

Forgiving Judas:  
Examining Judas Iscariot from a Jewish Perspective

by

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## Forgiving Judas: Examining Judas Iscariot from a Jewish Perspective

### Chapter 1: Introduction

He is one of the most villainous characters in the entire corpus of Western culture. His name is synonymous with selfish ambition, greed, short sightedness, and above all else, betrayal. He shares a berth in our consciousness with other traitors like Quisling, Arnold, and Mir Jafar, Ephialtes, Richard III, and La Malinche. Finally, he has been used to represent and condemn the Jewish people as a whole for 2000 years. He is Judas Iscariot.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the man Judas. Who was he really? What did he believe? What does his betrayal say about Jews? I write this paper for several reasons. First, as a soon-to-be military chaplain working in a predominantly non-Jewish environment, I will assuredly be asked about Judaism and its intersectionality with Christianity, up to and including matters such as the Passion. Second, I believe that this work can create even more amicable and amiable dialogue between Jews and Christians, which thankfully has been the norm, the cornerstone, and the hallmark of relations between these two great religions in the United States. Third, I hope this thesis will encourage greater scholarship of both Judaism and Christianity.

One of the beauties of Reform Judaism since its inception in the early part of the 19th century in Germany has been an embracing, intertwining, and inclusion of the

secular sciences and rational in our theological approach and worldview. As such, I therefore seek to examine the character of Judas from a Reform Jewish perspective. This means that I will not only use the theology of my denomination, but the tools of history, literature, psychology, sociology, logic, and Christian theology as well in my study.

I want to make it clear from the very beginning that this paper is in no way, shape, or form an attack on Christianity or Christians. I have nothing but the utmost respect, admiration, and love for Christianity and Christians in all that they have done for humanity, from Mother Teresa to the Sistine Chapel, from Saint Francis of Assisi to John Wesley, Fred Shuttlesworth, Eric Liddell, John Newton, William Wilberforce, Franz Xaver Gruber, the Salvation Army, the Sisters of Christian Charity, the Righteous Among the Nations who saved countless Jews during the Holocaust, Martin Luther King Jr, Martin Niemoller, Chaplains Joseph T. O'Callahan, George L. Fox, Clark V. Poling, John P. Washington, Herman G. Felhoelter, Emil Kapaun, Charles J. Watters, Vincent R. Capodanno, Charles Liteky, Henry Timothy Vakoc, Dale Goetz, Francis P. Duffy, and William Corby, His Holiness Pope John Paul II, and His Holiness Pope Francis. The impact that Christianity and Christians have had on the world history has been monumental, and I would argue, for the betterment of all mankind.

### *The Pervasiveness of Judas*

Many Jews might ask why it is necessary to know about and study Judas Iscariot, a character who is featured solely in the Christian Bible. There are two reasons with the second being based off of the first. First, Judas Iscariot is perhaps the most

well known, most oft-mentioned traitor and betrayer in western culture. Arguably, he is more well-known by more people in more places than Ephialtes, Benedict Arnold, Quisling, and Marshal Petin put together. Indeed, it almost seems like every other traitor in history is compared to him. In describing Benedict Arnold's treason Benjamin Franklin penned: "Judas sold only one man, Arnold three millions. Judas got for his one man thirty pieces of silver, Arnold not a halfpenny a head. A miserable bargain."<sup>1</sup> His name has been used in literature, art, music, drama, film, and historical episodes to represent and emphasize betrayal of one's friends, values, and cause (often for and because of monetary gain). Here are but a few examples:

-In the Arthurian legend, there is an unoccupied thirteenth seat at the Round Table called "the Siege Perilous". Some scholars have speculated that it is supposed to represent the seat left vacant when Judas departed the Last Supper.<sup>2</sup>

-In *Dante's Inferno* (early 14th century), Judas is given the worst punishment in hell next only to Satan himself. Judas's head is scrapped by Satan's razor sharp teeth while the rest of his body is scrapped by Satan's claws.

