

Judas Hangs Himself

Matthew 27:3-10 and Acts 1:18-19

About 6:00 am Friday morning, the fifteenth of Nisan

DIG: What did Judas do with the thirty pieces of silver? What did the Sadducees do with it? How was it a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy? Did death relieve Judas' guilt? How does the Matthew account dovetail with the Acts account of Judas' suicide?

REFLECT: Both Peter and Judas caved in under pressure, yet history has treated them very differently. Why? What is the effect of the suicide of an unsaved person? What is the difference between remorse and repentance? Is there any sin that you can commit that cannot be forgiven by the blood of Christ?

Judas clutched at the messenger's robe. The little man asked to see Caiaphas at once. The messenger gave the betrayer the back of his hand. The high priest, he shouted, was too busy to spend time with crazy people. Judas' deceitful eyes saw a knot of people gathering around him and the messenger. The apostate apostle was certain they were all trying to stop him from explaining how this trivial matter had gotten out of control.

He swallowed and determined to try to speak softly. What he wanted to say amounted to breast-beating remorse, but his voice was so subdued and shaky that no one could grasp a word he was saying and people started to laugh. The messenger laughed too, and then he broke through the little ring of people to deliver the messages to Caiaphas who seemed preoccupied. Judas, still whispering hoarsely, begged him to please stop and listen. When the messenger jogged away, the betrayer threatened to return the thirty pieces of silver. Then the high priest, as a matter of justice, would have to return the prisoner. This, he mumbled to himself, was simply a matter of justice or lack thereof.

When Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse (Matthew 27:3a). But his remorse was not repentance of sin. Mattityahu did not use the Greek word *metanoeo*, which means a genuine change of mind and will, but *metamelomai*, which merely points to regret or sorrow. The betrayer did not experience spiritual repentance, but only emotional remorse. Even though he would not repent of his sin, he could not escape the reality of his guilt. Genuine sorrow for sin (*metamelomai*) can be prompted by God the Holy Spirit in order to produce repentance (*metanoeo*) as Rabbi Sha'ul states in 2 Corinthians 7:10. But, Judas' regret and sorrow only led to guilt and despair.

The words that **Christ** had spoken to **him** in the garden of Gethsemane: **Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss (Luke 22:48)?** must have burnt a hole into his soul. He decided to return **the thirty pieces of silver to the Sadducees in the Temple (Matthew 27:3b)**. The word for **Temple** here is the Greek word *naos*, or the **sanctuary** itself, and not *hieron*, for the Temple Mount. Once the sin had been committed, all the glamour or supposed justification passed away quickly and only the naked reality remained. **Jesus** was condemned to be crucified. As **Judas** watched **the Master** being carried away to Pilate, the full enormity of **his** treachery finally began to dawn on **him** as **he** realized the Jewish leaders fully intended to put **Yeshua** to death.¹⁵³⁶

The people in front of **his** eyes diffused into vague forms and melted against the whiteness of the marble columns in the Royal Stoa. **He** was alone again. **He** clutched at **his** neck and then **he** began running. Reaching the Court of the Gentiles, **he** raced north toward the Sanctuary. **He** ran through the crowds of worshipers with remarkable agility, and **he** ducked and skidded and jarred people without a second thought or apology.

When **Judas** reached the Court of **the Priests** (see **Mw - The Diagram of the Second Temple**), **he** turned into the inner room of the offerings. Several of **the Sadducees** were there holding a discussion. They knew **Judas**, because these were **the men** who had paid **him**. When **they** saw **him**, **they** were dumbfounded as **he** approached bowing and groveling and rubbing **his** hands together and smiling. **He** had come to ask a favor and **he** did not want to alienate **them**, so **he** pretended not to notice **their** aloofness.

Judas wet **his** lips and was determined that **he** would not shout. **He** cleared **his** throat and with forced sweetness, said, **"I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood"** (**Matthew 27:4a**). Evidently the money was a continual reminder of **His** sin. This was not true repentance, but **remorse** and regret for the consequences of **his** actions. **Peter** also failed **Messiah** with **his** three denials. Yet, **he** even with that terrible sin **he** truly repented and was ultimately restored (see **Mn - Jesus Reinstates Peter**).¹⁵³⁷ For **Judas**, however, the roads, the streets, people's faces all seemed to condemn **him**. **He** always felt it, and **he** imagined it until **his** whole being was on fire. **He** tried to give the **blood money** back to **the chief priests** who served under the high priest **Caiaphas**, but **they** were unsympathetic.

