

The enigma of Judas Iscariot (1)

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IT IS A fearful paradox for us to contemplate: that one chosen to be an heir of salvation, and especially selected to sit on one of the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29,30), who saw with his own eyes and heard with his own ears the Word made flesh, who witnessed in close proximity the teachings and miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ, could be the one to steal, beguile, betray with the kiss of death, and lose sight of the future vision of the Kingdom.

We are *all* warned that, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18; Hos. 4:6). A vision is a mental picture that encapsulates, presents and recalls certain circumstances, knowledge, scenery, locations and events while awake. For the vision to be alive, clear and sustainable for all occasions it must have a sure foundation based on Scriptural knowledge. The vision must be unimpaired and not suffer distortions by fleshly distractions; it must be fervently fed, nurtured, shepherded, kept alive, sustained, seasoned and matured by the Word of God.

Judas had an immediate vision of the restored Kingdom of Israel but eagerly sought instant gratification and a position of elevation and importance. Frustrated by the lack of immediate fruition, fearing for life itself, there emerged opportunity for self-preservation at the expense of others. There are sobering lessons from the life of Judas, given so that we might reflect on our own behaviour, to repudiate and rectify that which is unfitting.

Judas in the Scripture record

Judas Iscariot was an inhabitant of Kerioth, a town of the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15:25). Ungers suggests that the name comes from *Ish Kerioth*, meaning ‘man of Kerioth’. Thus Judas was the only apostle who was not of Galilee, being a Judean.

Judas’s name is always mentioned last when the apostles are listed by name. Usually when he is mentioned it is with one or more qualifying features:

- the son of Simon (Jno. 6:71; 12:4; 13:2,26)
- Iscariot (Mt. 10:4; Mk. 3:19; Lk. 6:16; Jno. 6:71; 12:4; 13:2,26)

- one of the twelve (Mt. 26:14,47; Mk. 14:10,43; Lk. 22:47)
- the one who betrayed Jesus (Mt. 10:4; 26:25; 27:3; Mk. 3:19; Jno. 18:2,5)
- the traitor (Lk. 6:16)
- Satan, that is, the adversary (22:3)
- influenced by the devil (Jno. 13:2)
- the one who had the bag (v. 29)
- receiving a band of men (18:3)
- falling by transgression (Acts 1:25)
- the son of perdition (Jno. 17:12).

Judas was chosen by the Lord as one of the twelve disciples who became apostles (Mt. 10:2-4; Lk. 6:13-16), being sent out with the twelve to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt. 10:5,6). The twelve disciples (literally ‘learners’) all received instruction from Jesus (5:1,2) and knew the discipline, qualities and characteristics they were to emulate in this exalted calling. Judas was drawn, as the others were, by the preaching of the Messianic hope and by the gracious words of the new teacher. He was greatly motivated to leave his former life and obey the call of Jesus of Nazareth.

Judas the thief

There is a time when resistance to evil is possible. It means rigorous self-examination, critical discipline, mastering and submitting flesh to the Divine will, obedience to the commands of Yahweh and fervent prayer to overcome flesh. There needs to be a willingness to overcome, a supplanting of flesh with spiritual knowledge, and patient continuance in well-doing. John advised: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 Jno. 5:21); for “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Judas had one of the highest positions among the twelve, being entrusted with the common money bag (Jno. 13:29). He had a talent in accountancy, and was made treasurer to the apostles. Matthew, the ex-revenue man, would also have been an appropriate choice or contender for the position. It is not known if Judas was appointed, or whether he promoted himself to the position.

The responsibility that this would have given Judas triggered temptation and trial. The early signs of temptation for Judas appear in the

Why did Judas betray Christ?

- It was foretold; he was the son of perdition (Jno. 17:12).
- Anger at the public rebuke given him by Christ at the supper in the house of Simon the leper (12:4-8).
- Avarice, covetousness, the thirty pieces of silver (v. 6).
- Disappointment at Christ foretelling his death instead of taking the Kingdom.

reference to those who supported Jesus in his ministry: "Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance" (Lk. 8:3).

As Judas became entrusted with larger sums of money, a propensity for covetousness, unfaithfulness, embezzlement, avarice, selfishness and theft emerged. Keeping the bag brought responsibility. Judas was motivated by avarice, insatiable greed. Like Matthew, Judas had practical and administrative talents that constituted both his opportunity and his temptation. The disappointment of every expectation that had initially drawn him to Jesus sowed the germs of this avarice, which grew in spite of the many warnings from the Lord (Mt. 6:19-34; 13:22,23; Mk. 10:25). He proved unfaithful, untrustworthy, and used the common purse of the brotherhood for his own ends: "he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (Jno. 12:6). His very ability became a snare, so that what could have been a blessing turned into a curse. Paul saw this in perspective: "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).

Judas, aware of Judas's propensity, warned indirectly and then openly: "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Lk. 16:11). Judas did not have the humility of mind to accept correction as David did when Nathan confronted him with the parable of the ewe lamb (2 Sam. 12:1-7).

