

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

84 Was Judas Iscariot a Believer?

Scripture: Acts 1:15-20

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty.). Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take."

It is not easy to talk about Judas. I would prefer to talk about the other men Jesus chose. Even their failures are not all that difficult to deal with, possibly because we see so much of ourselves in them. Judas, however, remains a most baffling figure to this day. The passing of hundreds of years has not made it any easier to understand the mind of this . "son of perdition" as Jesus elected to call him in John's record, "*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.*" (17:12) What kind of a person do you think Judas was? Was he a demon, or was he a scoundrel of the worst kind? Or do you suppose he was just a blundering fool who saw his plan take a bizarre turn for the worse, and having reached the point of no return, was driven to escape by suicide? There remain many unresolved questions about Judas and in all the literature and piling on of words concerning him, there is nothing which seems to go far enough.

It seems incredible that a man could have had the relationship with Jesus that Judas had and yet be guilty of such a breach of trust. Clearly Jesus had chosen him according to John 6:66-71. We know he was one of the twelve. The complete list of these men is given three times in the gospel record, and the name of Judas is included. (Matthew 10:2-5; Mark 3:13-19; and Luke 6:12-16). We

know from the record that Jesus intended that these men be with Him. Judas undoubtedly viewed Jesus at close range, he ate, talked and lived with Jesus. Furthermore, the price was not equal to the deed. It was a paltry amount for such a cruel treachery. The exchange was made for about twelve dollars as we view values today. People don't sell animals for that kind of money today. It wasn't even the price of a pet.

Another matter is that of the suicide and the purchase of the land. Here we face the problem of who actually did buy the land, the priests or Judas, and the contradiction which seems to exist in the record of how Judas died. Also, doubters have long pointed out the apparent mistake in the name of the prophet who had predicted the money involved in the surrender of Jesus. So, I say once again, it is not easy to speak of Judas Iscariot. Our study will take us to the Scriptures themselves and it should be from this source that we form our opinions about him. The desire is to say something new even if we may not be certain that it is true. What can we conclude about Judas if anything, from the record we have in the Bible?

I. JUDAS WAS A MAN: *John 6:70*

The question has often been raised as to the possibility of Judas being a demon who incarnated himself with the purpose of destroying Christ. The above reference reads, "*Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is devil.*" The word devil here is the Greek word "*diabolos*" and carries the common meaning of "slanderer", or "adversary." Elsewhere in the New Testament the word is used without the definite article such as in I Timothy 3:11, "*Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.*" The same is true in II Timothy 3:3 and Titus 2:13. Jesus had much the same thought when He spoke to Peter with the words, "Get thee behind me Satan.", in Mark 8:33. He was not identifying Peter as a devil. He saw in Peter at that moment those qualities of an adversary or slanderer. The same was true of Judas when Jesus called him a devil. Those were the characteristics Jesus discerned in the man at the time. Not everyone views the meaning of the verse in this way. No less a Bible expositor than G. Campbell Morgan has written, "I do not believe that Judas was a man in the ordinary sense of the word. I believe that he was a devil incarnate, created in history for the nefarious work that was hell's work." This view seems to give rise to larger problems than it solves. God never created a devil, the Devil was made not created. If such were true Judas would not be to blame for his misdeed and Jesus clearly indicated that it would have been good for the person

who betrays Him never to have been born. "*Woe unto him*" Jesus said. (Matthew 26:21-25) I therefore conclude Judas was a man, not a devil.

II. JESUS DID CHOOSE SUCH A MAN TO LEARN FROM HIM:

Any study of Judas will have to include somewhere along the line the question of why Jesus picked him in the first place. This is a very difficult area to move in because as far as I can understand the Bible is silent at this point. The only exception might be recorded by John, "*I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.*" The (13:18) Scripture cannot be broken according to Jesus (John 10:35) and the call of Judas was in keeping with that principle. Judas was not chosen out of any necessity. There were others who responded to Jesus' message and might have been selected. Judas was not chosen out of ignorance, although how much of His omniscience Jesus surrendered in the incarnation we do not know. You may remember that incredible admixture of strength and weariness as a sleeping Jesus in the boat awakened to still the tempest. I am content to feel that Jesus chose Judas in much the same spirit as He chose Peter and the sons of thunder, James and John. He did not select them for what they were, but for what they might become. He saw John and knew He could overcome that pride and become a man of love. So it was with the entire group. He saw their potential. I believe He chose Judas as a person not as a pawn driven by fate on a chessboard. The choice Judas made I believe to have been his own.

III. JUDAS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY:

During the events which surrounded the death of Jesus there mere happenings which took place in direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. One such prophecy is found in Zechariah 11:12-13. This is the way it reads, "*And I said unto them, If ye think me good, give me my-price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price 30 pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter, a lordly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the 30 pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.*" Such a passage would seem to suggest that Judas was a driven man without a mind of his own in the matter. The only thing that can be said here is that in His decree to endow man with the capacity of choice, God allowed for His permissive as well as His positive will to be done. Thus God allowed Judas to indulge an evil impulse and did not intervene to force a positive action on his part. Had Judas been compelled to act against his will in the matter of Christ, he would not have been morally

responsible for what he did. Jesus indicated he was responsible when he asked, "*Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*" The tone here is certainly not, "Judas, do not feel bad, you are not to blame for what you are about to do!" Furthermore, in Acts 1:25 we read, "*Judas hath by transgression fell.*" Exactly what was this transgression? The fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah lies in the fact that when Judas became a disciple of Jesus he was either elected or chosen to be the treasurer of the group. Evidently he was a man who had a way with money.

