

Matthew 27:3-5

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Judas's Remorse

After Jesus was condemned, Judas regrets his betrayal, and he tries to return the thirty pieces of silver. The chief priests refuse to accept it. Judas throws it at their feet and runs away before killing himself.

This event is unparalleled in the other gospels, however, Acts 1:18-19 describes it.

This passage and commentary deal with the subject of suicide. If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide we encourage you to recall the LORD's hope in Lamentations 3:21-25 and seek help—no matter what you are dealing with, there is a better way.

Having concluded his accounts of Jesus's religious trials at night in the home of Caiaphas the high priest (Matthew 26:57-68) and in front of the Sanhedrin upon sunrise (Matthew 27:1-2) Matthew takes a significant break from his main narrative before he resumes Jesus's civil trial in Pilate's court (Matthew 27:11-26).

Between his accounts of Jesus's religious trials and His civil trial, Matthew informs his readers what happened to *Judas*, the disciple *who betrayed* Jesus to the priests (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50).

Judas's remorse and suicide most likely took place on the night of Nisan 15 (sometime during pre-dawn hours on Friday by Roman reckoning). As we will soon see, *Judas* seems to have done all the things Matthew reports of him in this passage after Jesus's second religious trial had concluded in the home of Caiaphas, and around the time Jesus's third religious trial took place.

To learn more about the timing and sequencing of these events, see our article, "[Timeline: Jesus's Final 24 Hours.](#)"

Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse (v 3a).

Matthew begins with the word: *then*, to inform the reader that he is pausing his main narrative about the condemnation of Jesus to discuss the topic of—*Judas*. The word *Then* could serve as a call back to events that happened earlier that evening, before Jesus was officially tried and expeditiously *condemned* at sunrise, then was handed over to Pilate (Matthew 27:1-2). Or *Then* could simply mean “what happened next.” In any case, the events Matthew initially describes in this passage occurred in *the temple sanctuary* (v 5) shortly before or after Jesus's third religious trial, which took place nearby on *the temple* grounds.

Judas was one of Jesus's twelve disciples (Matthew 10:4) and was their treasurer. *He* embezzled their funds and 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. Had she donated the perfume to be sold, Judas would have had access to the money and could secretly steal from the donation (John 12:4-6).

Judas was from the town of Kerioth, hence the name "*Judas of Kerioth*" or "*Judas Iscariot*." 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. This could account for *Judas's* ability to navigate Jerusalem with ease as *he betrayed* Jesus.

Judas had the distinction of being Jesus's only disciple from Judea. As the one *who betrayed Him*, it made complete Judea's rejection of Jesus.

In Hebrew, *Judas's* actual name was "Judah. The Hellenization of Jewish names make it easy to miss some prophetic connections. For instance, Judah, the patriarch of the tribe of Judah (the tribe of the Jews) prefigured "Judah from Kerioth" (*Judas Iscariot*).

- Judah was one of twelve sons of Israel.
- *Judas* was one of twelve disciples.
- Judah plotted to kill Joseph, who is a prefigure of Jesus as a Messianic Servant (Genesis 37:18).
- *Judas* conspired with the priests to kill Jesus, the actual Messiah.
- Judah put Joseph in the ground (Genesis 36:24).
- *Judas* buried Jesus in the ground.
- Judah *betrayed* his brother Joseph, (Genesis 37:26-27).
- *Judas betrayed* his Rabbi Jesus.
- Judah sold Joseph to his captors for shekels of silver (Genesis 37:28)
- *Judas* sold Jesus to His captors for shekels of silver.
- Judah *felt remorse* for his treatment of his brother (Genesis 43:8-9, 44:18-34).
- *Judas felt remorse* for his treatment of his rabbi.
- Joseph, the one whom Judah *betrayed*, was unjustly accused and condemned (Genesis 39:7-20).
- Jesus, the One whom *Judas betrayed*, was unjustly accused and condemned.
- Joseph, the one whom Judah *betrayed* became a mighty ruler and mercifully saved many people from famine and physical death (Genesis 41:39-43, 41:56-57).
- Jesus, the One whom *Judas betrayed* became the King of Kings and mercifully saves many people from sin and eternal death.