The Sadducees looked at each other and then back at **the traitor**. **They** couldn't be less sympathetic this **little man**. The high priest had negotiated for the deliverance of **the Nazarene**, and had paid for it. **They** had been ordered to pay **the traitor thirty pieces of silver** out of the Temple treasury and they had done it. There had been witnesses to the transaction. What more did he want? "**What do we care?**" the ranking one among them said, "**That's your problem**" (**Matthew 27:4b NLT**). His only reward would be infamy.

Judas' mouth opened to speak, and then it closed. The shock of **their** words was beyond bearing. Didn't **they** understand? The whole arrangement was a mistake. **He** tried to speak to **them** again, but **they** were in an animated conversation and **they** had work to do to get ready for the Chagigah offering at 9:00 am. **Judas** wanted to cry, but the tears of **remorse** just would not come.

He stood, wild-eyed, mouth open, staring at **the Sadducees**. His thoughts, imprisoned in the confused brain of **the false apostle**, kept racing around in circles. It was then that **he** realized, without a shadow of a doubt, that what **they** had meant was that the entire matter was out of **their** hands. **They** were not going to lift a finger to save this **troublemaking rabbi**, and if **Judas** had, as **he** protested, **betrayed innocent blood**, then it was **his** crime, and not **theirs**.

Judas stood indecisively for a moment. Then **he** made a decision. **He** could correct the misunderstanding by returning **the money**. In **his** twisted mind, if **he** accepted nothing for the betrayal, then it was no longer betrayal. The Torah said that no deal was complete until each of the parties had full possession of the merchandise. Well, Caiaphas had **Jesus**. But **Judas** would nullify the agreement by returning **the money**. Yes, that would do it!

He reached into **his** outer robe and untied the long leather strings around **his** money apron, and pulled it out. **The priests** paused for a moment to watch **him**. Then, nervously, **Judas** counted out **thirty silver coins**. Then, not being certain whether **he** was perhaps returning thirty-one, **he** counted **them** again. **He** had **thirty**. In utter desperation and frustration **Judas** defiantly **threw the money into the holy place** (*Greek: naso*) and **left** (**Mattityahu 27:5a**). The music of **the money** rang through the big room and **the coins** danced and spun and rolled in slower and slower circles until **they** came to rest on the floor. Then **Judas** turned, apron in hand, leather strings flying behind **him**, and ran. Heaven and earth had vanished. **Judas** was so totally trapped in the darkness and corruption of **sin** that **he** became a willing instrument of **the Adversary**. **He** had totally renounced **Christ**. **Satan** controlled **him**. **There** was no escape, no help, no counsel, or hope anywhere. Therefore, **Judas** rushed out from **the Temple**.

Because the **Sadducees** were forced to take back the **silver coins**, they had to devise a way to dispose of it. They picked up the coins and said: **It is against the Torah to put this into the treasury. Since the money was blood money**, it was contaminated and abhorrent to **ADONAI** (compare **Deuteronomy 23:18**). Accordingly, it could not be deposited into the **Temple treasury**, the place from which it had presumably come. This much the **Sadducees** would admit, though they were quite oblivious to their own complicity.¹⁵³⁸ Evidently the **pious hypocrites** had convinced themselves that the ends justified the means when it came to turning **Jesus** over to the Romans. And yet they were pious about using this money! It was **blood money** in the truest sense of the phrase (**Matthew 27:6**).

But by stating it was **blood money** they condemned themselves out of their own mouths. By definition, **blood money** referred to money illegitimately paid and received to falsely convict a man of a crime that led to his execution. So at the height of hypocrisy the **Sadducees** had no problem about taking money out of the Temple treasury to pay for **Judas** to betray **Jesus**, but now they had reservations about putting it back. In doing so, they testified to the world of their guilt. It is fascinating to notice how callous and unfeeling they were about their crime, in contrast to the crushing agony of the **betrayer** that drove him to kill himself in a futile attempt to pacify his guilt.

So in order to soothe their consciences, they decided to use the money to buy the **potter's field** as a burial place for foreigners. This field was where potters had collected clay to use in their trade. Perhaps the clay was depleted and the field was available for a cheap price. The **religious leaders** may have reasoned that they would use the **blood money** to buy a defiled and useless field in which to bury defiled foreigners, or **Gentiles**. Or the field may have been used to bury any traveler who died while visiting **Jerusalem**, especially those who were indigent.¹⁵³⁹ But it was bought with **blood money**. That's why it has been called **the Field of Blood** to this day (**Matthew 27:7-8**). Therefore, **Judas** did not personally buy the **potter's field**, but he did so indirectly. The **Sadducees** actually bought the **Field of Blood** with the payment he received for his wickedness (**Acts 1:18a**).

