Judas Iscariot

Key Passages: Matthew 10:4, 26:14-30, 47-50, 27:1-10, Mark 3:19, 14:10-46, Luke 6:16, 22:3-48 and John 18:2-5

Have you ever had a friend who appeared to be trustworthy and loyal, but in the end turned out to be the opposite? To be someone who we would identify as a betrayer or traitor. If so, how did it make you feel? How did you react?

It is interesting that throughout the Gospels we get more background information on Judas than any of the other Apostles. He is the most notorious of the bunch not because of his followership, but because of his identity as the betrayer of Jesus. Eleven apostles demonstrate for us God's ability to use common everyday people, faults and all, and do some amazing things. In fact, up until the moment Judas becomes greedy and makes the choice to turn on Jesus, he was a part of those things as well. He was just as close to Jesus as all the others. He heard all the teachings and witnessed all the miracles, yet, instead of growing fonder of Jesus, his heart became hardened. While all the other apostles were being transformed into passionate followers of Jesus, Judas was being changed too. In the end, he became an instrument of Satan and demonstrated the dangers of deceit and betrayal. When we study Judas, we should see what happened to him as a warning for us to guard against spiritual carelessness, pride, and greed.

His Name

"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. What does his name mean?

"Praise" or "Let God be praised" – It's a bit ironic that the betrayer of Jesus' name would carry these meanings.

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).[1]

Judas was an important participant in the story of Jesus' ministry. He was brought into the group of twelve and entrusted as the group's treasurer. 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).[2]

Read Matthew 26:14-30, then 47-50, Matthew 27:1-10

Evaluation

The portrait of Judas that emerges from the New Testament accounts can be probed in many ways. Brown and Klassen argue that παραδίδωμι (*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

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

[2] Ibid.

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.[3]

[3] Ibid.