

How Do You Improve Yourself?

Series: Understanding God Helps You To Understand You.

How many Gods does it take to change a light bulb?

What Does The Bible Say?

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. 2 Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. 3 Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. 5 One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?” 7 “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.” 8 Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” 9 Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! (John 5:1–9 NLT)

Do you want to get well?

When we erroneously think God will remove a flaw or defect from us, we unconsciously go into a version of waiting on the Lord that is a form of laziness.

Let's look at two people as examples:

Judas:

Was a traitor: Luke 6:16

Judas (son of James), Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him).

(Luke 6:16 NLT)

Son of the devil: John 17:12

During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold. (John

17:12 NLT)

Went to hell: Acts 1:25

as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs.” (Acts 1:25 NLT)

Was a thief: John 12:6

Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples’ money, he often stole some for himself. (John 12:6 NLT)

Objected to devotion to the Lord: John 12:5

4 But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, 5 “That perfume was worth a year’s wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.” (John 12:4–5 NLT)

Acted shocked when caught: Matthew 26:21-25

While they were eating, he said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”

22 Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, “Am I the one, Lord?”

23 He replied, “One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me. 24 For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!” 25 Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked, “Rabbi, am I the one?” And Jesus told him, “You have said it.” (Matthew 26:21–25 NLT)

Zacchaeus:

Gave half his possessions to the poor: Luke 19:8

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” (Luke 19:8a NLT)

Paid back four times to people he cheated: Luke 19:8

Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” (Luke 19:8b NLT)

Either you want to change, get healthy, and grow closer to God or you don't.

How Can You Obey

Formula to become spiritually mature:

God Woos: John 6:44

For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up. (John 6:44 NLT)

God Works: Phil 2:13

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. (Philippians 2:13 NLT)

God's Word: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is

right. 17 God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17 NLT)

Own Commitment: 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

24 Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! 25 All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24–25 NLT)

Other Christians: Ephesians 5:21

21 And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21 NLT)

Onerous Crises: Matthew 6:34

“So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.” (Matthew 6:34 NLT)

Prayer is the primary way for us to change.

How many gods does it take to change a light bulb?

It only takes one, but the light bulb has to want to change!

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Notes:

This series is originated from the book, Thurman, C. (2017).
The Lies We Believe About God: Knowing God For Who He Really Is. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

Explore:

Judas Iscariot (Ἰούδας Ἰσκαριώθ, Ioudas Iskariōth). One of Jesus' 12 disciples. Betrayed Jesus and assisted the authorities in capturing Him.

Introduction

“Judas” was a common name in first-century Judaism. Seven additional people mentioned in the Gospels and Acts are named Ἰούδας (Ioudas)—translated as Judah, Judas, or Jude:

- Judas, son of James, one of the 12 apostles (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13; John 14:22; compare Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18).
- Jude, a brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3).
- Judah, the Old Testament patriarch, who is part of Jesus' ancestry (Matt 1:2, 3; Luke 3:33).

- Judah, the son of Joseph, who is also a forefather of Jesus (Luke 3:30).
- Judas called Barsabbas, an emissary from the Jerusalem Council to Antioch (Acts 15:22, 27, 32).
- Judas of Galilee, mentioned in Gamaliel's speech (Acts 5:37).
- Judas of Damascus, to whom Ananias is sent to locate Paul (Acts 9:11).

The story and tradition of Judas Iscariot may be influenced by the Old Testament figure of Judah who participated in handing over his brother Joseph (Meyer, Judas; Klassen, Judas; Spong, Judas Iscariot). Additionally, the similarity between the name Ἰούδας (Ioudas) (Judas) and the term Ἰουδαῖος (Ioudaios) (Jew) has led to the interpretation that Judas is a symbol for all Jewish people.

The name Iscariot is obscure. It is probably a reference to Judas' place of origin which is shared by his father, Simon (John 6:71; 13:26). Some manuscripts even read "from Kerioth" (John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26 and 14:22). 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).