-In the "Friar's Tale" within Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c.1387), the Friar/narrator compares the main character of his story, a summoner, to Judas for having stolen out of the fines that he collects. Judas is also mentioned in "The Canon Yeoman's Tale", "The Parson's Tale", and "The Nun's Priest's Tale".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin, Benjamin. *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*. Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company. 1839. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Berg, Wendy. *Gwenevere and the Round Table*. Cheltenham, UK: Skylight Press. 2012. p.168; Boulton, D'arcy Jonathan Dacre. *The Knights of the Crown: The Monarchical Orders of Knighthood in Europe 1325-1520*. New York: St Martin's Press, Inc. 1987. p.23; Griffin, Justin E. *The Holy Grail: The History, the Legend, the Evidence*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. 2001. p.18

<sup>3</sup> Rossignol, Rosalyn. *Critical Companion to Chaucer: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Infobase Publishing. 2006. p.475

-In the fourth season of the television series *Turn: Washington's Spies* (2017) on American Movies Channel (AMC), the American Officer Caleb Brewster is captured and interrogated by the British Army, specifically Benedict Arnold. When ordered to defect from the Patriot cause, he shouts at Arnold "Well at least I ain't a Judas who sold out his whole country for a pile of silver!"<sup>4</sup>

-In the episode "A. Wilson (Manager)?" of the incredibly popular British television program *Dad's Army*, Arthur Lowe's character calls John Le Mesurier's character "Judas" twice for accepting a promotion in the nearing hamlet of Eastgate, thereby leaving the Walmington-on-Sea branch of their bank.<sup>5</sup>

-In a 1991 episode of the culturally dominant animated television show *The Simpsons*, the chronically evil Mr Burns angrily calls his usually loyal underling Smithers "Judas" for not going along with one of his nefarious schemes.<sup>6</sup>

-In the 1995 movie *Braveheart*, the French Princess of Wales (played by Sophie Marceau) is sent by her father-in-law, Edward I of England to offer the Scottish rebel William Wallace (played by Mel Gibson) a chest of gold as well as numerous titles if he suspends his campaign against the English. He rebuffs the bribe stating: "A lordship and titles. Gold. That I should become Judas?"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "The Black Hole of Calcutta (Season 4, Episode 2)" *Turn: Washington's Spies*. American Movie Classics (AMC). 2017.

<sup>5</sup> "A Wilson (Manager)?". *Dad's Army*. BBC One. Air Date: December 4, 1970.

<sup>6</sup> "Blood Feud". *The Simpsons*. 20th Century Fox. Air Date: July 11, 1991. Production Code: 7F22. Episode 35 (Season 2 Episode 22).

<sup>7</sup> *Braveheart*. Twentieth Century Fox. dir Mel Gibson. 1995.



-One of the most prolific black metal hardcore rock bands of the 1990's was *Judas Iscariot*, which, as part of its core ideology and central motivation, attacked capitalism and the mores of Christianity.

-One of the most successful comic book novels in history is entitled *Teen Titans: The Judas Contract*. As the title suggests, one of the major, if not central, themes is betrayal.<sup>8</sup>

-The movie *Dracula 2000*, starring Gerard Butler as Count Dracula and Christopher Plummer as the famous vampire hunter Abraham van Helsing, is based on the premise that Dracula is in fact Judas Iscariot and was cursed with immortal life after the betrayal at the Last Supper and his unsuccessful suicide. His need for human blood is an inverse of Jesus' offering of his own blood for the sake of humanity and his aversion to silver is a reminder of the silver that he accepted from Caiaphas.<sup>9</sup>

-In 1966, an angry fan heckled artist Bob Dylan at a Manchester, UK concert because the singer had recently switched to playing an electric guitar from an acoustic. The incident is now a staple in music history and is remembered by many as the "Judas Show".<sup>10</sup>

-The rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* features Judas as a prominent and even largely sympathetic character.

-Famous singers such as Johnny Cash ("Down There by the Train" 1969) and Bob Dylan ("With God on Our Side" 1964) have referenced Judas in their lyrics.

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<sup>8</sup> Wolfman, Marv. *New Teen Titans* (Vol 7). DC Comics. 2017.

<sup>9</sup> *Dracula 2000*. Dimension Films. Dir. Patrick Lussier. 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Fleming, Colin. "Remembering Bob Dylan's Infamous 'Judas' Show". *RollingStone*. May 17, 2016.