Matthew describes *Judas* as the disciple *who had betrayed Him*.

Sometime during the week leading up to Passover, “Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests” and offered to betray Jesus for a price—they agreed to pay “thirty pieces of silver”—the price of a slave (Matthew 26:14-15, Exodus 21:32). And “From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus” (Matthew 26:16).

The good opportunity *Judas* was looking for was most likely not intended to be the night of Passover. But when Jesus unexpectedly identified *Judas* as His betrayer during their Seder celebration (Matthew 26:20-25, John 13:26), *Judas* went to *the priests and elders* (v 3) to inform them that Jesus was aware of their conspiracy (John 13:27). This alarming news threatened to not only foil their plot to murder Jesus, but it also threatened to lead to their downfall if news of their conspiracy spread and the people turned against them.

Therefore, *they* acted with urgency and force to swiftly arrest and secretly condemn Jesus that night. Caiaphas was able to secure a Roman Cohort from Pilate to assist them (John 18:3). And *Judas* was able to lead them to the exact spot where Jesus was praying in a garden just outside the city gates where they arrested *Him* sometime after midnight (Matthew 26:47-56, Mark 14:43-52, Luke 22:47-53).

From there, *the chief priest and elders*’ lack of preparation began to show as they had neither evidence, nor a charge to bring against Jesus. First, they sent *Him* to Annas, the former high priest who interrogated *Him* (John 18:12-13, 19-24) while false witnesses and the Sanhedrin council were gathered from around the city in the dead of night to Caiaphas’s house. Unable to manufacture a charge, Annas then sent Jesus to Caiaphas, where the nighttime tribunal, after many failed attempts with false witnesses, unjustly *condemned Him* of blasphemy in a fit of emotional rage (Matthew 26:57-68, Mark 14:53-65).

Judas saw all of this.

He saw the false accusations. *He saw* the twisting of Jesus’s words. *He saw* the wanton disregard for the rule of law. *He saw* the mockery and abuse. *He saw that* Jesus *had been* unjustly *condemned*.

And *when Judas saw* all this, *he felt remorse* for his catalytic role in Jesus’s unjust condemnation.

The Greek word translated as *remorse* in this sentence is a form of μεταμέλομαι (G3338—pronounced: “met-am-el’-lom-ai”). It describes a change of feelings or emotions from positive to negative. “Metamelomai” is feeling sorry for what you have done.

The *remorse Judas felt* was a sense of guilt and wrongfulness about *betraying* (v 4) his Rabbi who served and loved him (John 13:5) and called him “friend” (Matthew 26:50). The emotional change and *remorse Judas felt* was a change in the right direction. It was a different sentiment than the evil and gross attitude *he* had displayed *when he* kissed Jesus over and over again as *he betrayed Him* in the garden (Matthew 26:49). In the garden *Judas* was acting as Satan’s agent

(John 13:27). Now, *when he* was coming to his senses from the things *he saw*, *Judas felt remorse*.

The guilt *Judas* was experiencing is similar to the pattern we experience whenever we give our hearts over to Satan and his lies. He uses us to inflict harm, and we often feel *remorse* once we see the horrible consequences of our sinful behavior. But feeling good or bad about our sin does not vindicate us. Just because we *feel remorse* for wrong we have done, does not make us healthy or righteous (i.e. in harmony with God).

Judas felt so terrible that *he* tried to do something to make the awful feelings go away. This was a natural reaction. No one enjoys feeling guilty or rotten. We often try to make our terrible feelings go away too.

