

Historic Overview: Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot was, according to the New Testament, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. He is best known for his betrayal of Jesus to the hands of the chief priests for 30 pieces of silver. He was the first of the apostles to die.

Judas is mentioned in the synoptic gospels, the Gospel of John and at the beginning of Acts of the Apostles.

Mark states that the chief priests were looking for a sly way to arrest Jesus. They decided not to do so during the feast since they were afraid that people would riot; instead, they chose the night before the feast to arrest him. In the Gospel of Luke, Satan enters Judas at this time.

According to the account in the Gospel of John, Judas carried the disciples' money bag. He betrayed Jesus for a bribe of "thirty pieces of silver" by identifying him with a kiss — "the kiss of Judas" — to arresting soldiers of the High Priest Caiaphas, who then turned Jesus over to Pontius Pilate's soldiers.

Death

There are a few descriptions of the death of Judas, two of which are included in the modern Biblical canon:

- Matthew 27:3-10 says that Judas returned the money to the priests and committed suicide by hanging himself. They used it to buy the potter's field. The Gospel account presents this as a fulfillment of prophecy.
- The *Acts of the Apostles* says that Judas used the money to buy a field, but fell headfirst, and *burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out*. This field is called Akeldama or *Field of Blood*.
- The existence of conflicting accounts of the death of Judas caused problems for scholars who saw them as threatening the reliability of Scripture. This problem was one of the points causing C. S. Lewis, for example, to reject the view "that every statement in Scripture must be historical truth"

Betrayal of Jesus

There are several explanations as to why Judas betrayed Jesus. A prevalent explanation is that Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16). One of Judas's main weaknesses seemed to be money (John 12:4-6). A possibility is that Judas expected Jesus to overthrow Roman rule of Israel. In this view, Judas is a disillusioned disciple betraying Jesus not so much because he loved money, but because he loved his country and thought Jesus had failed it. According to Luke 22:3-6 and John 13:27, Satan entered into him and called him to do it.

The Gospels suggest that Jesus foresaw (John 6:64, Matthew 26:25) and allowed Judas's betrayal (John 13:27-28). One explanation is that Jesus allowed the betrayal because it would allow God's plan to be fulfilled. Another is that regardless of the betrayal, Jesus was ultimately destined for crucifixion. In April 2006, a Coptic papyrus manuscript titled the Gospel of Judas from 200 AD was translated, suggesting that Jesus told Judas to betray him, although some scholars question the translation.

Judas is the subject of philosophical writings, including *The Problem of Natural Evil* by Bertrand Russell and "Three Versions of Judas", a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. They allege various problematic ideological contradictions with the discrepancy between Judas's actions and his eternal punishment. John S. Feinberg argues that if Jesus foresees Judas's betrayal, then the betrayal is not an act of free will, and therefore should not be punishable. Conversely, it is argued that just because the betrayal was foretold, it does not prevent Judas from exercising his own free will in this matter. Other scholars argue that Judas acted in obedience to God's will. The gospels suggest that Judas is apparently bound up with the fulfillment of God's purposes, yet *woe is upon him*, and he would *have been better unborn* (Matthew 26:23-25). The difficulty inherent in the saying is the paradox - if Judas had not been born, the Son of Man will apparently no longer go "*as it is written of him*". The consequence of this apologetic approach is that Judas's actions come to be seen as necessary and unavoidable, yet leading to condemnation.

Wikipedia, Judas Iscariot - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judas_Iscariot