-In 2011, pop star Lady Gaga released the song “Judas” which dealt with a woman who is betrayed by her boyfriend but still loves him. The lyrics include:

“When he comes to me I am ready  
I'll wash his feet with my hair if he needs  
Forgive him when his tongue lies through his brain  
Even after three times he betrays me  
I'm just a Holy Fool, oh baby he's so cruel  
But I'm still in love with Judas, baby  
I'm just a Holy Fool, oh baby he's so cruel  
But I'm still in love with Judas, baby”

-In politics, the term Judas has been used quite freely anytime a legislator does not side with his party, or even switches sides of the aisle. Winston Churchill was lambasted as this biblical figure when he switched from the Conservatives to the Liberal party in 1904.<sup>11</sup> This insult was also applied to Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, who had been Vice-President Al Gore's running mate on the Democratic ticket in 2000 presidential ticket, but by 2004 was a solid supporter of President George W. Bush's efforts in Iraq, and in 2008 endorsed Senator John of Arizona (a Republican) over Senator Barack Obama (a Democrat) in that year's presidential election.<sup>12</sup>

-Though there are several reasons as to why the number thirteen is considered unlucky, one of them centers around Judas Iscariot. This stems from the idea that there were thirteen men present at the Last Supper. For many Judas, the betrayer, the unholy one among the group, is the thirteenth.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Haffner, Sebastian. *Churchill*. London: Haus Publishing Limited. 2003. p.35

<sup>12</sup> Harnden, Toby. “Senior Democrat branded a Judas in row set to split the party over Iraq”. *The Telegraph*. July 30, 2006. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1525198/Senior-Democrat-branded-a-Judas-in-row-set-to-split-the-party-over-Iraq.html>;

<sup>13</sup> Roach, John. “Friday the 13th Superstitions Rooted in Bible and More”. *National Geographic News*. May 14, 2011.

-Judas has even found his way into what one would think of as the rather peaceful and non-controversial science of dendrology. Specifically, *Cercis siliquastrum*, a beautiful flowering tree common to southern Europe and the Near East, is better known by the name “the Judas tree”.<sup>14</sup> The reason for this is two-fold. The first is the legend that Judas hanged himself from such a tree. The second is that the bright, beautiful pinkish-purple buds that adorn the tree are said to be reminiscent of Judas’s innards exploding when he hanged himself (per the Book of Acts). Fittingly of course, the 1961 novel *The Judas Tree* by A.J. Cronin is about a man who hangs himself from a Judas Tree after betraying the two women he loves.<sup>15</sup>

These examples highlight that Judas has been used in all facets of Western civilization from history to politics to literature to film to science, to even metaphor and expression of moral measurement. We are, without realizing it, truly inundated with daily references to this New Testament character. No matter where someone goes in the world or the context they are in, most people on earth will understand that “Judas” is synonymous for “traitor” and “betrayal”.

### *Judas the Jew*

On the surface, there is nothing wrong with Judas being a villain. Any good plot, fictional or historical/factual, needs a villain in its plot: Darth Vader, Hannibal Lecter, the Joker, Von Rothbart, Professor Moriarty, Joffrey Baratheon, Ramsay Bolton, Brutus, John Wilkes Booth, King George III, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Rasputin, etc. It is fair to say that

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<sup>14</sup> Duke, James A. *Duke's Handbook of Medicinal Plants of the Bible*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. 2008. p.93

<sup>15</sup> Cronin, A.J. *The Judas Tree*. UK: Pan Macmillan. 1961.

Judas fills this role within Christian doctrine and that Christians are taught to despise Judas with the same intensity that Jews have for Haman. In many communities, Judas effigies are publicly hanged and burned around Easter.<sup>16</sup> One could argue that this is comparable to the edible effigy of the hamantaschen, and drowning out Haman's name with the grogger during Kriyat Sefer Esther. However, now comes the second point: Judas is quite clearly portrayed as a Jew. He has been cited as the Jew who betrayed Jesus. Prolific Israeli author Amos Oz puts it best: "Jesus and all his apostles were Jews and the children of Jews. But in the Christian imagination the only one remembered as a Jew . . . was Judas Iscariot".<sup>17</sup> Not only this, but more directly and classically for many centuries, Christians were taught that Judas's unforgivable nefariousness and ultimate treason of his friend and leader was directly linked to or due to his Judaism/Jewish identity.<sup>18</sup> Oz supported this when he doubled down in a 2016 interview, saying:

"This ugly story became the Chernobyl of Western anti-semitism for two thousand years. More people paid with their blood for this story than for any other story ever told. Pogroms, inquisition, persecution, Holocaust because in their populist minds all of us are Judas. This is not a Nazi invention. Look at the figure Judas, in Renaissance art, the ugly, little man with the crooked nose at the end of the table at the Last Supper".<sup>19</sup>

Two historical cases that buttress Oz's point are:

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<sup>16</sup> Doane, William Croswell. *The Book of Easter*. New York: The MacMillan Company. 2016. p.25

<sup>17</sup> Barton, Emily. "Judas, Jesus and Politics: Amos Oz's New Novel". New York Times. December 7, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Standford, Peter. "Was Judas - Christianity's great traitor - wrongfully condemned?". *The Independent*. April 25, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> "Amos Oz on being called a 'traitor'- BBC Newsnight". *BBC Newsnight*. September 14, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i12g-BzlvfQ>

-When Dr. Roderigo Lopez, a Portuguese Converso court physician to Queen Elizabeth I of England and many argue, the inspiration for Shakespeare's Shylock, was put on trial in February 1594 for allegedly have plotted to poison his royal patroness, his prosecutor, Sir Edward Coke, declared Lopez to be a "a perjured, murdering villain and a Jewish doctor worse than Judas himself ... [not] a new Christian ... [but] a very Jew".<sup>20</sup>

-During the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), one of the common insults that French anti-Semites hurled against the falsely accused and wrongfully convicted Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus was that he, specifically as a Jew, was a modern-day Judas.<sup>21</sup>

With the Christian Bible being the most widely published and distributed book around the globe, this means that for much of western history, the world's greatest villain has been a Jew. On top of this, Judas has not been seen as an anomaly, aberration, or unique exception, but rather as the normative stereotype when it comes to the Jews. One could argue however, that as shown by the Gospels, Judas was far from the only Jew who turned on Jesus. The crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as the Messiah was the same crowd that only days later called for his death in front of Pilate. Even Peter, who would go on to lead the church, denied knowing his master during the Sanhedrin trial. On top of these betrayals, Jesus was despised by the other Jewish factions of Judaea- Caiaphas, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Zealots/Sicarii. Despite this, unlike an unnamed crowd or a follower who ultimately comes back into the fold after a moment of doubt (Peter), Judas for almost two

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<sup>20</sup> Furdell, Elizabeth Lane. *The Royal Doctors, 1485-1714: Medical Personnel at the Tudor and Stuart Courts*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press. 2001. 81.

<sup>21</sup> Stanford, Peter. *Judas: The Most Hated Name in History*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Publishing. 2015. p.220; "A Propos de Judas Dreyfus". *La Libre Parole*. November 10, 1894.

thousand years was the epitome of treason and betrayal. The other Jewish characters simply added fuel to the fire for which Judas was the base.

What historically made matters worse was that later Jewish stereotypes were only furthered and built upon by the legacy of Judas. As European Jewry were prevented from joining guilds in the middle ages, some of the only jobs open to them innately involved money such as loan sharks, pawn brokers, and tax farmers.<sup>22</sup> Thus the image of the covetous Jew emerged. Given that Judas had, according to Gospel, betrayed his leader not out of ideological differences but simply monetary gain, this meant that in the eyes of the Christian community, Jews had a long history of thievery and dishonesty to their collective name. A prime example of this is that in many productions of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the tragic (Jewish) villain Shylock was dressed to appear as Judas, especially when it came to the donning of a red beard and wig, the hair color associated with Judas.<sup>23</sup>

A further claim that was used by anti-semites (that employed the Judas narrative as evidence) was that the Jews were an innately disloyal people. The fact that Jews prayed for a return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple meant that they would never demonstrate an undivided loyalty to the nations in which they lived. This accusation only increased with the birth of modern political Zionism and the creation of the State of Israel.<sup>24</sup> Again, Judas Iscariot was cited as the primogenitor of this ugly claim since he was the stereotypical Jew.

