

Matthew 26:14-16

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Judas's Bargain

Judas seeks out the chief priests in order to betray Jesus. He asks them what they will give him for doing this. They reply "thirty pieces of silver"—the prescribed compensation to be paid an owner for the accidental death of his slave. Judas agrees.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 14:10-11 and Luke 22:3-6.

Sometime between Jesus's Anointing in Bethany (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8) which took place six days before Passover (John 12:1) and the night before Passover, *Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.*

This event is commonly known as "*Judas's Bargain.*"

Jesus had numerous disciples, but he selected *twelve* to be among His closest apprentices and He commissioned them with special authority (Matthew 10:1). *Judas Iscariot* was one of these select *twelve* (Matthew 10:4). The name *Judas Iscariot* means "Judah of Kerioth." Kerioth was a town located in the far south of Judea, approximately 25 miles south of Jerusalem and 10 miles west of the Dead Sea. *Judas* had the distinction of being the only disciple from Judea, in the southern part of Israel. The other eleven were from the north, the Galilee region ([see map](#)).

The Gospel of John indicates that Jesus spent His first year in Judea, with little known fruit. It could be that *Judas* was His first and only disciple (from the twelve) from that year of effort. As the one who would *betray Him*, that would make complete Judea's rejection of Jesus.

Moreover, in Hebrew, *Judas's* actual name was "Judah," just as Zacharias's actual name was "Zachariah." The Hellenization of these Jewish names can cause us to miss some prophetic connections. Judah, the patriarch of the tribe of Judah (the tribe of the Jews) prefigured Judah from Kerioth (*Judas Iscariot*). In Genesis, Judah betrayed his brother Joseph (the type of Jesus) and plotted to kill him, put Joseph in the ground for 3 days and then sold him for shekels of silver (Genesis 37:26-28). Later Judah of Genesis repented of his betrayal (Genesis 43:8-9; 44:18-34). So would "*Judah Iscariot*" (Matthew 27:3).

Jerusalem is located in Judea, which could account for Judas's ability to navigate his way into the presence of the *chief priests*, who were located in Jerusalem.

Judas was the treasurer of the disciples. But he embezzled their funds. He was miserly when he begrudged Martha and Lazarus's sister, Mary, for using expensive perfume to wipe Jesus's feet instead of donating it to the Lord. His actual motivation was to have the money in a place where he could secretly steal from the donation (John 12:4-6). John suggests that *Judas* was already "intending to betray" Jesus when the Anointing at Bethany took place (John 12:4).

In their gospel narratives, Matthew and Mark both mention *Judas going to the chief priests*, just after the Anointing of Jesus by Mary, (also covered in the first part of chapter 26). Their placement of this event in their narrative is perhaps a way to suggest that *Judas* was the disciple who was the most indignant by the “waste” of the costly perfume (Matthew 26:8). Both gospel writers sandwich the Anointing at Bethany between the Plot of *the Chief Priests* (Matthew 26:1-2; Mark 14:1-2) and *Judas’s Bargain* (Mark 14:10-11) apparently for thematic effect.

When *Judas went to the chief priests*, he said to them, “*What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?*” His question indicates that *Judas* was looking to gain something from this transaction.

The chief priests and Pharisees had been looking for a way to kill *Jesus* for some time (John 11:47-53). They had recently decided on waiting until after the Passover festival to avoid a riot (Matthew 26:5; Mark 14:1), but now with *Judas’s* surprising offer they seem to have reconsidered their schemes. Mark and Luke both relate that the chief priests and officers were delighted at this turn of events (Mark 14:11; Luke 22:5). *They* were quick to strike a bargain and promised to give *him* money.

Only Matthew’s gospel specifies that the agreed upon amount was *thirty pieces of silver*.

The amount of *thirty pieces of silver* is an allusion to two Old Testament scriptures.

The first allusion is to Exodus 21:32, where the Law prescribes the amount of compensation a master is to receive if his slave is accidentally killed by another,

“If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master **thirty shekels of silver**, and the ox shall be stoned.”

(Exodus 21:32)

In essence, when *Judas went to the chief priests* and asked *them*: “*What are you willing to give me to betray Jesus to you?*” *They* replied: “The price of a slave.” They were willing to compensate *Judas* for the death of “his slave”—*Jesus*. By naming this price, their response was intentionally insulting. It was also twistingly ironic. *Jesus* was *Judas’s* master (and Creator) not his slave. And *Judas* was *Jesus’s* disciple and follower, not His master. *The chief priests* probably took a cynical delight in the perverted terms of the bargain as *they weighed out the thirty pieces of silver and gave it to Judas*.

The second allusion was to an odd scene from Zechariah 11, which Matthew reveals to be prophetic.

The specific verse in reference is Zechariah 11:12-13:

“I said to them, ‘If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!’ So **they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages**. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.’ So I took the **thirty shekels of silver** and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.”

To understand this prophetic allusion properly we need to look at it in its original context.

In this scripture, God tells the prophet Zechariah to shepherd a “flock doomed to slaughter” (Zechariah 11:4). The flock likely represents the nation of Israel. Through the prophecy, the Lord mockingly laments the flock for two catastrophes. The first catastrophe is because “their own shepherds [who symbolize Israel’s priests and religious leaders] have no pity on them” (Zechariah 11:5). The second is because a brutal political takeover is about to occur: “each will fall into another’s power and the power of his king; and they will strike the land, and I will not deliver them” (Zechariah 11:6). This is likely a prediction of Rome’s demolition of Israel and the temple that took place in 70 A.D. In His Olivet Discourse, *Jesus* had recently told His disciples of this impending destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2).

