



# The Liars' Gospel

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**The Liars' Gospel** Naomi Alderman

**An award-winning writer re-imagines the life of Jesus, from the points of view of four people closest to him before his death.**

This is the story of Yehoshuah, who wandered Roman-occupied Judea giving sermons and healing the sick. Now, a year after his death, four people tell their stories. His mother grieves, his friend Iehuda loses his faith, the High Priest of the Temple tries to keep the peace, and a rebel named Bar-Avo strives to bring that peace tumbling down.

It was a time of political power-play and brutal tyranny. Men and women took to the streets to protest. Dictators put them down with iron force. In the midst of it all, one inconsequential preacher died. And either something miraculous happened, or someone lied.

Viscerally powerful in its depictions of the period - massacres and riots, animal sacrifice and human betrayal - *The Liars' Gospel* makes the oldest story entirely new.

## The Liars' Gospel Details

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Author : Naomi Alderman

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# From Reader Review *The Liars' Gospel* for online ebook

## Therese says

A historical novel depicting Yehoshuah (the historical Jesus) through the eyes of four different people who encountered him: his mother Mary, Judas Iscariot, the high priest Caiaphas, and the criminal/revolutionary Barrabas, whom the crowd demanded be set free in place of Yehoshuah prior to Yehoshuah's crucifixion. (In this book, one can't speak of "The" Crucifixion with a capital C, since there are crucifixions left and right.)

This book was artfully constructed and very competently written. Religiously conservative Christian believers may find some elements of it offensive - the author Naomi Alderman, writing fairly conspicuously from a Jewish perspective, begins from the viewpoint that Jesus is a man of the period, a traveling preacher of which there were many, teaching doctrines little removed from those of other rabbis. Historically, of course, with millennia of faith subtracted from the equation, her version of the story makes perfect sense.

My reaction to this book is a little complicated ... on the one hand, I admired the artistry of how she structured it, and her bravery in telling her straightforward view about who might have lied and how and why in the process of constructing the Jesus of Christianity. Of course, I'm an unbeliever myself, so I found the realism of her approach very refreshing.

There were a few things I didn't like, though. If she had confined herself to the notion of the humanity of the people who lied, and the way in which even the lies circle around people who were still very interesting figures, all would have been well. But instead, halfway or three quarters of the way through the story I started to feel she was getting into the age old question of who was to blame for Jesus being crucified. The anti-Semites' answer, of course, has always been "The Jews." Alderman's answer is the traditional Jewish rebuttal - no, it was the Romans. There are few or no good Romans in her book. Granted, she is writing from the standpoint of Jewish characters, but still ... by dehumanizing the Romans and leaving out their viewpoint, she really introduces a fatal philosophical and aesthetic flaw ... they become an army of mostly two-dimensional monsters. And the book's aesthetic purpose becomes subordinate to a kind of anti-defamation subtext that cheapens the enterprise. That was a disappointing choice to me.

The book also follows the tradition of many past historical novels about Jesus in being stone-cold sober with a somber atmosphere (cf. Jose Saramago, Phillip Pullman), if it at least has the virtue of avoiding any syrupy inspirational tone. None of the characters were very likeable or sympathetic (again, cf. Saramago, Pullman). And it was all a little depressing. So if you are looking for something a little more upbeat, stick with Christopher Moore's *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*.

As for her treatment of the historical aspects of the period, it will probably sound strange for me to say this, but I felt like Alderman's Judaea was, well, a little too Jewish. All the characters have Hebrew names. Well, great, right, didn't they speak Hebrew? Actually, probably not - but rather Aramaic or Greek. Hebrew was little enough used that Targumim, or Aramaic translations of the scriptures, had to be used in most synagogues. Alderman lets us know right up there in the book's dedication that she's studied Hebrew and Latin, lest we doubt her chops, and she does indeed do wonderfully well at giving us the flavor of Hebrew in the character names and the occasional cultural tidbit - but there is hardly any flavor of Aramaic in the book, and less of Greek.