Judas led the criticism of Mary when she poured precious ointment on Christ's head as an act of devotion while he dined (Jno. 12:3-5). The sight of Mary's lavish sacrifice, which brought no gain to himself, increased his alienation to repugnance and hate. The rest of the twelve gave instant voice in support of Judas and his criticism (Mt. 26:8,9; Mk. 14:4,5), for which Jesus rebuked them.

Judas was moved by natural antagonism to spiritual principles. Many of the sayings of the Lord were opposed to the principle of material-

ism, which Judas resented. In the face of personal danger, the altruistic teaching of Christ that once attracted him began to repel.

Angry at the open rebuke at Bethany, the sting of exposure began to bite. Though he now knew that Jesus had discovered his secret sin, there was still opportunity to seek forgiveness, but it angered and alienated him further, so that he now aligned himself with the enemy.

Judas, motivated by personal ambition, greed and spite, did not allow the instruction he so plainly heard from the Master to convert him. He had great privileges, but failed to utilise his opportunities. Judas represents those believers of all times who fail to resist the insidious influence of worldliness, and who betray their Lord in many different ways (*cf.* Heb. 6:6; 10:29).

Judas the traitor

Judas's journey along the pathway of sin gathered momentum. His vision of the Kingdom was totally befuddled and near extinction. Instead of being an instructor in the Truth, he became a guide for the wicked men who slew his Lord. Chosen by the Lord (Lk. 6:16; Jno. 6:70,71), he possessed the abilities and qualities of an apostle, but was moved and enticed by the leaders of Jewry (Jno. 13:2) to betray Jesus.

The scene at Bethany, discussed above, showed how deeply the canker had eaten into the life of Judas. Even under the best of influences, the uncurtailed evil inclination grew worse, and Judas went out in utter darkness to betray his Master for thirty pieces of silver (Jno. 13:29,30). Yet from the beginning our Lord knew: "Jesus answered them [the disciples], Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil [*diabolos*, 'accuser' or 'slanderer']?" (6:64,70). Prior to the feast of the Passover, Judas had gone to the chief priests and captains and covenanted with them for money to betray Jesus to them (Mt. 26:14-16; Mk. 14:10,11; Lk. 22:3-6).

For Judas to save his own life, he must reveal to the Jewish leaders that he was not really a

true follower of Jesus. The pitiful sum that he requested as the price of his perfidy could be represented as a mere token payment, designed to suggest that he really acted against Jesus by motives of patriotism to the state rather than pecuniary advantage. Having made the payment, the elders and priests could hardly move against him as a disciple of the Lord, as evidently they intended to do against the other apostles, for he could retaliate by accusing them of bribery.

We read in John 13: "And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him . . ." (v. 2). At the beginning of the last supper Judas was present, his feet were washed, he heard the fearful words, "ye are clean, *but not all*" (v. 10). Jesus quoted from Psalm 41:9: "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me" (v. 18). Reclining near Jesus, Judas heard him tell the disciples, "One of you which eateth with me shall betray me" (Mk. 14:18).

The disciples were unaware who the traitor was, and looked upon each other to see any telltale signs that would mark the guilty. They failed to grasp the significance of the sign when

Jesus gave the sop to Judas (Jno. 13:23-26). Sorrowfully they asked in turn, "is it I?". Judas did the same: "is it I?" (Mt. 26:22,25). Then Jesus said to him, "That thou doest, do quickly" (Jno. 13:27).

Judas cleverly concealed his treachery from the disciples. He knew the garden to which Jesus and the disciples had often resorted, and came, accompanied by a band of officers and servants, and revealed his Master by a kiss (Mt. 26:47-49; Mk. 14:43-45; Lk. 22:47,48), a salutation normally reserved for those who command great affection. Jesus received the kiss with the words of stern, sad reproach (Lk. 22:48), revealing his voluntary submission to his Father (Jno. 6:38).

Judas stands as the supreme traitor for all time. He was against the bonds of discipleship and friendship, against light, against mercies, affection and trust, and opposed to the Divine will. Judas stands as a type of all betrayers of the Lord. The steps of his decline are so gradual that they are hardly discernible, until the full fact of betrayal is revealed. Let us take heed: "Be not highminded, but fear" (Rom. 11:20); "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

(To be concluded)



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

H. Victory at the Red Sea (Exodus 14–15)

Part 2: The Song of Moses—15:1-21 (i)

Mark Vincent

Introduction

MOSES' SONG of triumph following the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea is justly famed. This has arisen for several reasons: its exuberance, its overflowing praise, its literary qualities; but also for its complexity, its antiquity, and the surprising nature of some of its content.

I shall not dwell long on the linguistic aspects, but suffice it to say that Exodus 15 contains so many rare and archaic grammatical features, and so much unusual vocabulary, that it has attracted considerable attention from linguists, and is considered by many to be the oldest text in the Old Testament (the surrounding narrative would be understood to have been subjected to an editorial process during its