Next, Zechariah says that he shepherded the flock doomed to slaughter and took two staffs which he named “Favor” and “Union” (Zechariah 11:7). The staff named “Favor,” Zechariah explains, represents God’s covenant with all the peoples at Mt. Sinai, and he breaks it to symbolize how the children of Israel broke the covenant with God (Zechariah 11:10-11). Zechariah also breaks the staff named “Union.” He explains that it represented the broken unity between the tribes of Judah and Israel when they became separate kingdoms (Zechariah 11:14).

Using these two staffs as illustrations, the prophet, Zechariah, was both summarizing Israel’s past history, and prophesying what was to come. Throughout their history, Israel repeatedly disobeyed God’s covenant, and the kingdom of Israel divided in ~975 B.C. Zechariah was describing these historical events centuries later in ~520 B.C. Prophetically, the splitting of the staff “Favor” also symbolizes Israel’s rejection of *Jesus* as God and Messiah five hundred years later. The splitting of the staff “Union” also symbolizes Rome’s bloody victory over the Jews in 70 A.D. and the Jewish diaspora that followed. This is consistent with the biblical pattern of prophecies having a double fulfillment.

There is also a Messianic prophetic fulfillment that can be applied concerning the splitting of the two staffs. The splitting of “Favor” could represent Israel rejecting *Jesus* as the Messiah. The splitting of “Union” could represent Rome’s crucifixion of the Messiah. This Messianic interpretation goes along with the general principle that whatever happens to the Israelites also will happen to the Messiah and vice-versa.

In Zechariah 11:8, the Lord said that He “annihilated the three [bad] shepherds in one month, for my soul was impatient with them, and their soul was weary of me.” These three shepherds possibly represent the three religious offices during *Jesus*’s day who conspired to destroy Him: the elders (Pharisees), chief priests (Sadducees) and the scribes (religious lawyers) (Matthew 16:21; 21:45-46; 26:3-5). This might represent these three offices being destroyed during the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

As Zechariah dramatically enacted the word of the Lord through his speech and actions in front of the people, he paused to ask them if the word seemed good to them, and asked for his wages if it did. Amused, the people watching “weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages” (Zechariah 11:12). They insultingly offered him the price of a slave.

Then the Lord told Zechariah to, “Throw it to the potter” and sarcastically commented on the cheapness of “that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.” Zechariah then did as the Lord commanded him, “So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord” (Zechariah 11:14).

Matthew explicitly revisits this prophesy after *Judas* bitterly returns *the thirty pieces of silver* to the *chief priests* (Matthew 27:3-4), who then use the money to buy a place called “the Potter’s Field” as a burial plot for strangers (Matthew 27:7) thus fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah (Matthew 27:8-10).

Additionally, there is a third, less explicit Old Testament allusion.

The entire scene of *Judas*’s Bargain which the gospel writers describe is eerily reminiscent of Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery. *Jesus*, like Joseph, was sold by *one of His* “brothers” (closest disciples) into slavery for mere *pieces of silver* (Genesis 37:28). It is interesting considering that the name of the brother who first proposed the idea of selling Joseph to the Midianite traders was “Judah,” which is the same name as *Jesus*’s betrayer—*Judas* is the Hellenized version of the Hebrew name, “Judah.” The first Judah was *one of Jacob*’s *twelve* sons (Genesis 37:26-27); even as *Judas* was the *one of the twelve disciples* who went to the priests to sell *Jesus*.

After *Judas* accepted payment of *the thirty pieces of silver*, Matthew wrote: *from then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus*. That opportunity would come soon enough.

Why did *Judas* betray *Jesus*?

The apostle John comments that *Judas* was already looking to *betray Jesus* before the Anointing in Bethany (John 12:4). John also remarks that *Judas* was a thief who pilfered the money box (John 12:6). But thirty pieces of silver was the token price that was offered as an insult to *Jesus*. It is likely that if greed was *Judas*’s main motivation *he* would have held out for more. It is also likely that *the chief priests* would have happily paid it to get rid of *Jesus*, whom they hated so much. The gospel writers do not provide any other motivation than what Luke explained:

“**And Satan entered into Judas** who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them.”
(Luke 22:3-4)

We know that Satan’s influence is to cause people to think on the things of man rather than the things of God (Matthew 16:23). *Jesus* spoke this word to Peter when Peter chastised *Jesus* for saying He would die, rather than ascend the throne (as they expected) (Matthew 16:21-23). We can speculate that *Judas* might have pursued the things of man by reasoning to himself that *he* was doing God a favor by forcing *Jesus*’s hand, to determine if he was in fact the Messiah, forcing *Jesus* to ascend the throne or be found a fraud.

It is apparent from the gospel accounts that the overriding expectation of both the disciples and the people was for their Messiah to be a political deliverer. This is for good reason; since the prophets clearly indicate that will be the case. However, what the people missed was that the Old Testament prophesied of two Messiahs, a suffering servant (Joseph – Psalm 22 – Isaiah 53) and a conquering king (David, the one they hoped for) was to be fulfilled in one person (Jesus) coming to earth in two separate advents. Jesus came the first time to serve, and die for the sins of the world (Matthew 20:28).

We can imagine *Judas* rationalizing that by making his bargain for *thirty pieces of silver*, he was forcing Jesus's hand, and would either show him to be a fraud or force Him to ascend to the throne. This speculation would seem to be supported by *Judas's* response after Jesus is arrested. After *Judas* saw that Jesus was condemned, he tried to return the *thirty pieces of silver* and said "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (Matthew 27:3-4).

Whatever his rationalization might have been, *Judas* seems to have given over his heart and mind to Satan and his temptations when he betrayed *Jesus*. Sadly, it would be the greatest regret of his life. But unlike Peter, who repented, *Judas* will take his own life (Matthew 27:5).

Biblical Text

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. ¹⁶ From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.