In fact, my impression from reading into the history of the period is that the culture was not so monolithically Hebrew, let alone so monolithically Rabbinic Jewish. "Judaism" as such did not exist during

the time of Jesus, any more than Christianity did - the system of rabbinic rulings was in its infancy and there is no conclusive evidence that rabbinic norms were practised widely before the temple's destruction. Hellenization was a powerful force, there were a lot of pagan cities and pagan inhabitants throughout the region, Greek and Syrian and Aramaic and Nabataean-Arabic cultural elements all had their own peculiarities. The Idumaeans in the south were not all that Jewish, having only relatively recently been forcibly converted to the Israelite religion under the Hasmoneans, and Galilee too had been converted and had not long before been pagan. It was viewed as kind of a backwoods area, is my impression, and the rabbis sometimes called it "Gallilee of the Gentiles."

That's why I say Naomi Alderman's *Judaea* is a little too Jewish, because I think the real Judaea was a much more religiously and culturally fragmented place than she depicts. Now, that said, every writer about this period has to interpret the historical evidence as best he or she can - usually none of us are full-time scholars in the field - and I think by emphasizing the Hebrew and normative rabbinic culture in her depiction, she has illuminated very important aspects of the historical Jesus. So even if it might not be a full or perfect picture, it's still an important one, and this is a valuable work.

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## **Elizabeth says**

Honestly nearly rated this five stars. It's excellent. Read it.

I have quite a number of retellings of the Christ myth, so if I tell you that this may be the best, even better than *The Good Man Jesus And The Scoundrel Christ*, believe it is good. It says something so widely overlooked and even forgotten but so obvious - this is a Jewish story. In traditional Jewish communities, where the rituals and observations and practice in everyday life is kept alive, as it was without change for millennia, the past is not some distant thing, nor some mythical land. It is there by your side, it is living. There is an unbroken chain stretching back from this day to that day, through the centuries, in which people like you said this prayer, people like you broke this bread. The world may be different but people don't change.

Miriam (Mary, mother of Christ) is a Jewish mother who hoped for nothing more than for her son to grow up and marry and give her grandchildren. Now he is gone and he has not even left her grandchildren to grieve with, nor help her as she grows old. Iehuda of Kerioth (Judas Iscariot) is a man seeking a return to a more pure and authentic faith in the time of Roman-occupied Judea, when the temple leader is appointed by Rome, by the emperor, by a man claiming to be a living god, in blasphemy. Yet his faith seems unfounded when the new firebrand reformist preacher he follows begins to espouse the same blasphemies of being a living god. Caiaphas is a man holding a difficult peace, preserving his people's way of life and making concessions to its conquerors, trying to mitigate the all-powerful might of Rome and reign in the more extreme elements among his own people who could bring the troubled peace crashing down. And Bar-Avo (Barabbas) is a resistance fighter, a terrorist, a freedom fighter, a criminal, a man who kills his own people as well as the enemy if he believes they have collaborated or become complacent about their degradation.

These people could be now as they were then. People holding difficult peace. People seeking freedom and an authentic religious life. People enduring through grief and disappointment. Nothing is mysticised or otherised. And Alderman's writing is so good, these are rich, full, identifiable people.

The book is composed of four parts, each narrated in first person by each of the characters. The book is bookended though with a prologue and an epilogue, detailing the first and second sieges of Jerusalem. This

gives context to the world these characters inhabit. It is vital to understand what the overarching, defining force was in this world. That every person reacts and lives in reference to this situation. Pompey conquers Jerusalem, he slaughters the temple's men, violates the holiest place in the temple with his heathen presence, and makes the temple leaders appointees of Rome. The religio-ethnic tension between the occupying force and the occupied stems from this. And the fact that the Jews live and worship is a gift merely by the mercy of Rome, and not their right as free people. And their religious leadership becomes a political tool of their oppressor, permanently entangling the struggle for political freedom with religious purity and authenticity.

When the book ends, it ends with the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, who believes that the mercy shown to the Jews has not been met with gratitude, and for their defiance, destroys their city utterly. A million people in Jerusalem were starved, slaughtered or hacked through, the buildings of the city razed, the temple burnt and the Holiest of Holies defiled and destroyed. The Jews are scattered to the four winds, those that survived, and must continue on.

Once it establishes this historical setting, what makes this book amazing is how sympathetic everyone is in their own way, even when they have diametrically opposed viewpoints. Alderman's writing is so good that with each new character you are brought in and totally on their side, even while recognising their flaws.

