

JUDAS ISCARIOT (Part I)

Judas Iscariot was called by Jesus Christ to be a disciple, one of the twelve most privileged men in the New Testament who would accompany and learn from the Master. Then, when Jesus would return to Glory, His disciples would continue the work He began.

As one of the disciples Judas was with Jesus for a period of over three years. He saw everything Jesus did, and he heard everything Jesus said, and yet ... he ultimately betrayed Him.

One of the most hurtful things in life is to be betrayed by someone you thought you could trust. ... When someone 'lets you down' it hurts 'to your very heart'. ... Judas 'let Jesus down'. Even though he was so greatly privileged, he eventually sold his friendship and commitment for thirty pieces of silver.

Initially, Judas would have been like the other disciples in that he was an ordinary man from an ordinary background. None of the disciples was anything special, and neither was Judas. ... Indeed, if Jesus had not called the twelve to be His disciples we would never have heard of them!

So, Judas Iscariot had the same opportunities as the rest and yet, in three out of the four lists of disciples, - (he is not mentioned in the Acts list), - he is consistently described as the betrayer of Jesus, (**Mt. 10:4** ... Iscariot, who also betrayed him [*παραδίδωμι, give/deliver into the hands of another*] ... **Mk. 3:19** And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him ... **Lk. 6:16** ... and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor [*προδότης*]) ... Above everything else he did in the service of Jesus, his is a story of the most heinous and infamous treachery.

As we have noticed previously, the name Judas was a beautiful and common Old Testament name meaning 'God is praised'. When the father and mother gave their son such a name they undoubtedly had great hopes for him, - his father's name was Simon (Jn. 6:71) ... Judas, son of Simon ... Judas bar-Simon.

Judas *Iscariot*, on the other hand, simply refers to where he came from. The same form of speech is used to refer, - for example, - to Saul *of Tarsus*, and

Jesus *of Nazareth* ... Judas Iscariot simply means Judas *of/from Kerieth*, Ἰσκαριώτης.

There are two Kerieth's in Scripture. There was a Kerieth in Moab, - the region to the east and south-east of the Dead Sea. This Moabite Kerieth is mentioned in Jeremiah 48:24, 41 *Kerieth is taken, and the strong holds are surprised, and the mighty men's hearts in Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs, and Amos 2:2, But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerieth: and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.*

However, the Kerieth Judas Iscariot came from was twenty-three miles south of Jerusalem and about ten miles south of Hebron in the territory belonging to the tribe of Judah, and mentioned in Joshua 15:25. This was an outlying rural farming area consisting of a number of villages which loosely formed the town, - or townland, - of Kerieth.

Interestingly, this was not in or anywhere near Galilee, from where the other eleven came, - this was in Judea ... Judas Iscariot came from Judea, from the tribe of Judah in the south of the country. That is probably the reason Judas is not continuously described as Judas son of Simon ... but to distinguish him, he was known as Judas from Kerieth in Judea. He was the only non-Galilean disciple, the only Judean ... and an *outsider*.

Consider that for a moment ... He was brought up in a different part of the country. He had a different accent. He grew up with different people, and he would not have had the shared upbringing many of the others had. For example, Peter and Andrew grew up together as brothers, ... James and John were brothers also, and they were close friends and work colleagues with Peter and Andrew. Philip and Bartholomew/Nathanael were friends, if not relatives. Matthew and Thomas and James were friends. Simon the Zealot and Judas son of Alphaeus were co-workers in the Gospel ... but Judas Iscariot was an outsider from the beginning for he was on his own. So, he would have found it 'challenging' to have fitted in. He seemed to be content enough though being a loner.

How did he ever get into the group? After all, he came from a different part of the country, away down in the south. ... He came from a little place (Kerieth) 'out in the sticks' in Judea. Not being known by any of the other

men/disciples Judas would have found it necessary to prove himself ... and he must have made some kind of impression because he was given the job of looking after the purse-strings. That suited him because he saw the opportunity to help himself to some of its contents. Whether or not the disciples knew that at the time we are not sure, but they *did* come to discover it, **Jn. 12:1** Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. **2** There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. **3** Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. **4** Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, **5** Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? **6** This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief [*κλέπτης*], and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

Now the word for ‘thief’ that is used as a description of Judas Iscariot is a different word than the word used to describe the two thieves on the cross. The word for them is ληστής, and it relates more to a violent bandit-type robber -plunderer ... whereas Judas was a κλέπτης ... he ‘had his fingers in the till’ while he was pretending to be working with you.