In an effort to sooth his guilt **Judas** then went away and hanged himself (**Matthew 27:5b**). As **Judas** ran out of the **Temple** his lungs burned and cried out for air, but he did not stop. He went south through the wealthy residential section of the **Upper City**, then through the **Lower City**, little legs flying, eyes bugged out like those of one who does not see, and to families out for a holy day morning stroll he was a comical figure. Some called out as he passed, but **Judas** heard nothing.

When **he** reached the broad white Roman steps, **Judas** hurried across them, skipping so the **he** would not fall, and then ran through the tall cypresses pointing green apostrophes at the sky. Instead of breath, little cries came from **his** mouth. **He** ran as far as the inside of the wall, and then, like an animal looking for an exit, **he** turned right and ran to the west. When **he** came to the gate leading to Bethlehem, a sea of people were coming in, and **Judas** swam the tide with **his** legs churning and **his** arms flailing.

Outside the wall, **he** ran along the little path that hung over **the Valley of Hinnom**. The little field **he** had helped to buy lay directly across from **him**, but **Judas** did not know; nor would **he** have wanted to know. Now **he** was slowed to a walk, because the path clung to the wall and hung over the edge of nothing. Far below were the jagged chunks of rock left over from the building of the wall.

Judas walked carefully along until **he** came to a lonely fig tree. It grew out from the path and hung its spring leaves over the valley. **The traitor** placed **his** foot against the tree trunk and pushed violently. The tree barely shook. **He** breathed hard - painfully hard. **He** looked around for something, but could not find anything to assist **him**. Then **he** looked at the money belt in **his** hand and crept up the small trunk until **he** found a strong branch. **Judas** leaned out and tried to rock the branch. It moved slightly.

He leaned out, straddling the branch, and tied the thick leather belt to it. It was the money belt that had carried those **thirty pieces of silver**. Then **he** took the other string, on the far side of the apron, and tied it securely around **his** neck. **Judas** made several knots behind **his** ear and then slowly, carefully, **he** crept off the branch.

The little man clung to the wood with both hands for a moment. **He** was now quite calm and collected. Finally, **he** was at ease with **his** decision, foolishly thinking **he** could escape **his** pain. Then **he** released one hand . . . and then the other . . . and fell into eternity. It was done. **Judas** dropped a few feet and swung back and forth like a lazy pendulum. The branch creaked as **he** swung. After a few seconds, **he** reached up to the leather belt and tried to grasp it and lift **himself** up. **His** mouth opened and contorted, but no sound came out. **His** legs convulsed and drew themselves up, almost to **his** chest. **He** made one more attempt to pull **himself** up, and then **his** hands fell back and settled by **his** side and **he** swung back and forth in a wide arc. **He** was the first of the Twelve to die, and **he** died before **his Master**.¹⁵⁴⁰

It was early morning. At that moment, the sky lighted up and the darkness changed to bands of yellows and unbelievable pink. The colors became diffuse and spread over the dome of the sky until, at last, the Levite on the highest pinnacle of the Temple could sound his shofar and **Yerushalayim** began to awaken.

It was the first day of the Passover and according to Jewish law if there was a dead body hanging in **Jerusalem** then the whole **city** was considered defiled and the morning offering could not be celebrated. But since the body hung in **the Valley of ben Hinnom, the City of David** was considered cleansed and the celebration of the Passover could begin. They could return later and recover the body for burial.

Consequently, **the betrayer's** body hung there until the sun set on Passover. However, the festivals of Unleavened Bread and Pesach together lasted for seven days (**Exodus 12:19**). No one would dare touch **his** body during that time for fear of defilement. Heaven only knows how long **he** hung there that week, but ultimately the weight of **his** body broke whatever branch **he** hung on and **he fell headlong** down the steep cliffs onto the jagged rocks of **the Valley of Hinnom** below. **His body burst open and all his intestines spilled out (Acts 1:18b)**.¹⁵⁴¹ Death, however, did not relieve **his** guilt. It only made it permanent. As **the Savior of Sinners** repeatedly declared, hell is a place of eternal torment, **of weeping and gnashing of teeth** (**Matthew 8:12, 13:42 and 50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30**). And eternity is a long time.

Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language **Akeldama**, that is, **the Field of Blood (Acts 1:19)**. The location of that field is unknown, but traditionally it is believed to be near the Greek Orthodox Church and Covenant of Saint Oniprius, where **the Valley of Hinnom** joins the Kidron Valley, southwest of **the City**.