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<sup>22</sup> Jaher, Frederic Cople. *A Scapegoat in the Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1994. P.65

<sup>23</sup> Sinsheimer, Hermann. *Shylock: The History of a Character*. London: Gollancz. 1947. 116.

<sup>24</sup> Alam, M. *Israeli Exceptionalism: The Destabilizing Logic of Zionism*. New York: Springer. 2009. p.89

Therefore, it is essential for Jews to not only know who Judas was, but to be familiar with the entire Christian Bible because so many historical perceptions of the Jewish people have been based off of it.

## Chapter 2: Methodology- How to study Jesus and Judas

Before proceeding further, the reader must, for the sole scope of this dissertation and this dissertation alone, accept the following premises:

1) Jesus of Nazareth existed and was both a Jew and an actual historical figure, living and preaching some time between 6 BCE and 36 CE. It does not mean that one has to accept Jesus as their personal savior nor believe that he was the son of God.

2) The parables, messages, sermons, and orations in the Gospels can be attributed to the historical Jesus.

3) Jesus was executed by the Romans by means of crucifixion.

4) There were historical Jewish and gentile factions who benefited from the death of Jesus, as he and his message posed an existential threat to them.

### *The Historical Context*

In addition to agreeing to the aforementioned rules, one, in addressing Judas, must have a keen understanding of the historical period in which he (and Jesus) lived. Judaea in 32-36 CE was a highly fractured society. The Jews of this area in this era were far from united. The various parties and factions included the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Romans, pro-Roman Jews, the Essenes, and possibly the proto-Sicarii and proto-Zealots. Each group had a different belief system, especially when it came to addressing the Roman occupation and rule over their homeland, as well as the notion of a messianic figure, era, and/or redemption. Their means and ideology were not only opposed to one another, but often violently so. Furthermore, neither the Jews nor the Judaism of the first century CE are the same Jews or same Judaism of today. At the



time of Jesus' birth, ministry, and death, Judaism was a nationalist religion and a temple-based sacrificial cult.<sup>25</sup> With the failure of two revolts [the Great Revolt (66-70 CE) and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 CE)], the destruction of both the Second Temple and the Jewish state less than 40 years after the Crucifixion, and the exile of the Jews after both disastrous wars, Judaism underwent a series of major changes in order to survive. Talmud replaced the Temple, prayers replaced the sacrifices, and the Rabbis replaced the priests.<sup>26</sup> The Judaism we see today is Rabbinic Judaism. In many ways, the Jews of that era would not even recognize the Jews of today. Below is a concise description of the major groups were active in the 1st century CE.

### *The Pharisees*

Many historians theorize that Rabbinic Judaism (which is what is observed today) is the direct descendant of the Pharisees. Components of their theology included ultimate authority laying with Mosaic law not the priesthood, support of the Oral Torah as part of the dogma, the belief that all laws were of equal importance, the concept that all parts of everyday life could made holy and sanctified no matter mundane they seemed, and the belief in the resurrection of the dead.<sup>27</sup> Josephus claims that the Pharisees were quite popular with the everyday people of Judaea.<sup>28</sup> New Testament

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<sup>25</sup> Stevenson, Gregory. *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation, Issue 107*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. 2001. P.142

<sup>26</sup> Rayner, John D. *Jewish Religious Law: A Progressive Perspective*. New York: Berghahn Books. 1998. p.5

<sup>27</sup> Flint, Peter W. *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 2013. P.135

<sup>28</sup> Klawans, Jonathan. *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 2013. p.173

scripture tells of how both John the Baptist and Jesus were opposed to and in fact openly confronted members of this sect.