Also, he would have had great interest in looking for the Messiah because, - according to the Old Testament prophecies, - the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah ... the same tribe he, - Judas Iscariot, - belonged to. ... And Judas Iscariot was the only disciple who came from the same ancestry as Jesus, - the tribe of Judah, - and that is why prophetically in Ps. 41:9 Jesus referred to him as *mine own familiar friend*. ... They both belonged to the same family ... the family of Judah.

As we have already seen, *all* the disciples were looking for the coming of the Messiah, so Judas Iscariot ‘fitted in’ and was fairly ‘normal’ in that regard. ... Like James and John, for example, he would have relished the thought of sitting beside Jesus when He would establish Himself as the Messiah in the future Kingdom ... and surely, since he also came from the tribe of Judah, there would be an *extra-special* place for him!

So he was not any different from that perspective ... and he also followed Jesus because he wanted to, otherwise he would not have left his home town of Kerioth ... and neither did he not desert the Saviour as many had done at

the conclusion of the events in Jn. 6:60, Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? ... ⁶⁶ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Also ... his character and purpose had been prophesied in the Old Testament. ... Ah, says some, so *that* is why he betrayed Jesus! And they say it wasn't really Judas' fault for he was fulfilling a role within prophecy. Some of them say that Jesus and Judas were colluding on some kind of plan and that Jesus 'backed' out of whatever they were arranging and Judas was thrown into such a conundrum he decided the only way out was for him to commit suicide. ... So basically, Judas Iscariot had been manipulated and manoeuvred into a situation over which he had no choice ... the 'script' had been written for him and he was forced to fulfil it! ... He has been the most 'badly-done-by' individual in the whole of history!

No, that is not true. ... Let's set aside the conspiracy theories and accept what the Bible says ... for Judas Iscariot *did* have a choice. He wasn't some kind of robotic automaton who had to, - against his will, - blindly fulfil a particular role. ... Judas very decisively and ruthlessly *chose* to betray Jesus because he saw an opportunity in it for himself to gain money and favour. ... When he discovered the Pharisees were looking to find a way to trap Jesus, Judas saw his *modus operandi* to make money ... and he 'jumped at it'! He knew exactly what he was doing, and he was so filled with greed he betrayed Jesus.

He was so twisted! He was the kind of person who would not let anyone get close to him. He did not partner with any of the other disciples in case he was found out ... and so he 'kept himself to himself'. ... And it was due to his own fallen will, - driven by his selfish ambition for power and position, - that he chose to betray Jesus. He wasn't forced into it for he did it willingly! In fact, ... two things ... firstly, Jesus pleaded with him at the Last Supper, **Jn. 13:26** Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. ... secondly, Matthew makes it clear the Jewish leaders did not come looking for Judas ... but Judas went to find them, **Mt. 26:14** Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, ¹⁵ And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

At the same time, though, Jesus chose him to be a disciple. In that event in John chapter six when so many followed Jesus as ‘disciples’ ... and then they heard some of the things He was saying and it *offended* them to such a degree, they followed Him no longer ... but Judas remained ... and God used his reason for remaining so that he would fulfil the plan for which he was there.

In fact, he would have admired Jesus ... and the very fact he wept after he had betrayed Jesus illustrates this, to some degree. ... He followed Jesus at the beginning because he was infatuated with the possibilities Jesus might achieve! ... And he wanted to be part of the unfolding drama.

So really, in following Jesus, he was granted the opportunity to do what he wanted to do ... and he would often have been genuinely touched as he saw the people coming to Jesus, and as he watched Jesus performing the miracles of healing, and raising people from the dead ... and as he listened to the Saviour speak. Underlying it all though, as became evident, Judas Iscariot saw Jesus as the opportunity to take him where he wanted to go! ... I’ll follow this Man for I see how He can serve my purposes.