I loved her portrayal of Iehuda (Judas). I've seen many sympathetic portrayals of Judas in various media, I didn't expect anything particularly new from this one. Yet I got it. Many portrayals of Judas are of a man mistakenly doing what he thinks is the lesser of two evils, or a man racked with ambivalence and remorse. Alderman's Iehuda is neither. He is a man who desperately needs his faith in God and believes Yehoshuah (Jesus) is the one to lead a truly revolutionary reform of the religion, return Judea to a real relationship with God who seems to have abandoned them to occupation. The corruption of the temple leaders who allow a blasphemous, living god to be sacrificed to in the temple every day, the idolatry of the coinage being minted with graven image of that living god, the transformation of their most holy and pious religious positions into political positions won with favours and wealth, where contemplation is not on the spiritual but on the machinations of empire - all these draw him to this new cult. He is heart and soul devoted to it. So when Yehoshuah (Jesus) starts to show the same corruption, same blasphemy, same politicking, by claiming to be a living god, by allowing himself to be anointed in expensive oils as gestures of wealth, by playing favourites amongst his followers about who is in his inner circle of "disciples", Iehuda (Judas) can't stand it. For him, it is Yehoshuah (Jesus) who betrays him, not the other way around. In fact Yehoshuah (Jesus) betrays the whole cause. And for Iehuda (Judas) it is a true return to God to report him to the authorities, a true act of devotion to the one true God to renounce this imposter. He is not ambivalent, but happy. He has done the right thing. He is reunited with the true faith.

Caiaphas is just as interestingly portrayed. Caiaphas is widely discussed by the other characters as being corrupt, and he is, just not as they think. Caiaphas does not see himself as religiously corrupt. He knows he has made concessions to Rome, but he thinks he has won more battles than he has lost, and he has mitigated a lot of the worst excesses of Rome. For him, the most important thing of all is to ensure the continuation of the temple, the daily sacrifices to God, the sanctity of the Holiest of Holies, the ability to wash out his people's sin when he meets with God on Yom Kippur. All else is secondary. There must be peace for the temple to continue, the relationship with God is all that matters. So what if it is undignified? So what if there is injustice? So what if the Romans kill the young men and everyone is too afraid to stop them? Your dignity, your justice and your grief should not be as important as your dedication to God. Call yourself pious? Yet you would risk bringing down their wrath on us all, risk them destroying the temple? True adherence to the faith would require that the preservation of the relationship with God is paramount. Therefore any concession to that end is justified.

What is really good in this chapter is that Caiaphas meets Pilate. Pilate wants temple gold to pay for building an aqueduct, and doesn't understand or care that this would be sacrilegious, for gold dedicated to the glory of God to be used by Rome's emissaries for projects of their liking. And Pilate bursts out into a rant, that despite the fact he is set up as the antagonist, is massively sympathetic, especially to me as someone without faith. He brays that everything that's in this city is holy, the gold is holy, the food is holy, the building is holy, the coins are (un)holy, everything - EVERYTHING - is a source for religious offence. He's trying to build an aqueduct to bring you clean water, you fucking backwards peasants, and you're too fucking superstitious to even appreciate what's trying to be done for you! It is a great scene, in which Pilate's absolute rightness and wrongness is played off this arbitrator who knows that there will be riots and death as a result of this man's pigheadedness towards those he's been set over to rule. It's every occupation ever. Why don't you love my mercy you idiots!

The last chapter is of Bar-Avo (Barabbas), whose name means "son of his father" and therefore is understood to be a nom de guerre. He is a resistance fighter, a savvy, smart, quick and ruthless leader who spends his life fighting to free Judea from Roman rule. He has no tolerance for those who capitulate to Rome, who pander to the Romans, who ease their way, who collaborate to bring about a subjugated Judea, and in this other Jews are as much his enemy as the Romans. He commits random acts of "terror" to ensure people never become complacent about Roman rule. The peace Caiaphas so desperately craves is Bar-Avo's (Barabbas) greatest nightmare and defeat. He resists to the end, until as an old man, with his band of loyal Zealots, they storm the temple and kill its Rome appointed leaders. For which, Rome pays them back in spades.