Alternatively, the term Iscariot could be a description of Judas' act, possibly derived from a Greek word for assassin or bandit (σικάριος, sikarios) or from an Aramaic term of similar meaning. This rendering, however, would be redundant when it appears in places where the name is further modified with a description of Judas as the one who betrayed Jesus (Matt 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16).

Karelyne Gerber Ayayo, “Judas Iscariot,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Explore:

Judas’ Place among the Twelve Apostles

The Gospels and Acts are the only New Testament books to mention Judas, although 1 Cor 11:23 indicates that Paul was aware of the tradition of betrayal following the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23). The Synoptic Gospels list Judas among Jesus’ circle of 12 apostles, placing his name last and identifying him as Jesus’ betrayer (Matt 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16). John’s first explicit mention of Judas also affirms Jesus’ choice of him as one of the Twelve, and even highlights his allegiance at a time when other disciples are withdrawing. However, John also simultaneously labels him a devil and references his future betrayal (John 6:66, 70–71). The Synoptics repeatedly identify

Judas as one of the Twelve even after the betrayal is underway (Matt 26:14, 47; Mark 14:10, 43; Luke 22:3; Acts 1:17). Judas receives no special treatment from the evangelists until the final days of Jesus' life; as go the Twelve, so, presumably, goes Judas (compare Matt 10:1; 20:17; Mark 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; Luke 8:1; 9:1–6, 12). Only after Jesus' death is Judas notably absent from the eleven (Acts 1:13).

Karelyne Gerber Ayayo, "Judas Iscariot," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Explore:

Overview of Judas' Betrayal

All four Gospels indicate that, as the time of Passover neared, the chief priests desired to arrest Jesus (Matt 26:4; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2; John 11:57). The Synoptics say they were hesitant

for fear of the people (Matt 26:5; Mark 14:2; Luke 22:2), while John writes that they could not find Jesus (John 11:57). The Synoptics specify that Jesus had been teaching publicly in the temple (Matt 26:55; Mark 14:49; Luke 21:37; 22:53), indicating the chief priests may have struggled to locate Him away from the crowds.

Interaction with the Jewish Leaders

The Synoptics detail how Judas, specified as one of the Twelve, interacted with the Jewish leadership about their interest in Jesus and his willingness to betray (παράδιδωμι, paradidōmi) Him (Matt 26:14–15; Mark 14:10; Luke 22:3–4). Luke explains that Judas' act was a result of Satanic influence, a concept that John's Gospel reiterates (Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27). All three accounts discuss a monetary payment, but only Matthew specifies the amount as 30 pieces of silver and that the payment was tendered (Matt 26:15; Mark 14:11; Luke 22:5). From then, Judas began to

seek a time when Jesus was apart from the crowd (Luke 22:6) so that he might complete his obligation (Matt 26:16; Mark 14:11) as “a guide to those who arrested Jesus” (Acts 1:16 NASB).

John’s Gospel doesn’t record an encounter between Judas and the Jerusalem leaders, although readers may infer some prior contact from John 18:3. John also is silent about the matter of compensation for Judas, despite being the only Gospel to record Judas’ responsibility for the money box and his habitual pilfering of it (John 12:6).

The Last Supper

Judas’ attendance at the Last Supper, explicit in John 13:27 and Matt 26:25, is also implied in the Synoptics by the company of the Twelve (Matt 26:20; Mark 14:17) or of the apostles (Luke 22:14). However, it is debated whether he was present for its entirety, and whether he partook of the bread and the wine.

During the gathering, Jesus indicates that one of those present

would betray Him (Matt 26:21; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:21; John 13:21). This revelation prompts general murmuring among the disciples (Matt 26:22; Mark 14:19; Luke 22:23), who in Matthew and Mark respond, “Surely not I?” (Matt 26:22; Mark 14:19 NASB). In Mark’s telling, Jesus reiterates that the perpetrator is one of the Twelve, but doesn’t reveal his precise identity. Matthew writes that each one asks this question of the “Lord” (Matt 26:22), a title for Jesus that is spoken by his friends and those who seek Him for healing. Although Judas’ question is no different than the other disciples’, Matthew singles out his inquiry, and he distinguishes himself by addressing Jesus as “Rabbi,” a designation for Jesus that Matthew generally reserves for strangers and enemies of Jesus. Jesus offers an ambiguous, but possibly affirmative, answer when He replies, “You have said it yourself” (Matt 26:25, NASB). The Synoptics add Jesus’ woe for the offender: “It would have been good for

that man if he had not been born” (Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22 NASB).

