of the lower classes did not have last names, and so to differentiate people with the same first name, descriptive designations were often added. For example, there are several different Marys in the New Testament. “Mary” was one of the most common names in first-century Palestine. And so each New Testament Mary is given some kind of identifying feature: Mary “the mother of Jesus”; Mary “of Bethany”; Mary “Magdalene.” This last designation indicates that this Mary came from the town of Magdala, which was a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee. Thus, simply by knowing what she was called, we can learn some information about her.

Some people have hoped that...

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