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The Fire Gospel

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Synopsis

Theo Griepenkerl *aka* Theo Grippen is an authority of Aramaic, the language which Jesus spoke. While on business at a museum in Iraq, a bomb goes off outside, killing several people and smashing a statue of a pregnant woman. Inside the statue are a number of perfectly preserved scrolls, written in Aramaic.

For Theo, this is the find of the millennium, for the scrolls are a new gospel of Jesus, written in Jesus' own language, not Greek, like the gospels of the New Testament. Theo takes the scrolls back to Canada and translates them. They purport to be the testimony of Malchus, the servant in the Garden of Gethsemane whose ear was cut off.

Theo translates the scrolls and seeks a publisher, expecting to be rewarded with fame and riches, but things in the modern world don't turn out quite the way he expected. His publisher points out that his work doesn't have the cachet of a Dan Brown novel, for instance. Reviews on Amazon are mixed, some of them extreme, some morbid and several just speculative about the content without actually reading the book.

Theo is entirely unprepared for some of the more extreme reactions to the book. Malchus' account is quite different to the other gospels in that it is more prosaic, casts doubt on the behaviour of some of the disciples, changes Jesus' cry 'it is finished' to 'please, somebody, finish me' and focuses on the indignity of the cross, not its triumph. Some readers react by losing their faith or attacking Theo as an emissary of Satan.

Finally Theo is abducted from a book signing in a violent attack which kills several people. His two abductors are an Arab Muslim and a white crazy person and Theo is forced to make a video saying that he is sorry and people who bought the books should throw them away. The political motive behind the video is to make sure that Christians don't lose their faith, because the Muslim fears that *Jews* will then become more prominent and he wants to prevent this at all costs. The crazy guy just wants to punish Theo for publishing a Satanic book.

The crazy kidnapper tries to shoot Theo, but the Muslim kidnapper rescues him and sets him free. Theo staggers out into a world of criminals and lawlessness, bleeding and suffering, waiting for healing and salvation at the last.

Some questions to think about:

What difference might a 'new' gospel make to your faith?

A number of people talk about 'satanic' texts. In what ways do you think words could be evil?

What is the author telling us by calling his book 'The Fire Gospel'?

Is there any truth in the idea that Christians provide a buffer between other religions?

How did you feel about the passages from Malchus' gospel and did any of it 'ring true' for you?

How did you feel about the Amazon reviews?

How do you feel about Theo's actions and behaviour?

How did you feel about the kidnapers?

Does the Malchus Jesus make more sense to us in a context of Middle Eastern violence?