

How did Judas die?

The death of Judas Iscariot was a suicide committed after he was filled with remorse (but not repentance) for his betrayal of Jesus. Matthew and Luke (in the book of Acts) both mention some details of Judas's death, and reconciling the details between the two accounts has presented some difficulties.

Matthew says that Judas died by hanging. Here is the account in Matthew's Gospel: "So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, 'It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.' So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day" (Matthew 27:5-8).

Luke says that Judas fell into a field and that his body ruptured. Here is the account in Acts: "With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood" (Acts 1:18-19).

Which account is correct? Did Judas die by hanging, or did he die by falling? Or are both true? A related question is, Did Judas buy the field, or did the priests buy the field?

Concerning how Judas died, here is a simple reconciliation of the facts: Judas hanged himself in the potter's field (Matthew 27:5), and that is how he died. Then, after his body had begun to decay and bloat, the rope broke, or the branch of the tree he was

using broke, and his body fell, bursting open on the land of the potter's field (Acts 1:18-19). Note that Luke does not say that Judas died from the fall, only that his body fell. The Acts passage presumes Judas's hanging, as a man falling down in a field does not normally result in his body bursting open. Only decomposition and a fall from a height could cause a body to burst open. So Matthew mentions the actual cause of death, and Luke focuses more on the horror surrounding it.

Concerning who paid for the field, here are two possible ways to reconcile the facts: 1) Judas was promised the thirty pieces of silver several days before Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:11). Sometime during the days leading up to his betrayal of Jesus, Judas made arrangements to purchase a field, although no money had yet been transferred. After the deed was done, Judas was paid, but he then returned the money to the chief priests. The priests, who considered the silver to be blood money, completed the transaction that Judas had begun and bought the field. 2) When Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver down, the priests took the money and used it to buy the potter's field (Matthew 27:7). Judas may not have purchased the field personally, but he provided the money for the transaction and could then be said to be the purchaser.