We can try to make our guilty feelings disappear in an unhealthy way, by doing things like:

- Suppressing our feelings of guilt
- Drowning them in alcohol or other substances
- Distracting ourselves with pleasures or ambitions
- Judging others for their wrongs
- Justifying ourselves through self-affirming thoughts or self-righteous behavior

The common factor in all the unhealthy ways to deal with guilt is by trying to handle it apart from God. The only healthy way to deal with feelings of guilt is to work through it with God. We can do this by:

- Investigating our *remorse* with Him (2 Corinthians 10:5b).
- Confessing the wrong we have done to Him (1 John 1:9).
- Repenting of our wrong and turning toward His good will for our lives (2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 3:8).
- Accepting His mercy (Psalm 118:1, Galatians 5:1).
- Taking Responsibility for how our sin has harmed others, but making restitution when we can (Romans 12:18).

For a more about how to deal with guilty feelings in a healthy way, please see the Bible Says article,

[“Guilt and Repentance: How to Deal with Remorse.”](#)

Judas tried to cope with his feelings of guilt and *remorse* in an unhealthy way. *He* tried to handle it on his own terms instead of with God. Given his situation, this would have been a difficult thing to do, because Jesus had now been condemned to death, and *Judas* had made himself a deadly enemy to the other disciples. *Judas* likely *felt* there was no one *he* could turn to for help.

Judas, like the other disciples, was likely confused and deeply troubled by Jesus’s willingness to die at the hands of His enemies. They expected Jesus to rise as a political leader to overthrow Rome, and did not see how His arrest and crucifixion was part of God’s plan. They did not seem to recall the many times Jesus explained to them how *He* would be killed by His enemies and

resurrected back to life (Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19). Their false notions of who Jesus really was were painfully unravelling, and the disillusionment they *felt* was more than they could bear.

Overwhelmed with *remorse* about the terrible wrong *he* had done when *he* betrayed Jesus, Judas attempted to make the feelings go away by returning the bribe money. First, *he* tried to reverse the bribe *he* received.

Matthew says, *Judas...returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders* (v 3).

The chief priest and elders were the Sadducees and Pharisees who sat on the Sanhedrin Council. The same Council that conspired to put Jesus to death (Matthew 26:3-5, John 11:47-53), bribed *Judas* to assist them (Matthew 26:14-16), and had just *condemned Him* (Matthew 26:65-66).

Having witnessed *the chief priests' and elders'* intense hatred and fear of Jesus firsthand, *Judas* probably realized there was nothing *he* could do to undo Jesus's condemnation. And so, *he* attempted to excuse *himself* and nurse his own bleeding wounds of *remorse when he returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders*. *The thirty pieces of silver* was the price they had agreed to pay him for betraying Jesus to them (Matthew 26:14-16). This was a token fee—and the symbolic price of a slave (Exodus 31:32, Zechariah 11:12-13). Apparently, *Judas* had already been paid for his wicked service because *he returned the silver pieces*.

As *Judas* returned the money, *he* explained to *the chief priests and elders* why *he* was giving it back. The explanation *he* gave to them was: *I have sinned by betraying innocent blood* (v 4a).

Judas confessed his sin against God's commandments to them. Two commandments *Judas* specifically violated *when he* betrayed Jesus were:

- “You shall not murder.”
(Exodus 20:16, Deuteronomy 5:17)
- “You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.”
(Deuteronomy 16:19)

As *he* betrayed Jesus, *Judas* also likely violated God's commandment:

- “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”
(Exodus 20:16, Deuteronomy 5:20)

Judas accurately described his sin as *betraying innocent blood*.

Psalms 15 may be understood as a negative prophecy about *Judas* as the Messiah's betrayer. This short Psalm describes the characteristics of a citizen of Zion.

It opens by asking: “O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?” (Psalm 15:1) before listing actions that someone acceptable to God does or does not do. In this regard, Psalm 15 is similar to Jesus’s, Paul’s, and John’s lists about who will and who won’t be able to enter His kingdom (Matthew 7:21, Galatians 5:19-23, Revelation 22:14-15).