That bears itself out in the fact Judas never really had a spiritual interest, - the others had ... but there is no mention of Judas Iscariot showing any enthusiasm for the message Jesus was proclaiming. ... And the passage in Jn. 12:1-6 bears that out when he tried to put it across that the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with the ‘very costly’ ointment oil would have been better handing it to him and he could have sold it and given the proceeds to the poor. He was ‘fibbing’ for what he would have done was this ... He would have taken the ‘very costly oil’ from the woman, then he would have brought it to some of his friends and bartered for the best price ... he would come back, make a contribution into the ‘purse’ ... but not ‘let on’ to anyone he had kept the most of what he got for himself! ... That is the kind of *thief* he was.

By the way, what were the circumstances by which Judas became a disciple? ... There is no mention of his calling, as there was for example with Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew, or Nathanael/Bartholomew. Instead, from an ‘ordinary’ point of view, Judas Iscariot ‘latched himself on’, - as many do. For example, Jesus said, **Mt. 7:21** Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. **22** Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, *have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful*

works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. ... Now, this was *before* the twelve disciples were officially ‘constituted’ in Mt. 10:2-4 ... so already the measure of such ‘followers’/‘disciples’ as Judas was not a surprise to Jesus.

So, from the beginning, Judas was prepared to be with Jesus because it suited his aspirations. He was prepared to work in with what the rest of the disciples were doing because it was a means by which he could pretend in order to benefit. As far as the religion was concerned, he thought himself sufficiently good so he could tell others what they should do, however, he saw no need to do it himself. In other words, he was self-conceited, self-righteous, and self-deluded. While other people needed to repent, he saw no such need.

Jesus was well aware of his calibre though from the start, **Jn. 6:70** Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil [*διδύβολος*]? In Ps. 41:9 Judas had been written about, Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me ... And Judas was a close companion of the Saviour ... someone, - on the face of it, - He trusted. ... But Jesus knew all about him, **Mt. 26:17** Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? ¹⁸ And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. ²⁰ Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. ²¹ And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. ²² And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? ²³ And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. ²⁴ The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. ²⁵ Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. ... Jesus knew. Judas could not fool the Saviour! ... ²⁴ The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born, that is to say, that once he was born, he could never die and he would face eternal punishment. ... Surely Judas would have been ‘squirming’ as he listened!

Again, in the Psalms we read, **Ps. 55:12** For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: ¹³ But it was thou, a man mine

equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. ¹⁴ We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company ... Jesus knew all about him. Turn also to Zech. 11:12 for some more detail, And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. ¹³ And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.

And Peter also spoke of his treachery, [Acts 1:15](#) 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,) ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Indeed, in this particular passage Peter explained how Judas was responsible for his own actions while at the same time he was fulfilling God's Old Testament prophecy.

The same truth is repeated in the Lord's High Priestly prayer, [Jn. 17:11](#) And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. ¹² 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 ... And then He added, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled ... as found in Psalms 41 and 55, and Zech. 11.

By his own will, then, his own pride and his own unbelief, selfish ambition and greed ... *that* is what drove Judas Iscariot to follow Jesus. And then he gets in among the Twelve, and he is given the responsibility of looking after the money. He is chosen as a disciple, with a special responsibility, accompanied by the trust and influence of the other disciples ... and he manipulates his position for his own means. Following Jesus 'was a ticket' to promote himself. Yet, all the while, he was setting himself up to betray Jesus. He was pretending to be one of them when he wasn't! ... All smiles and 'one of the gang', and yet a hypocrite and a counterfeit ... pretending to be something he knew he wasn't! ... And none of the Twelve *saw* it ... *but Jesus did!*

Studying Judas Iscariot can be unsettling for we could ask, what if my faith in Christ is not real, and I am only pretending? Surely, it is to such a fear of pretence Peter addressed as he wrote, [II Peter 1:10](#) give diligence to make your

calling and election sure. ... How sure can we be of our salvation? How are we to know for certain if we are truly a child of God or not? How do we know we are not pretending?

We could pursue many answers to these questions but it is only necessary to ask one or two ... Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ and are you serving Him faithfully, to the very best of your ability? ... If you answer 'yes' to both of those questions you are standing on the same safe and secure platform as Paul when he wrote to the Philippians, **3:12** Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. **13** Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, **14** I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ... **9** And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: **10** That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; **11** If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

That is where Judas Iscariot hopelessly failed, as we shall continue to consider in our next study. Amen.