

## Lesson 10

# Matthew 26: Judas

## Introduction

Perhaps no other name has been more synonymous with deceit, treachery, and betrayal than Judas. I've never met a person named Judas, have you? Forever his name will be associated with his interactions with Jesus that led to Jesus' arrest, mock-trial, and execution on a cross. Judas is mentioned in all the synoptic gospels as well as John. First mentioned in Matthew 10.1, it is unclear how Jesus was chosen to be an apostle. How close he was to Jesus has not been revealed. We can assume that Jesus singled him out as a potential apostle in a similar manner as he did with Matthew, "Follow me," Matthew 9.9.

There are no individual scenes of Judas with Jesus recorded in Scripture. The lack of references to him seem to indicate that for the majority of Jesus' ministry, he was engaged in the same work and learning as the rest of the apostles and considered as one of the group. Apparently, he didn't seem less spiritual or more rebellious than the others. Think of the reaction of the 12 at the last supper when Jesus told them that one of them would betray Him. No one singled out Judas. In fact, in John 13.27-30 when Jesus identified Judas as his betrayer, some of the disciples thought something more innocent was going on.

In the listings of the apostles his name is always placed last and identify him as Jesus' betrayer.<sup>12</sup> This makes sense when we think of all four gospel writers writing decades afterward and looking back. The *one thing* Judas would be remembered for was his last, treacherous act. His surname *Iscariot* was also the name of his father, John 6.71; 13.2, 26. It is usually taken to refer to the place of his birth, Kerioth, located in southern Judah.<sup>13 14</sup> If this is true, Judas appears to have been the only one of the 12 not from Galilee. Despite his being placed at the last of the list among the apostles, Judas did play an important role among them: he served the group as its treasurer, John 12.6.

## The Betrayal

The events surrounding the Last Supper mark the point of no return for Judas. While they are gathered Jesus says that one of them would betray Him, Matthew 26.21. The reaction of the disciples is telling. None of them could believe it. *Surely not I, Lord*, they said. Jesus then specifies which one would commit this vile act of treachery:

He replied, "The one who dipped his hand with me in the bowl—he will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born." Judas, his betrayer, replied, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" "You have said it," he told him, Matthew 26.23-25.

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 10.4; Mark 3.19; Luke 6.16.

<sup>13</sup> BDAG, p. 480.

<sup>14</sup> If *Iscariot* indicates Judas' hometown, the precise location of Kerioth is less clear. The Old Testament identifies a town in Moab with this name (Jer 48:24, 41; Amos 2:2), as well as a location called Kerioth-Hezron (Josh 15:25). See Ayayo, Karelynn Gerber. "Judas Iscariot." *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

John gives us more detail on the events around that table.

When he had dipped the bread, he gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son. After Judas ate the piece of bread, Satan entered him. So Jesus told him, "What you're doing, do quickly." None of those reclining at the table knew why he said this to him. Since Judas kept the money-bag, some thought that Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival," or that he should give something to the poor. After receiving the piece of bread, he immediately left. And it was night, John 13.26b-30.

Later that evening, after the Supper concluded Jesus and the disciples went to Gethsemane. Jesus went there to pray. All four gospels record the event.<sup>15</sup> After some time, Judas, knowing exactly where Jesus would be, arrives with a band of soldiers and temple police to arrest Jesus. Judas identifies Jesus by giving him a kiss, Mark 26.47-50; Mark 14.43-45; Luke 22.47-48. Jesus is subsequently arrested, and we know the rest of the story.

## Judas' Motive for Betrayal

Scripture does not directly identify Judas' motives. Why did Judas determine to follow Jesus? What did he think of Jesus when he started to follow? What caused him to change his mind? Early on in Jesus' ministry, Jesus told the 12 that one of them had gone to work for the devil, John 6.70-71. We could assume that he had joined on with Jesus to be a part of the fame, power, and influence, as Jesus' standing with the people grew. We might also assume that he thought Jesus might have (at least in the beginning) been the one who would overthrow the Romans and he would have a high office in a new government. It seems plausible that when he figured out Jesus' mission did not involve being a political champion, Judas (who was all about self-protection and self-advancement) decided to curry favor with the political and religious establishment by betraying him. One can easily see him as a disillusioned disciple retaliating against Jesus because he thought Jesus had failed the Jewish nation in not delivering it.

As mentioned earlier, John mentions that Judas had been placed in charge of the money bag, 12.6, and was helping himself with its contents. Judas was benefitting financially from being around Jesus and at some point, grown concerned that Jesus had become aware of his theft.<sup>16</sup> Mark details Jesus' anointing at Bethany by a woman who took an expensive bottle of perfume and poured it on His head. He says some of the 12 were indignant wondering out loud as to why the perfume had been wasted. Their reasoning was that the perfume could have been sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor, Mark 14.5. John's account identifies Judas as the one who scolded the woman:

"Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He didn't say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it, John 12.5-6.

