

## Why did Judas betray Jesus?

While we cannot be absolutely certain why Judas betrayed Jesus, some things are certain. First, although Judas was chosen to be one of the Twelve (John 6:64), all scriptural evidence points to the fact that he never believed Jesus to be God. He even may not have been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah (as Judas understood it). Unlike the other disciples that called Jesus “Lord,” Judas never used this title for Jesus and instead called him “Rabbi,” which acknowledged Jesus as nothing more than a teacher. While other disciples at times made great professions of faith and loyalty (John 6:68; 11:16), Judas never did so and appears to have remained silent. This lack of faith in Jesus is the foundation for all other considerations listed below. The same holds true for us. If we fail to recognize Jesus as God incarnate, and therefore the only One who can provide forgiveness for our sins—and the eternal salvation that comes with it—we will be subject to numerous other problems that stem from a wrong view of God.

Second, Judas not only lacked faith in Christ, but he also had little or no personal relationship with Jesus. When the synoptic gospels list the Twelve, they are always listed in the same general order with slight variations (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16). The general order is believed to indicate the relative closeness of their personal relationship with Jesus. Despite the variations, Peter and the brothers James and John are always listed first, which is consistent with their relationships with Jesus. Judas is always listed last, which may indicate his relative lack of a personal relationship with Christ. Additionally, the only documented dialogue between Jesus and Judas involves Judas being rebuked by Jesus after his greed-motivated remark to Mary (John 12:1-8), Judas’ denial of his betrayal (Matthew 26:25), and the betrayal itself (Luke 22:48).

Third, Judas was consumed with greed to the point of betraying the trust of not only Jesus, but also his fellow disciples, as we see in John 12:5-6. Judas may have desired to follow Jesus simply because he saw the great following and believed he could profit from collections taken for the group. The fact that Judas was in charge of the moneybag for the group would indicate his interest in money (John 13:29).

Additionally, Judas, like most people at the time, believed the Messiah was going to overthrow Roman occupation and take a position of power ruling over the nation of Israel. Judas may have followed Jesus hoping to benefit from association with Him as the new reigning political power. No doubt he expected to be among the ruling elite after the revolution. By the time of Judas' betrayal, Jesus had made it clear that He planned to die, not start a rebellion against Rome. So Judas may have assumed—just as the Pharisees did—that since He would not overthrow the Romans, He must not be the Messiah they were expecting.

There are a few Old Testament verses that point to the betrayal, some more specifically than others. Here are two:

"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9, see fulfillment in Matthew 26:14, 48-49). Also, "I told them, 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'—the handsome price at which they priced me!" So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter" (Zechariah 11:12-13; see Matthew 27:3-5 for the fulfillment of the Zechariah prophecy). These Old Testament prophecies indicate that Judas' betrayal was known to God and that it was sovereignly planned beforehand as the

means by which Jesus would be killed.

But if Judas' betrayal was known to God, did Judas have a choice, and is he held responsible for his part in the betrayal? It is difficult for many to reconcile the concept of "free will" (as most people understand it) with God's foreknowledge of future events, and this is largely due to our limited experience of going through time in a linear fashion. If we see God as existing outside of time, since He created everything before "time" began, then we can understand that God sees every moment in time as the present. We experience time in a linear way—we see time as a straight line, and we pass from one point gradually to another, remembering the past we have already traveled through, but unable to see the future we are approaching. However, God, being the eternal Creator of the construct of time, is not "in time" or on the timeline, but outside of it. It might help to think of time (in relation to God) as a circle with God being the center and therefore equally close to all points.

In any case, Judas had the full capacity of making his choice—at least up to the point where "Satan entered into him" (John 13:27)—and God's foreknowledge (John 13:10, 18, 21) in no way supersedes Judas' ability to make any given choice. Rather, what Judas would choose eventually, God saw as if it was a present observation, and Jesus made it clear that Judas was responsible for his choice and would be held accountable for it. "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me" (Mark 14:18). Notice that Jesus characterizes Judas' participation as a betrayal. And regarding accountability for this betrayal Jesus said, "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Mark 14:21). Satan, too, had a part in this, as we see in John 13:26-27, and he, too, will be held accountable for his deeds. God in His wisdom was able, as always, to manipulate even Satan's rebellion for

the benefit of mankind. Satan helped send Jesus to the cross, and on the cross sin and death were defeated, and now God's provision of salvation is freely available to all who receive Jesus Christ as Savior.