So where is Yehoshuah (Jesus) in all this? He is far from the centre of things. He is of greatest importance to his mother, and barely remembered by Caiaphas and Bar-Avo (Barabbas). He has a decent following, but no more really than a lot of other reformist, messianic, apocalyptic cults had at the time. Does he pose a threat to the temple leaders? Not in a religious sense, but he is an embarrassment to them because they are tasked with keeping the population docile under Roman rule. A few of his scattered followers believe he has risen from the dead, but since no one sees him, they figure that his body was simply stolen in order to be given a proper burial. Not even his mother really believes. This is a retelling of the Christ myth in which Christ is a minor character. Why he said what he said, why he did what he did, why he died how he died, is what's important. He himself is but a shadow. The negative space where religion and politics collide in an occupied land.

Absolutely read this book. This may be my longest review ever. That's how much I enjoyed this book. Read it. Read it now.

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## **Hamster says**

I only got 14% through this book when I realized I was starting to hate Jesus. Who the heck would write a historical fiction novel and turn the Savior of the World into an abusive, unfeeling, psycho? I'm curious as to who the author thought her audience was, because any Christians worth their salt would use the book as toilet paper. Atheists or Muslims might agree with its accuracy (or lack thereof) but I honestly can't imagine this novel interesting them.

Typically, writers of historical fiction try to stick close to the known facts and fill out the ambiguous parts. This book would fit better under speculative fiction, since the title was the only thing I found believable. Thanks Netgalley, for the copy.

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## **Hannah says**

Naomi Alderman has written an intriguing account of events and people surrounding Jesus. In so doing she has made biblical figures that are sometimes perceived as one dimensional characters and turned them into ones we can relate to, with depth and conflict and imperfection. Although at times it felt sacrilegious reading some points of view such as the Iehuda from Qeriot, it made you see how Jesus could have been perceived, at the time, in a negative but credible way; a rock star that started to believe the hype surrounding him and got carried away. Of course most believe this to be false as he indeed turned out to be the real deal, but at the time there must have been doubt and Jesus could have come across as a smug, arrogant heretical madman. I thought it was interesting to portray Judas as an over zealous man of God that became disillusioned and rebelled, throwing himself instead at the mighty feet of Rome. I enjoyed reading the part of Yehoshuah's mother, Miryam as you can see how she could have felt resentful and rejected by her son. It simply offered a more human account of an almost mythical character and brought life and reality to her. The characters that surround Yehoshuah are painted in fine detail through Alderman's alternative view point, but Yehoshuah himself is still presented, in my opinion, as a mysterious being that we are never able to get near. We see him through other's eyes. Yet by doing so we are constantly made aware that this is an individual's opinion which allows room for us as the reader to form our own. This is where the genius of this book lays; in the doubt, in the many eyes that reflect Jesus. This is all set against a backdrop of brutal Roman occupation, that often gets ignored surrounding the life of Jesus. I found this book fascinating, poetic, historically insightful and extremely provocative. I also appreciated the biblical motif that Naomi incorporated into her style of writing, 'And it is Friday morning, and it is Friday evening. The Sabbath day.'

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## **Jennifer Stephens says**

The Liars' Gospel by Naomi Alderman is a "creative" retelling of life in Israel under Roman occupation and early on centers on Jesus. Alderman's crafting of words is superb so it's quite disappointing that she put her talent to work slandering a public figure in such an offensive manner.

In the novel we are exposed to the viewpoints of Mary, Barabbas, and Judas as imagined by Alderman. I can get behind historical fiction wherein we take a real place or course of events to set the scene and slide in imaginary characters to build a plot. Likewise I enjoy a twist on a known public figure that shows another side of them that is faithful to their overall historical presence but adds a new dimension of storytelling. But I really have a problem with a convenient retelling that absolutely butchers the essence of a character we've come to know through history. Jesus punching his father in the face and the other nonsense that goes on in The Liars' Gospel is disgusting and the character sketch of Jesus as depicted by Alderman is very offensive to not only Christians but to the record of history. What's next, a historical novel about Ghandi detailing his secret role as a fascist, working undercover for the state to stir up insurrection and justification for his friends in power to destroy the people? Perhaps a creative retelling of the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King recast as a drunkard and adulterer whose main focus was becoming famous and having a movie made about himself? Or we could approach it from the other direction and spin a moving story of Hitler and how he was deeply misunderstood?

I've read other reviews in a similar vein (thus my voice adds to the chorus) and so I know what's next: cue the godless hoards to leave argumentative comments on this review and attack my coverage of the novel.

