

I started this thread with a question about the Gospel of Thomas — almost certainly the most important Gospel not in the New Testament. Now that I have situated “Thomasine” Christianity in the context of the Nag Hammadi Library the broader Gnostic movement - and questioned whether it is actually a kind of Gnosticism, or simply something similar - I can turn to the Gospel itself. This will take three posts. The one today is a broad introduction to its character. I have taken this from my textbook, [The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings](#).

The *Gospel of Thomas*

The *Gospel of Thomas* is without question the most significant book discovered in the Nag Hammadi library. Unlike the *Gospel of Peter*, discovered sixty years earlier, this book is completely preserved. It has no narrative at all, no stories about anything that Jesus did, no references to his death and resurrection. The *Gospel of Thomas* is a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus.

The Sayings of the Collection. The sayings are not arranged in any recognizable order. Nor are they set within any context, except in a few instances in which Jesus is said to reply to a direct question of his disciples. Most of the sayings begin simply with the words “Jesus said.” In terms of genre, the book looks less like the New Testament Gospels and more like the Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible. Like Proverbs, it is a collection of sayings that are meant to bring wisdom to the one who can understand it. In fact, the opening statement indicates that the correct understanding of these sayings will provide more than wisdom; it will bring eternal life: “These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote them down. And he said, ‘He who finds the meaning of these words will not taste death’” (*Gosp. Thom.* 1).

The Jesus of this Gospel is not the Jewish messiah that we have seen in other Gospels, not the miracle-working Son of God, not the crucified and resurrected Lord, and not the Son of Man who will return on the clouds of heaven. He is the eternal Jesus whose words bring salvation.

The Reputed Author. Who is Didymus Judas Thomas, who allegedly penned these words? We know this name from other ancient Christian sources, such as the *Acts of Thomas*. Both “Didymus” and “Thomas” are words that mean “twin” (the first is Greek, the second Semitic); Judas is his proper name. According to the *Acts of Thomas*, he was a blood relation of Jesus, the same one mentioned in the New Testament (Mark 6:3). Thus, Didymus Judas Thomas was Jesus’ twin brother (see Box 13.2). Who better to relate the secret words of Jesus that can bring eternal life than his own twin brother?

The Character of the Sayings. Many of the sayings of Jesus in this Gospel will be familiar to those who have read the Synoptic Gospels: “If a blind man leads a blind man, the two of them fall into a pit” (*Gosp. Thom.* 34); “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven” (54); “The harvest is great, but the workers are few; but beseech the Lord to send workers to the harvest” (73). Somewhat more than half of the sayings in *Thomas* can be found in the Synoptic Gospels.

Other sayings sound vaguely familiar, yet somewhat peculiar: “Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds, he will be troubled, and when he is troubled, he will marvel, and he will rule over the All” (2).

Still other sayings of Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* sound quite unlike anything known from the New Testament: “. . . On the day when you were one, you became two. But when you have become two, what will you do?” (11); “If the flesh exists because of spirit, it is a miracle, but if spirit exists because of the body, it is a miracle of miracles. But I marvel at how this great wealth established itself in this poverty” (29); “I stood in the midst of the World, and I appeared to them in the flesh. I found all of them drunk; I did not find any of them thirsting. And my soul was pained for the sons of men because they are blind in their hearts, and they do not see that they came empty into the world. . . . When they have shaken off their wine, then they shall repent” (28); “His disciples said, ‘On what day will you be revealed to us and on what day shall we see you?’ Jesus said, ‘When you undress without being ashamed, and you take your clothes and put them under your feet as little children and tramp on them, then you shall see the Son of the Living One, and you shall not fear” (37); “If they say to you, ‘Where did you come from?’ say to them, ‘We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own and established itself and became manifest through their image.’ If they say to you, ‘Is it you?’ say, ‘We are its children and we are the elect of the living father’” (50); and, one of the most telling sayings of the entire book: “Jesus said, ‘Whoever has come to understand the world has found only a corpse, and whoever has found a corpse is superior to the world’” (56).



[Thomas: The Most Important Gospel Outside the New Testament
Thomasine Christians and Others, From After the New Testament](#)