

# QUESTIONING THOMAS

In John's Gospel, "Doubting Thomas" is made to appear foolish and inadequate:

Thomas (who was called the Twin [*Didymos*]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. **Do not doubt but believe.**"

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.**"

One hypothesis about John's Gospel, advanced by Elaine Pagels, is that John was (in part) written as a refutation of Gnostic understandings of Jesus' teachings.

The Gospel of Thomas is a Gnostic Christian text, now extant in one Coptic manuscript, discovered only in 1947, near the village of Nag Hamadi, in Egypt, but known for centuries through Greek fragments and as reported by some early church fathers (not with approval).

Comprises 114 Sayings of the “living Jesus.”

**What does that phrase mean?**

Gnostic emphasis on spirituality (often dualistic) on salvation through self-**knowledge** rather than belief in Jesus.

*Gnosis* means knowledge, from *gnothei*, ‘to know.’

Various forms of Gnosticism were declared heretical in the second century.

**What is heresy?**

Here are two of the heresies in Thomas:

1. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the children of the living father. (3)

Compare that with John 1:18:

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

What is the difference between knowing oneself and knowing God? Why is self-knowledge heretical?

Here is another heresy:

2. "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death."

Compare that with John 8:51/52:

Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see/taste death.

What is the difference between what the two passages require for overcoming death?

Why was Gnosticism problematic for the early church?

So, the Gospel of Thomas Didymos is a Gnostic text, emphasizing spiritual self-knowledge as the path to salvation.

It is also, like the hypothetical Q, a Sayings Gospel.

**What is missing?**

Narrative

Context

Passion Story

**What does the absence of narrative context tell us about how the Gospels were (probably) composed?**

The fictive nature of the narrative is confirmed by differences in the contexts supplied by Matthew and Luke.

**What does the absence of a Passion Narrative suggest to us about the practice of early Christians?**