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## Bettie? says

BABT

70 years after the storming of Jerusalem's walls, a mother mourns her preacher son's death

*BBC blurb - In her new novel, the award-winning writer Naomi Alderman provides a compelling and challenging fictional account of life in Roman-occupied Judea. Her novel begins in 63 BC with Pompey's Roman army assailing the fortifications of Jerusalem, and ends with the bloodshed of the Jewish-Roman war in the first century CE.*

*Within this context of Roman brutality and Jewish insurrection, Alderman presents the life and death of a charismatic Jewish preacher, Yehoshuah. A year after his death, four people tell their stories - his mother, Miryam; his former friend and follower Iehuda of Qeriot; the High Priest at the great Temple in Jerusalem, Caiaphas and the rebel, Bar-Avo.*

Read by Stephanie Racine and Tracy-Ann Oberman  
Abridged by Sally Marmion

One started and hoped for some historical insight, but the getting is only an imagined and romanticised intrigue.

Move along, nothing to see.  
Produced by Emma Harding

Author Note: Naomi Alderman grew up in the Orthodox Jewish community in north-west London. Her first novel, 'Disobedience', was published in ten languages and won the Orange Award for New Writers; like her second novel, 'The Lessons', it was read on BBC Radio 4's Book at Bedtime. In 2007, she was named Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year, and one of Waterstones' 25 Writers for the Future. In 2009 she was shortlisted for the BBC National Short Story Award

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## Patrick says

An interesting take on a part of human history where myth and history collide. There are people, like Julius Caesar, whom we know existed, and about whom we know a fair amount. And then there are people like Helen of Troy, lost to pre-history, who as likely as not, never existed. Jesus of Nazareth is perched awkwardly between these two places, and to my mind, this made Naomi Alderman's story about life in Roman-occupied Jerusalem a quite haunting novel about how stories and myths come to be and about what can never be known for certain. And so we have a retelling of the parable of the talents which is quite different in its focus from the biblical account. And it is not Yehoshuah but the political insurrectionist, Bar Avo, who persuades the fishermen of Galilee to throw their lot in with him.

It's beautifully written and to this admittedly uneducated reader, the evocation of life in 0BCE Jerusalem feels spot-on. I don't know if her description of the lines of crucifixes on the road into Jerusalem as screaming trees is originally her own but either way, it's a perfect metaphor for the horrors of crucifixion, which Alderman reminds us, was hardly an exceptional mode of judicial killing at the time (somehow, I can't



help but picture Mark Lanegan being attracted to the image, which makes me wonder if it is older).

I liked the way that the book took a well-established story (although one where I'm embarrassingly reliant on a primary school Church of England version which left out a lot of the awkward details) and looked at it from a different angle – presenting Judas as a disillusioned follower who fears that his leader is becoming a cultish demagogue, and Caiaphas not as a cynical man seeking to get rid of a trouble-maker making life difficult for the temple, but as a pragmatic leader in a febrile, difficult environment, doing what he thinks will best protect his people from the might of the Roman Empire.

It's not without its flaws – the Epilogue would have been better presented as an author's afterword as it's essentially a “just in case you didn't get it, my point is that the myth of Jesus was bad news for the Jews” and she'd made that point well enough in the main body of the novel. I was also never quite sure she'd really explained quite why Pontius Pilate had decided to let the people of Jerusalem decide which of Barrabus/Bar Avo and Yehoshuah/Jesus should live and which should die – surely a Roman Prefect would want to be shot of the political insurrectionist, and be largely indifferent to the fate of a religious mystic? But perhaps I'd missed the point, maybe Pontius Pilate simply wasn't meant to be very clever.

[4.5 but I'm rounding up]

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## **Stephen says**

interesting novel surrounding the life of Jesus and split into 4 different versions, took me awhile to get into this novel maybe it was the subject title.

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## **Lyn (Readinghearts) says**

Naomi Alderman's new novel, *The Liars' Gospel* is definitely not a book for everyone. The book is set in the first century and centered around the life of a Jewish prophet, Yehoshuah (Jesus to us). Although it is ostensibly a retelling of the story of Jesus, I found Alderman's detailing of the political climate in Jerusalem during the rise and fall of Jesus much more interesting. The story is told from four viewpoints. That of Marym, Yehoshuah's mother, His friend and follower Ieudah of Queriot, the Roman High Priest of Jerusalem, Caiaphas, and the rebel Bar-Avo. As you read, it is easy to see that Marym is Mary, Ieudah is Judas Iscariot, and Bar-Avo is Barrabas.