As Psalm 15 prophetically pertains to *Judas*, Jesus’s betrayer:

Judas did not:

- walk with integrity and works of righteousness (Psalm 15:2)
- speak truth (Psalm 15:2)
- honor those who fear the LORD (Psalm 15:4)
- swear to his own hurt without wavering (Psalm 15:4)

Judas did:

- slander with his tongue (Psalm 15:3)
- evil to his neighbor (Psalm 15:3)
- take up reproach against his friend (Psalm 15:3)
- was greedy for money (Psalm 15:5)
- took a bribe against the innocent (Psalm 15:5)

Judas did the things the Psalm 15 described a dweller of the LORD’s city does not do, and he did not do the things it described a righteous person would do; therefore, *Judas* was greatly shaken (Psalm 15:5).

When Judas returned the silver, he was trying to absolve himself of his sin and alleviate his deep remorse and guilt. But *the chief priests and elders* cared nothing of *Judas*’s confession and scorned him,

But they said, “What is that to us? See to that yourself!” (v 4b).

Their reaction was not befitting of a priest or religious teacher whose role was supposed to help sinners draw closer to God. But these priests and elders harshly turned *Judas* away in his hour of remorse. Their heartless reaction was the result of two factors.

First, they were in a hurry to condemn *Jesus* and hand him over to the Romans for execution shortly after sunrise—before the people became aware of their conspiracy. They did not have time to waste upon *Judas* and his moral scruples.

Second, if they accepted the premise of his confession that *he* was guilty of *betraying innocent blood*, it would implicate them in the same sins and crimes. *The priests and elders* were the very people *Judas* betrayed the innocent man to. *They* were about to murder *Him*. If *Judas* had betrayed *innocent blood*, then by logical extension *they* were about to murder an innocent man. By listening to *Judas*, *the chief priests and elders* would be listening to his implicit accusation that *they* were *Jesus*’s murderers. *They* were loath to do so.

Therefore, *the chief priest and elders* told *Judas* that *they* wanted to hear nothing of what *he* might have to confess to them. All this was expressed in their rhetorical question: *What is that to us?*

Their scorn-filled solution for *Judas* was: *See to that yourself!*

In other words, *they* told *Judas*, “Go confess to *yourself*; and leave *us* out of it.”

At this point *Judas* grew even more desperate. Matthew says: *And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed* (v 5a).

They had refused to hear his confession or help him atone for his sin. *Judas* threw the unholy blood money across *the temple sanctuary*. The “Beit Hamikdash” (“The Holy House” of God) had become a “den of robbers” indeed (Jeremiah 7:11, Matthew 26:13). As *the pieces of silver* jingled on the floor of *the temple sanctuary*, *Judas*, desperate as ever, *departed* and fled.

It seems that his feelings of remorse and guilt did not subside as *he* undoubtedly hoped they would *when he returned the thirty pieces of silver*. He was still guilt-ridden. Having betrayed Jesus and his fellow disciples, and now mocked for his *remorse* by *the priests and elders* *he* regrettably allied with, *Judas* felt as though *he* was alone and that there was no one *he* could turn to in his dire situation. *He* was unable to escape the pain and *felt* there was nothing *he* could do to rid himself of his overbearing remorse.

Tragically, after fleeing *the temple*, *Judas* went away and hanged himself (vs 5b).

It was a final act of desperation to escape the guilt tearing him apart. But physical death is no escape from guilt (Matthew 10:28). It does not remove our sin before God. Dead or alive, we will all be judged by Christ for our actions (Romans 14:10, 1 Corinthians 3:11-14, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Timothy 4:1). Killing oneself is a violation of God’s commandment to not murder. We cannot atone for breaking God’s law by breaking God’s law. The Bible never condones suicide. It forbids it (Exodus 20:16, Deuteronomy 5:17).

Judas was wrong to kill himself. He was wrong in believing he was without hope, because even though *he* had *sinned* greatly and done a terrible wrong, God’s love is everlasting.

Judas did not call to mind the great hope of that is the God (Lamentations 3:21).