Stealing was an ongoing practice of Judas. So, it seems very fair to say that this story, along with his plot of an exchange of funds with Jesus leaders, indicates that Judas betrayed Jesus for money.

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 26.36-56; Mark 14.26-50; Luke 22.39-53; John 18.1-14.

<sup>16</sup> Salter, G. Connor. "Judas Betrays Jesus – Bible Story" [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com). Retrieved 10/31/2022 from [Judas Betrays Jesus - Bible Story, Verses & Meaning \(biblestudytools.com\)](http://www.biblestudytools.com)

## The One Good Thing We Can Say About Judas

Matthew 27.3-10 reveals that Judas was full of remorse when he saw that Jesus had been condemned. He *returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 27.3b*. It appears that he never imagined the religious establishment would carry things that far. As the reality sank in, as he reflected on all the time he had spent with Jesus, as the treachery of his actions came crashing down upon him, his heart was broken. It is fair to say he was no sociopath who was hardened to the point that he didn't feel any responsibility for his actions.

### *What makes his death so tragic*

Judas had sacrificed much to follow Jesus. Like the other disciples, he would leave his home, family, and life's profession to do this. He would have given up everything to follow Jesus, just like the other disciples, Matthew 19.27. He took great risks to follow Jesus, and yet threw it all away when he betrayed Jesus.

Also, consider how Judas ignored the repeated warnings. Jesus had warned him, and all the disciples, to guard themselves against Satan, Matthew 10.28. Early on, Jesus warned that one of them had gone to work for the devil, John 6.70. It also appears that at the last supper, Judas had the seat of honor at the table,<sup>17</sup> given his proximity to Jesus, John 13.26. His is the first to receive food, a sign of honor. Roger Frederickson opines that this is love's last appeal. Jesus is reaching out to him as a friend.<sup>18</sup> Even at the exact moment of the betrayal, it appears Jesus gave him one last out:

but Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" Luke 22.48.

Judas had numerous opportunities to consider what he was doing and relent. Yet, he still chose to go through with his plan.

## Judas' Death

Matthew's gospel, 27.3-10, provides the details. Judas, filled with remorse, tried to return the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. *I have sinned by betraying innocent blood*, he said, 27.4.

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<sup>17</sup> Of all the accounts of his betrayal, John's is by far the most developed. It seems likely from this Gospel that Judas was in the place of special honor at the Last Supper. The usual arrangement at such a meal was to have a series of couches, each accommodating three people, arranged in a U around the table. The host reclined in the center of the chief couch at the center of the curve of the U. The guests reclined on either side of him, leaning on their left elbow and eating with their right hand. The place of honor was to the left and, therefore, in a sense, behind the host. The second place was to his right, and the guest in that position would have his back to the host, "lying close to his breast." This was the position occupied by "the disciple . . . whom Jesus loved" (Jn 13:23). Peter was evidently separated from this disciple by some others, so that he had to beckon him to capture his attention. When Jesus declared that one of them would betray him, Peter asked the disciple whom Jesus loved to find out who it was. Jesus told him, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it" (Jn 13:26). So saying, he gave the morsel to Judas, telling him to do what he was going to do quickly.

See Williams, D. J. "Judas Iscariot." *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992, p. 407.

<sup>18</sup> Fredrikson, Roger L., and Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *John*. Vol. 27 of *The Preacher's Commentary Series*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1985, p. 217.

Rebuffed sternly by the religious leaders, Judas threw the money onto the temple floor and went out and hanged himself.

Rather than have blood money in the temple treasury, the chief priests and elders used it to purchase a potters field<sup>19</sup>, which was used to bury foreigners. The field became known as the “Field of Blood,” Matthew 27.8; Zechariah 11.12-13. Acts 1.18-19 reports:

Now this man acquired a field with his unrighteous wages. He fell headfirst, his body burst open and his intestines spilled out. This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that in their own language that field is called Hakeldama (that is, Field of Blood).

The last words recorded in Scripture about Judas are that he left (turned aside) from his apostolic ministry and has gone where he belongs, Acts 1.25.

## Learning from Judas

**What motivates us?** As we’ve seen, there is plenty of speculation regarding Judas’ motives for his betrayal. Be it for failed political and national expectations, money, or whatever, it appears Judas did not sincerely serve Jesus. He was still more committed to himself than to the Lord.

**Judas failed to take eternity in view.** Where will our actions end? It is not all about the here and now. Our actions have consequences. *Be sure your sin will catch up with you*, Numbers 32.23. What Satan offered Judas looked good in the short term, but now Judas has all of eternity to be tormented by his great remorse and guilt. If only he had considered eternity!

**Being well connected is not a guarantee of success.** Judas was part of Jesus’ group of 12. What an amazing privilege! He would have had instant access to the Messiah. Yet, despite being so closely connected to our Lord, he still succumbed to sin. As long as we remain in this body, we are fallible beings who are subject to failure. We must never grow haughty or arrogant. Our dependence on Jesus will never lessen as long as we are here on earth.

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<sup>19</sup> A potter’s field was a worked-out clay pit.