I thought that Alderman's decision to tell this tale from 4 vary different viewpoints was a brilliant idea. Each character had a different relationship with Jesus and none of them alone could have told the tale completely by themselves. The switching of voice throughout the book allows the author to cover, not only the different times periods of Jesus' life, but also the different facets of his life. Of the four tellings (or gospels, per the title) I feel the best one was the telling by Judas. It is here that we first get to see what political forces are at work in Israel between the occupying Romans and the Jews. This political background was the most interesting part of the book to my thinking. Since I am not very well versed in the history of Israel, the Jewish faith, or the Roman empire during the time of Tiberius, I found this part of the book illuminating. The idea that the political forces at work during this time period could play such a major role in allowing Jesus to gather a following, and therefore, to become both who he was and who he wasn't, was what I liked best about the book.

One reason that I see this book as more than just the retelling of Jesus story, is that the second two "gospels" those of Caiaphas and Barrabas do not seem to have much to do with Jesus at all. Although Caiaphas was the High Priest of Jerusalem during this time, he never really came in contact with Jesus in a large way. His focus was more in the arena of the political strife between the occupiers and the native populations, and his efforts to reconcile the two. In the case of Barrabas, he went on to continue to lead the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans long after Jesus was dead. In fact, his story began with the death of Jesus and continued on with the focus on the political. For me this was the second best section of the book.

All in all, I found Alderman to present a thought provoking work that captivated me. Both her excellent prose and her development of the characters in the books were definite pluses. Not only was she adept at fleshing out the four characters telling the stories, but her attention to the supporting cast of characters was also well done. In addition, her ability to tell the story of Jesus from an alternate perspective and make it both believable, and more importantly, not disrespectful or preachy, was appreciated. As much as I enjoyed the book, at no time did the writing make me question my faith, or give me the idea that Ms. Alderman was trying to change my beliefs. Only that she was looking at the same story with different eyes.

As I said, this book is not for everyone, but if you are looking for something that is a little different, looks at something from a totally different direction, and has the ability to bring to light questions and new information, than this is the book for you. I am giving it 4 stars, and in fact, enjoyed it much more than I thought I might.

This book was provided to me by Little, Brown and Company through Netgalley in exchange for my review. I would like to thank them for the chance to read a book that I would probably not ever look at on my own. I thoroughly enjoyed it

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## **Jackie says**

"And in the midst of all that, one preacher by the name of Jesus died. And either something miraculous happened or someone lied."

This is not the story of Yehoshuah (Jesus) but of the way his existence affected those around him. It is an often bloody tale of a people under Roman occupation, told from the perspectives of Miryam (his mother), Iehuda (a follower), Caiaphas (High Priest of Jerusalem) and Bar-Avo (rebel and murderer).

The first half of the book is sublime. Miriam's feelings of betrayal, disappointment and loss in relation to her eldest son, and the strong love she had for him despite all these things, ring so true.

My favourite "chapter" is that of Iehuda. A man who loses faith, finds it again in Yehoshuah and then loses it again when he feels that Yehoshuah is allowing himself to become the centre of things and more important than his message and his people.

"Losing one's faith is so very like gaining it. There is the same joy, the same terror, the same annihilation of self in the ecstasy of understanding. There is the same fear that it will not hold, the same wild hope that, this time, it will. One has to lose one's faith many times before one begins to lose faith in faith itself."

After this it becomes more about a city under occupation and the clash between Rome and Jerusalem. It is no less compelling and well-written, but did not appeal to me as much as the first two chapters. However, I still

found myself unwilling to put it down, even for a moment.

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### **Brent Soderstrum says**

I won this book through GoodReads First Read program.

This is an uncomfortable read for a Christian. Alderman is a Jewish lady who allegedly writes about Jesus through four peoples perspective. Mary, Judas, Caiphaas and Barabas. Yet only the Mary and Judas section cover Jesus prominently. Caiphaas and Barabas only discuss Jesus peripherally. Even the sections which do cover Jesus more completely include complete lies with absolutely no backing which results in the uncomfortable feeling in reading the book. Jesus allegedly strikes Joseph. Joseph leaves Mary for another woman, Mary never finds that Jesus is gone from the tomb, Judas doesn't kill himself etc.