“The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning
Great is Your faithfulness...
The LORD is good to those who wait for Him.”
(Lamentations 3:22-23, 25)

In his guilt-ridden isolation and despair *Judas* did not remember this hope. Perhaps *Judas* had been living an illusion of control. *He* was stealing from the money bag while presenting an

image of respectability. *He* might have expected to pocket a bribe and force Jesus's hand to either be the Messiah they all expected, and defeat the Romans, or show Himself to be a fraud. In his own mind, *he* might have reasoned that *he* would come out on top in any event.

But *Judas's* illusions of control have now come crashing down, and *he* is dealing with the reality that *he* has betrayed an *innocent* man. It appears that the guilt was overwhelming. *Judas* can either repent, or spiral into self-destruction—the one remaining thing *he* can control.

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicide we encourage you to recall this hope and seek help. Reality is an acquired taste, and part of what is difficult for humans to grapple with is the reality that we only control a scant few things in this life. But the great news is that God is in control, and He is trustworthy. The question is whether we will trust Him.

Each of us has been given stewardship to make three fundamental categories of choices: who or what we trust, the perspective or mental models we adopt, and the actions we take. We each have the opportunity to trust God for all we do not control (which is almost everything). We each have the opportunity to choose a perspective that is true; that perspective includes the reality that God loves us, and is a forgiving God who desires us to succeed. And we have the opportunity to make constructive choices, choices that recognize that obedience to God is the path to our own fulfillment.

Two other points to consider regarding *Judas's* death.

The first regards Jesus's civil trial before the Romans (Matthew 27:11-26, Mark 15:1-15, Luke 23:1-25, John 18:28-19:16).

While *the priests and elders* obviously cared nothing for *Judas* as a person—for them, *he* was only a tool to help them arrest and condemn Jesus—his *remorse* and suicide likely created a material problem for them during Jesus's civil trials.

Under Roman law, the Jews could convict Jesus of blasphemy within their own religious court system, but they did not have authority to execute *Him* (John 18:31). They needed a Roman conviction to achieve a crucifixion. But Rome cared little about Jewish religious customs and would not hear such a case. For Jesus's civil trial, new charges and evidence would have to be found.

The main charge the Jews would accuse Jesus of before Pilate was insurrection (Luke 23:2)—the penalty of which was death. Since they basically had no evidence (John 18:29-30), we might surmise that they intended to use the testimony of *Judas*, Jesus's disciple. Without *Judas*, their star witness, it would be more difficult to demonstrate that Jesus was an insurrectionist deserving of death. *Judas* changing his mind would have posed a threat to their scheme, making haste all the more essential.

The second point about *Judas's* death regards how Luke described *Judas's* fate in the book of Acts (Acts 1:18-19).

Matthew writes that *Judas hanged himself*.

Luke writes that *Judas* was “falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out” (Acts 1:18).

These gruesome reports suggest that *Judas hanged himself* from a high place, and when the rope broke or was cut, his corpse fell headlong and his body burst open upon hitting the ground. Another possibility that some have offered as a way to resolve these accounts is that *Judas hanged himself* as Matthew reports and that his body was thrown over the city walls headlong and dashed against the rocks as Luke reports.

The reason his body might have been thrown over the wall was because his corpse defiled the city and prevented the priests from performing the festival and morning sacrifices. The priests might have been angry at Judas for deserting them, and could have ordered his body thrown over the southern city wall into the Hinnom Valley, the city dump. There are places where there is a steep drop from the city wall into that valley. In Jesus’s day, the Hinnom Valley was referred to as “Gehenna” which is sometimes translated as “hell” (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:33, Mark 9:43, 45, 47, Luke 12:5). If this second scenario is what happened to *Judas*, it was a graphic and theologically-fitting depiction of his fate.

In either case, Matthew tells us how *Judas* died—*hanged himself*; Luke tells us what happened to his corpse—“falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out” (Acts 1:18).

Biblical Text

³ Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to that yourself!” ⁵ And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.