### *The Sadducees*

The Sadducees were the faction that overwhelmingly encompassed the priesthood, the temple caste, and the upper nobility of Judaea. Components of their theology included the principle that people had total free will, the belief that the resurrection of the dead was not possible.<sup>29</sup> Their source of power was the Temple in Jerusalem (as we know, with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the Sadducees lost their home, their base of support, their power, and with it their *raison d'être*). As the Romans established direct rule over Judea in 6 CE, the Temple remained one of the few vestiges and symbols of Jewish autonomy.<sup>30</sup> If the Temple was enough to keep the Jews from revolting, then it benefited the Romans to keep it functioning “business as usual”.<sup>31</sup> Realizing this, the Sadducees acted as a sort of vassal or vichy government. In the Gospels the Sadducees are portrayed in very harsh terms as Caiaphas (the High Priest) and his cohort are the ones who arrest, try, condemn, and ultimately turn Jesus over to the Romans for execution. They are members of the Sadducee faction.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Elledge, C.D. *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism, 200 BCE-CE 200*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 2017. p.103

<sup>30</sup> Sharkansky, Ira. *Governing Jerusalem: Again on the World's Agenda*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. 1996. p.52

<sup>31</sup> Bowe, Barbara E. *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality: Touching a Finger to the Flame*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2003. P.129

<sup>32</sup> Scott, Thomas. *The Holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments, according to the authorized version: with explanatory notes, practical observations, Volumes 5-6*. Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong. 1823. p.536

Jesus' overturning of the coin-changing tables and driving out of the money changers from the Temple was a direct act on the Sadducees and their center of power.

### *The Romans*

The Roman Empire had its first significant contact with the Jews when they aided the Maccabees in throwing off the yoke of the Seleucids. The Romans established direct rule over Judea in 6CE when the Emperor Augustus removed and banished King Herod Archelaus to Gaul, and in his place installed the Roman Prefect Coponius.<sup>33</sup> At the time of Jesus, the Romans controlled Judaea. However, they allowed the Temple structure/hierarchy to remain intact. This kept most of the population docile. Essentially, as long as they could observe their cultic and religious practice, the Jews would keep the peace. The embodiment of Rome and the Romans in the Gospels is the governor of Judaea Pontius Pilate.

### *Pro-Roman Jews*

To say that the Romans were universally despised by their Jewish subjects in Judaea is simply not true. There were Jews who were enamored with Greco-Roman culture, ideology, and philosophy and/or stood to benefit from Roman rule of their homeland. King Herod was a true Roman vassal, owing his kingship to the Romans. However, he was also enamored with Rome, and spared no expense in Romanizing his kingdom. Josephus, author of *The Jewish War*, *Jewish Antiquities*, and *Against Apion*, was himself unapologetically pro-Roman (but simultaneously also pro-Jewish believing

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<sup>33</sup> Gooder, Paula. *Journey to the Manger: Exploring the Birth of Jesus*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 2016. p.100

the two peoples and cultures could live together amicably). In reflecting on the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE), he believed the conflict was the fault of the Sicarii and the Zealots who had dragged the rest of the population into a war that both went against their collective will and that resulted in the destruction of the country. Furthermore, it is important to note that this was not the first time that Jews/Judaeans were attracted to a foreign culture. Citing just one of the many examples is the Hasmonean war with the Seleucid Empire from 168-163 BCE. Although it is often portrayed in the holiday of Hanukkah as a fight against foreign, non-Jewish oppression, the conflict had its genesis in the tensions between Hellenized Jews and traditional, religious, nationalist Jews.

### *The Essenes*

The Essenes can best be described as a highly spiritual, mystical religious sect that purposely chose to dwell apart from the rest of Judaeen society, making their residence in the area of Ein Gedi and the Dead Sea. Composed almost entirely of men, the essenes lived an incredibly aesthetic lifestyle. There are those who believe that Jesus was an Essene who left the isolated community but carried back its major messages and principles to the general population, while simultaneously adapting their vision to fit into a world that did not want to live aesthetically.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Zealots/Sicarii*

One of the most fascinating and controversial Jewish factions of the era was the Zealots/Sicarii. Their aim- free Judaea from Roman rule and reestablish Jewish

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<sup>34</sup> Gladstone-Bratton, Fred. *A History of the Bible*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press. 1959. pp.79-80.

national autonomy. Their means- violence. They had no qualms about killing anyone who stood in the way of their goal. In fact, the group's name was based around the *sica*, a short curved dagger ideal for assassinations.<sup>35</sup>