John’s record provides a different perspective on the Last Supper. As Jesus washes the feet of His disciples (John 13:4–11), He intimates that at least one of them is less clean than the rest—a comment that John believes is a reference to the one who was betraying Jesus (John 13:10–11). After further teaching, Jesus directly informs His disciples that one of them will betray Him (John 13:21), but the disciples have no idea which one of them it could be (John 13:22). Although John suggests that Jesus reveals it to be Judas (John 13:26), the other disciples still seem unaware. They remain confused when Jesus dismisses Judas from their company, instructing him to act with haste—almost granting permission, if this statement is in reference to His betrayal (John 13:27–28). Though the rest suppose that he is going to buy provisions or give something to the poor (John 13:28–29), the narrator confirms Judas’ true intention. At the

outset of the meal, John declares that the devil was already working in Judas to bring about his betrayal of Jesus (John 13:2). John returns to this theme in 13:27 indicating that Satan enters Judas after he eats the morsel of bread Jesus gives him. John likely had a double meaning in mind when he wrote “it was night” when Judas’ departed (John 13:30). In contrast to John, none of the Synoptics record Judas’ departure from the company of the apostles, making it something of a surprise when he enters the garden he had frequented with Jesus separately from the rest (John 18:2).

Garden of Gethsemane

All four Gospels describe Jesus’ arrest in the garden of Gethsemane after Judas arrived in the company of representatives from the chief priests and Jewish leadership (Matt 26:47; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:47, 52; John 18:3). Matthew and Mark identify him as “one of the Twelve” as he hails Jesus

as rabbi and kisses Him (Matt 26:49; Mark 14:45, NASB), a sign he had prearranged to identify Jesus (Matt 26:48; Mark 14:44). In Luke, Jesus inquires whether Judas is betraying him with a kiss (Luke 22:48). In Matthew, Jesus replies to Judas' greeting with the statement, "Friend, do what you have come for" (Matt 26:50, NASB). John doesn't mention a kiss or any action by Judas, but twice records Jesus' self-identification to the officers while Judas stands with them (John 18:4–8). For Matthew and Mark, the scene culminates with all the disciples, presumably including Judas, fleeing and abandoning Jesus (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50).

Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, "Judas Iscariot," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Explore:

Judas' Remorse and Death

Matthew uniquely records Judas' remorse when he sees that the leaders have handed over Jesus to Pilate with the intent of having him killed (Matt 27:3). Judas articulates his own repentance and Jesus' innocence (Matt 27:4) and attempts to return the silver to the chief priests. When they reject the blood money, he throws it in the temple sanctuary, leaves, and hangs himself (Matt 27:5). Subsequently, the chief priests use the money to purchase the "Potter's Field" as a burial place for strangers, an act in which Matthew sees fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy.

Matthew's portrayal of Judas' death is different from Luke's depiction of Judas falling headlong and bursting in the middle (Acts 1:18). Some have attempted to harmonize these accounts by saying that Judas tried to hang himself, the rope or branch broke, and he fell. Papias, a second-century bishop in Asia

Minor, supplied an even more graphically grotesque account of Judas' death (Fragment 3).

Evaluation

The portrait of Judas that emerges from the New Testament accounts can be probed in many ways. Brown and Klassen argue that παραδίδομι (paradidōmi) should be read in the neutral sense of handing over rather than with a pejorative connotation of betrayal, despite contexts where a negative sense is explicit (Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22). Judas' motivation is also questioned, since the Gospels are ambiguous as to whether he was motivated by:

- Greed (Matt 26:15; John 12:5–6)
- Satanic influence (Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27)
- Obedience to Jesus (Matt 26:50; John 13:27)
- A mistaken understanding of the nature of Jesus'

Messiahship which anticipated His establishment of an earthly

kingdom (Matt 20:21; Mark 10:37; Acts 1:6; compare Matt 27:3)

- A growing understanding of Jesus' true Messianic mission with which Judas disagreed

Meyer and Ehrman claim the so-called Gospel of Judas presents a Judas who is closer to Jesus than any of the other disciples, who alone understands Jesus' message and intentions, and who acts in obedience to help Jesus attain His death. However, DeConick and Pearson, among others, have challenged this argument.

