

Bite Size Bible Study

Judas Iscariot #128

By Pastor Lee

Judas Iscariot was an integral part of the Passion of Jesus. He is often called the traitor disciple, who betrayed and enabled the arrest of his Rabbi, Jesus. But without his actions (which I am not condoning) Jesus would not have had the same opportunities to die for the sins of the mankind. No doubt it would have occurred without Judas's intervention, but God has no plan B, He is fully capable of carrying out Plan A.

The lapse of time between the recording in the gospels and the events surrounding the story of Judas allowed the writers to gather opinions and interpretations that may have colored the real events and most certainly the perceived mindset of Judas. It is not possible with any certainty, to draw from the four Gospels a complete coherent account of Judas's place among the twelve. Therefore, it is left up to the reader to evaluate the events in which he was involved. We in the Western cultures tend to jump on the negative assumption and hold on tight; but maybe Judas had other reasons for his actions.

Judas Iscariot is not his real name. He was known as Y'hudah Ben-Shim'on from K'riot (meaning Judas son of Simon from Kerioth, a town in southern Judea). In the lists in all three Synoptic Gospels, Judas appears last and his name is always coupled with the epithet '*who betrayed him*'. Also Judas seems to be the only non-Galilean among the twelve.

John calls him 'a thief', 'a betrayer', 'possessed by the devil', and 'the son of perdition'. It is as if they could not paint him black enough. But they forgot that all of them had at one time or another denied or deserted their Rabbi. So they may have felt the blacker they painted Judas the less their own greyness would be seen. Jesus himself, acknowledged to have been a clear reader of personality, first called Judas, and appointed him as the treasurer. Jesus is hardly likely to have given Judas the job if it was to be a source of temptation to him. It is not likely Judas would have joined a band of itinerant, penniless preachers if he were greedy and petty.

Judas might have seen in Jesus the potential fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. The current opinion at that time was the Messiah would come and defeat Roman rule and set up the nation of Israel again.

Christians, particularly in the west, have long speculated on the reasons for the original choice of Judas, his suicide, his motives and the relatively small amount of blood money paid to him. One theory is that Judas was probably the most passionate nationalist of the group, of shrewder stuff

than the rustic Galileans, swift to recognize the potential of Jesus, '*mighty in works and deeds*', to be the long awaited Messiah by Israelite peoples.

Judas seems to have misunderstood or disregarded Jesus's interpretation of his own roll as Messiah. Faced with a slow and steady process of disillusionment and disappointment, of what so many of Jesus's followers considered to be lost opportunities, Judas's impatience seems to have grown until he decided to grasp the initiative. By pushing Jesus at the tactical moment, he may well have felt that he was acting for Jesus's own good. Whether intending to force Jesus into declaring himself Messiah, at the height of the Passover feast, or whether driven to a pathetic revenge for his deep personal disappointment and frustration, Judas acted the traitor.

All three Synoptic Gospels declare that Judas himself approached the chief priests in order to betray Jesus to them. They were more than willing and promised to reward him. Matthew says that they gave him thirty pieces silver, the equivalent of about 120 days wages (or the purchase value of a foreign slave). If Judas was as greedy as is often supposed, he probably could have extorted far more from the high priests.

Matthew's account of Judas's remorse and suicide refers back to the prophecy of Zechariah 11:12-13. When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "*I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.*" They said, "*What is that to us? See to it yourself.*" So he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and left. Shortly after, he went and committed suicide (some say he hanged himself others say he fell and his body burst open). What ever his method of death was, it shows his loathing of his actions.

Judas had been through a lot with Jesus; he'd seen multitudes fed, demons rebuked, people healed, and the dead brought back to life, all of the things that prophecy said would be signs of the Messiah.

I believe that his plan was to force Jesus into admitting to be the Messiah, but his plan went horribly wrong. He had not thought through the consequences of his plan and ended up being a traitor to the Rabbi he loved.

He is a good lesson in taking our plans before the Throne and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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