In classic Jewish fashion, **Matthew** combines a number of prophetic passages and puts them under the heading of the main scroll, or **Jeremiah**.¹⁵⁴² **Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Isra'el, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me" (Mattityahu 27:9-10)**. While **Zechariah** specifically mentions the purchase price (**Zechariah 11:12-13**), it was **Jeremiah** that dealt with the purchase of **the field**. So when **Matthew** talks about **the field of blood** or **the potter's field**, he was building upon what **Jeremiah** had already written (see my commentary on **Jeremiah Cz - Judah is a Broken Jar**).

In his third symbolic action, ADONAI told Jeremiah to buy a jar and take the elders of the people (civil leaders) and the elders of the priests (religious leaders) to the Valley of Ben Hinnom. Earlier Jeremiah had told them that the Valley of Ben Hinnom would be renamed the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room (Jeremiah 7:30-34). It was there that the Israelites practiced child sacrifice, burning their sons and daughters in the fire (2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Jeremiah 19:5). The origin of the word Topheth (*topet*) is uncertain, but possibly it came from a word for oven. But there was a deliberate change in vowels where the vowels from the word shame (boset) were transferred to Topheth to emphasize the shameful character of the practices there. These high places of idol worship were located in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. Over the centuries Topheth became known as the potter's field.¹⁵⁴³

When Jeremiah broke that jar in front of the Jewish leadership, he was, in effect, prophesying what would happen to Isra'el. Jerusalem and the Jews were to become as broken as that jar - and once broken it couldn't be repaired. Thus, there was a curse put on Topeth. For they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room (Jeremiah 19:11). But little did they know that when the Sadducees bought the potters field, they bought Topheth and the curse that went along with it. And that is exactly what happened. The curse was fulfilled when the Romans came and destroyed the City and the Temple (see Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD).

Jeremiah went on to say: In this place (Topheth, or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, or the Valley of Slaughter) I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 19:7). How were the plans of Judah and Jerusalem ruined when the chief priests picked up the thirty silver coins and bought the potter's field? From the time the Pharisees attributed the miracles of Messiah to Satan they began to plan to kill Him (John 10:25-30, 11:45-53; Matthew 26:3-5; Mark 14:1-2, 10-11; Luke 22:1-6). Therefore, in the context of the B'rit Chadashah, the Great Sanhedrin, comprised of the leadership of Isra'el, was planning to have Jesus executed. Part of that planning included the payment of the thirty silver coins to Judas. Later, the same thirty silver coins were used to buy the potter's field. Caiaphas, Annas and the rest of the Jewish leadership thought they had gotten rid of the troublemaking Rabbi and all the problems he was causing them.

The curse of Topheth was fulfilled in two stages. We know this because **Matthew 27:9** declares: **Then what was spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled.**

The first stage was the destruction of Solomon's Temple, Jerusalem and Judah (see my commentary on **Jeremiah Gc - The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**) and the subsequent Babylonian Captivity (see my commentary on **Jeremiah Gt - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**), **and the second stage** was the destruction of Herod's Temple, Yerushalayim and Judah by the Romans (see **Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD**) and the subsequent diaspora.

The first destruction by the Babylonians was the result of spiritual adultery (see my commentary on **Jeremiah At - Unfaithful Isra'el**) and a refusal to listen to the message of God's prophets about repenting, and **the second destruction** by the Romans was a result of the rejection of Yeshua Ha'Meshiach on the basis of the Oral Law (see **Ei - The Oral Law**) and the decision of the Great Sanhedrin (see **Lg - The Great Sanhedrin**).

No one could be more evil than **Judas Iscariot**. Only **eleven** other men in all of history have had the intimate, personal relationship he had with **the Son of God**. No one has ever been exposed to **ADONAI's** perfect truth, both in precept and example. No one has ever been more exposed firsthand to **God's** love, compassion, power, kindness, forgiveness and grace. No one has had more evidence of **Yeshua's** deity or more firsthand knowledge of the way to salvation. Yet in all of those remarkable three-and-a-half blessed years with **the Truth**, **Judas** didn't take so much as the first step of faith.

In a way that defies comprehension, **Judas** persistently resisted and rejected **God's** truth, **God's** grace, and even **God's** own **Son**. We cannot understand **he** managed to completely conceal **his** wicked rebellion from everyone but **Christ**. **His** hypocrisy was so complete and deceptive that even when **Jesus** predicted that one of **the apostles** would betray **Him**, **Judas** was not even suspected.¹⁵⁴⁴