Additionally, the Gospel accounts themselves create theological tensions, many of which were explored early on by Origen (see Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.11; *Comm. Jo.* 32.240–50). For instance, they raise the question of how Judas can be faulted if his betrayal led to the fulfillment of God's will for Jesus to die on the cross. It is also questioned whether Judas was corrupt

from the time of his initial call—and if so, why Jesus chose him if He knew that Judas would betray Him.

The Gospel texts never indicate that the disciples were suspicious of Judas after Jesus predicts a betrayer; instead, they appear to be unaware of the offender's identity (Matt 26:22; Mark 14:19; Luke 22:23; John 13:29). Judas does not express enough outward signs of duplicity throughout Jesus' ministry to draw attention to himself; he appears no less sincere in his commitment to Jesus than the rest of the Twelve.

Passages like, “The Son of man now goes as it has been decreed, but woe to that person by whom he is betrayed” (Luke 22:22; compare Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21 NASB) indicate that the Gospel writers are comfortable with the theological complexity of their accounts. They appear to uphold God's will, Satan's evil influence, and Judas' human responsibility simultaneously in their presentations of Judas' act of betrayal.

Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, “Judas Iscariot,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Explore:

Zacchaeus (Ζακχαῖος, Zakchaios). A short, wealthy tax collector who hosts Jesus. A model of repentance. Name derived from the Hebrew word זַכַּי (zakkay), meaning “pure” or “innocent.” After Jesus visits his house, he offers to give half of all he has to the poor and repay anyone he has cheated.

Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

The story of Zacchaeus the tax collector only appears in one passage—Luke 19:1–10. Tax collectors in the Roman Empire had to collect a certain amount for the maintenance of the state. However, they were also permitted to collect more and then keep the proceeds. Tax collectors were hated for their tendency to abuse their power for their own gain. Material wealth (mammon)

is a recurring topic in the Gospel of Luke. St. Augustine argued that Zacchaeus' mammon could lead to his damnation (Augustin, Sermons, Sermon LXIII. [CXIII. Ben.] 3).

Zacchaeus' Repentance

In his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus repented of his past abuses. Slocum notes that Zacchaeus repented of his wealth (Slocum, "Zacchaeus Effects," 591). When Jesus sought to dine with Zacchaeus, the crowd reacted negatively, indicating Zacchaeus' isolation from the community (Luke 19:7 NRSV). His restoration is implied in his willingness to serve others.

The narrative focuses on Zacchaeus' actions, allowing the audience to view the events through his point of view. Yamasaki argues that the reading or listening community experiences the repentance and restoration with Zacchaeus (Yamasaki, "Point of View," 105). Zacchaeus consequently becomes a model of both repentance and reception of the teachings and grace of Jesus.

Byamungi points out that after repentance, his public image reflects the meaning of his name—pure, innocent (Byamungu, “Grace,” 337).

Zacchaeus in the Early Church

According to legend, Zacchaeus was the first bishop of Caesarea of Palestine (VII.4). He is listed as such in the fourth century ad work Apostolic Constitutions.

Michelle J. Morris, “Zacchaeus,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Question 1 of 5

Why do you think that God allowed polygamy in the Old Testament?

Question 2 of 5

What do you think is the most substantial reason for Christians to be monogamists?

Question 3 of 5

Have you tended to wait on God to change you, or have you actively done your part in trying to become a more Christlike person?

Question 4 of 5

Which part of the formula for becoming spiritually mature do you struggle with the most? Which part of the formula do you find the easiest to do?

Question 5 of 5

We need the support and challenge of others if we are going to change. Who are those people in your life?