Very often people who have a way with money also have a weakness, the passion for more and more. Judas came to the place where he was an ordinary thief. John 12:6 tells us, "*He was a thief, and had the bag and bore what was put in it.*" He had his hand in the treasury of the disciples. What was Judas doing with the money he was stealing? We have one suggestion from Acts 1:17-19. Apparently Judas had purchased a piece of property. He had decided to follow Jesus with the expectation that Jesus was going to make good on His claim to have a kingdom. His true Messiahship would flash out in any given moment. Judas was preparing for that day and he felt his prospects would be enhanced for a place in that kingdom with a parcel of land that was his own. When Judas realized things were not going well for Jesus and that a crisis of some kind was actually nearing, he must have felt that the disciples' treasury would no longer be a source of income for him. Another source of gain would be to surrender Jesus to the authorities. The price was fixed at 30 pieces of silver. The deed was done. (Matt.26:47-50) When the moment of truth came Judas experienced a dreadful reaction. The guilt he felt overwhelmed him. He took the blood money, destroyed with remorse, he raced back to the high priests and cast it at their feet with those words which will live in infamy. "*I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.*" Completely devastated he went out and strung up a rope. He then hung himself on the very parcel of ground he had schemed to purchase. His body swelled, the rope broke, and he fell headlong to the ground so that his bowels gushed out. The priests gathered up the money and rather than keeping it, sought the man from whom Judas had arranged to buy the land. He was a potter. Because Judas had suicided on the land it became a place with a stigma and we know it to this day as the "*Field of Blood.*" Zechariah's prophecy was fulfilled. There is a difference between the possession of a power and the use of that power. God made man with a will, but God did not make man use his will in a certain way. Judas used his will to surrender to the overtures of Satan. God makes the hand of a person, but God does not make it a murderer's hand.

He does not make it a hand that slays a victim. Judas was overcome with greed. He acted for reasons of his own. The reasons He chose suited perfectly the prediction of Zechariah centuries before.

IV. THE STORY OF JUDAS IS DEPENDABLE:

There are some strange problems which should be dealt with in connection with the record we have in the Bible concerning Judas. Three areas are commonly brought to the attention of Bible students.

1. The Purchase of the Land:

Who actually did buy this land? In Matthew 27:9 reads, "*They (the priests) took the thirty pieces of silver... and gave them for the potter's field.*" Peter tells us as recorded in Acts 1: 18, "*Now this man (Judas) purchased a field with the reward of iniquity.*" We do not have much space for this but the solution is as I have already told the story. Judas purchased the land before the betrayal. The buying in Matthew is not the same as the purchasing in Acts. The word in Matthew 27 "agorizo" meaning to buy in the open market. In Acts it is "ktaomai" and means to obtain or acquire for ones self. The nouns are also different. In Matthew it is a "field." The word is "agros." In Acts it is "chorion" which means 'farm' or "homestead." One was purchased by Judas before the betrayal, the other was purchased by the priests after the crucifixion.

2. The Suicide of Judas:

Matthew tells us Judas "*went out and hanged himself.*" (27:5). Peter informs us in Acts 1:18 "*that he fell headlong and all his bowels gushed out.*" Judas evidently went to some out of the way corner of the land he had purchased. The corpse hung for some time without being found. Of its own weight it eventually fell, rupturing the walls of the stomach and we have the result described by Peter. The two passages are reconciled.

3. The Fulfillment of Prophecy:

Matthew informs us that the priests acted in accordance with what Jeremiah the prophet had promised. (Matthew 27:9) The problem lies in the fact that no such prediction can be found in the Book of Jeremiah. I have satisfied this matter in my own thinking by taking literally what Peter had said. "*Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet...*" We can certainly distinguish between something spoken and something written. As long as

the two words have different meanings the record can stand. It may well have been that some of the messages of the prophets were handed down orally. Jesus suggested this in Matthew 5:21-27, 31,,33,,38,,43 with the words, "*Ye have heard that it was said...*"

V. THE STORY OF JUDAS IS A WARNING TO US:

You have heard of the three rules of Bible study. What does it say? What does it mean? How does it apply to my life? The most important of these is probably the last because the other two are included by-in-large. How do we apply the tragic story of Judas to our lives? We can certainly examine our motives for following Jesus. He saw wonderful things in the powers Jesus displayed. We can know that it is possible to have all the appearances of being a true follower of Christ, yet not to be a disciple in heart. If anything, we can be mindful of the exceeding great danger of money and the havoc it can bring in spiritual matters. The greatest tragedy of Judas was the fact that he never really listened to what Jesus said about forgiveness. He had undoubtedly heard the words, but he hadn't come to grips with what Jesus was saying. Even his miserable life did not have to end hanging upon the branch of a tree. He should have been found clinging to the dying Jesus begging for forgiveness. We may be sure He would have found it. Judas was never a true believer in Jesus Christ. He chose not to be. Anyone who does not choose to believe in Jesus will die. Those who choose to trust Him will live. Trust Jesus Christ and live, do not die as Judas.

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