The author cites very few sources for the tale she makes up. The few verses of the Bible she does cite are selective and misconstrued. She conveniently ignores the rest of the New Testament. I think this is an attempt by the author to write a controversial book that will sell many copies and make her famous. Sadly enough that may work in this world. I suggest you read the non-fiction story on the life of Jesus-the New Testament.

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### **Alex says**

I am tempted to give this five stars to help balance many of the one-star reviews by people who somehow accidentally found themselves reading a book by a non-Christian for the first time and were traumatized and enraged by the unfamiliar experience. Honestly, read the one-star reviews just for laughs.

Naomi Alderman retells the story of Israel under Roman occupation and beset by false messiahs, both religious and military. Being Jewish, Alderman does not believe that Jesus was a god and this novel is short on magic and miracles (although the Jews are desperately waiting for such and the early Christians believe they have found them.) If those are what you're looking to read about there are many more suitable books for you!

As always, Alderman is brilliant with language and characterization. She uses characters from the Christian Gospels but treats them as complicated human beings living in the last days of the Second Temple, as Israel rebels again and again against the mightiest power on earth and is finally utterly destroyed and the Jews exiled for almost two thousand years. No character is left as a two dimensional hero or villain, and once again Alderman is Jewish and does not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, so if that sounds infuriating to you don't read this book: try *The Lion*, *The Witch* and *The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis instead, or maybe *Heaven Is Real* by that six-year-old. If you are Jewish, or not allergic to a Jewish perspective on Jewish history, it is a gripping and tragic read, a powerful novel of historical fiction about a nation that looked for a savior in the face of annihilation and found none.

And everyone should read Alderman's "Disobedience: A Novel."

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## **Renee says**

The Liars' Gospel: A Novel, fictional book on the life of Jesus, is a visually telling read and gives a realistic look into how people lived, thought, loved, and hated back in Biblical times. There are three main sections which are three very different stories, each revolving around a time, place, verse, or person from the Bible.

For example, part one focuses on the life of Jesus from birth to his resurrection and how he was perceived by the family who gave him mortal life. Instead of writing about how his family revered him from the day he was born, the author instead delves into the tough matters of how his differences became too much for his family, eventually breaking it up.

Interesting read for those that have read the Bible or have a little knowledge of who the people were inside the Bible, or for anyone who likes to read period fiction. Biblical times were violent and harsh. These stories bring readers back to these times and make them wonder how they could have reacted under different points of view.

This review was published on my book blog.

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## **Cindie Harp says**

This book is brilliant. I am a deep lover of the time period, so I stand biased, but Naomi Alderman's reimagination of the period, weaving of actual historical reports (I am hard-pressed to call anything "fact" when the experts so vehemently disagree) and novelist projections, is riveting (to me). I will think of her rendition for a long time.

I know I read her Orange Award winning book, Disobedience, when it came out, but did not record it on Goodreads. I loved how she interspersed some LGBT roots in this book as well.

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## **Samuel Rood says**

It was an interesting idea, writing a book about Jesus from a Jewish perspective, but I was very disappointed. The first century characters so obviously belonged in the 21st. None of the characters were believable and the character development was stale and predictable. Miriam (Mary) was the most interesting story, but the other three characters (Judah aka Judas, Bar Avo aka Barabbas, and Caiaphas) as well as their stories all fell flat. The cursing and the sexuality in the story so distracted from the world Alderman created that I wasn't able to enjoy it. Most significantly, the central character, Yehoshua (Jesus) was so one dimensional and unimpressive it is difficult to believe that anyone could have mistaken him for the Messiah. It would have been much more interesting if Alderman had left the question of Yehoshua's credentials open-as many Jewish Jesus scholars have done (i.e. Daniel Boyarin, and Amy-Jill Levine)-a question of faith. Alderman's Yehoshua was self-absorbed, arrogant, delusional, and erratic. He couldn't have been less compelling. I wasn't expecting him to be anointed Messiah or worshipped as Lord, but I wasn't prepared to think that he deserved to be crucified-as Alderman portrays him. All in all, not worth anyone's time.