Josephus made no secret of his hatred for the Sicarii. He claimed that the vast majority of Jews were living peaceably under the Roman rule, and it was only the Sicarii through their antagonism, plotting, and instigation that brought death and destruction to the Jewish homeland. The Talmud actually supports Josephus's anger stating that the Sicarii actually destroyed the food supply in Jerusalem forcing the population to into a no-holds bar fight with the Romans rather than a negotiated surrender or settlement.<sup>36</sup> The Sicarii's ruthlessness was horrific as Josephus and Pliny both wrote of them coming down from Masada on Erev Pesach and butchering a defenseless Jewish settlement of 700 men, women, and children in Ein Gedi.<sup>37</sup> However, for many modern Jews the Sicarii and the Zealots are actually heroes.<sup>38</sup> After two thousand years of exile and persecution, the Zealots and Sicarii have been recast as gallant heroes who met their deaths fighting for the liberation and freedom of their people at Beth Horon, Jerusalem, and Masada. Many compare them to the Maccabees who preceded them,

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<sup>35</sup> Matusitz, Jonathan. *Terrorism and Communication: A Critical Introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Saldarini, Anthony J. *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan (Abot de Rabbi Nathan) Version B: A Translation and Commentary*. Leiden, Holland: E.J. Brill. 1975. p.20

<sup>37</sup> Josephus Flavius. *Wars of the Jews*. Book IV, Chapter 7, Paragraph 2; Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis Historia*. 5:73.

<sup>38</sup> Walzer, Michael, Lorberbaum, Menachem, Ackerman, Ari, and Zohar, Noam J. *The Jewish Political Tradition: Membership*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2006. p.105-106.

and the Warsaw ghetto fighters after them. Josephus actually made a point of saying that the Zealots and Sicarii were two different groups.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to take note of the fact that the Zealots were nothing new or unique. Both biblically and historically, Jews had a long history of revolting against foreign rule. One of the most prominent messages from the Book of Judges concerns the immediate primacy and necessity in throwing off foreign domination. The Zealots knew as part of their national history how Judah and his brothers Elieser and Simon from the Maccabeus family inspired a revolt that defeated several Seleucid armies that had occupied Judea, desecrated the Temple, and banned the reading of Torah. The genesis of their revolt eventually led to the defeat of the Seleucids (with Roman help) and the establishment of the Hasmonean dynasty. Therefore, Jesus' message of tolerance, non-violence, and coexistence was a slap-in-the-face to those who felt that history, tradition, patriotism, fate, and God were on their side.<sup>40</sup> The one significant criticism against placing the Sicarii in the historical Jesus narrative (and therefore calling Judas a sicarii) is that a great many historians believe that this faction did not begin operating until the 50's, a full twenty years after the crucifixion.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Longman III, Tremper. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Ada, MI: Baker Books. 2013; Brighton, Mark Andrew. *The Sicarii in Josephus's Judean War: Rhetorical Analysis and Historical Observations*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature. 2009. p.4

<sup>40</sup> Ruether, Rosemary. *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2001. p.9-10

<sup>41</sup> Stegemann, Ekkehard and Stegemann, Wolfgang. *Jesus Movement: A Social History Of Its First Century*. London, UK: A&C Black. 1999. p.179

### *Groups summary*

In examining all these groups, it is essential to remember that Jesus was a revolutionary and therefore posed an existential threat to every other faction present in Judaea. This was their common denominator in relation to him. His message and actions were a challenge to all who held power and all others who wanted power. There is no clearer proof of this than the New Testament itself. In Mark 23, Jesus publicly humiliates the Pharisee sect with the famous seven woes:

- 1) "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." (23:13)
- 2) "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." (23:14)
- 3) "Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!" (23:16)
- 4) "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." (23:23)

- 5) "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."  
(23:25)
- 6) "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." (23:27)
- 7) " Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." (23:29-30)

In Mark 11:15-19, Matthew 21:12-17, Luke 19:45-48, and John 2:13-16, Jesus attacks the Sadducees at the very center of their power, the Temple, when he overturns the money changing tables and drives the moneychangers from the Temple grounds. His followers were also willing to commit violence against the High Priest and his subordinates (ex: Simon Peter's assault and disfiguring of Malchus, one of Caiaphas's servants in John 18). Jesus was therefore a threat to their ideologies, theologies, and authority and power. As such, they wanted him dead. In Matthew 12:14-15, it states: "But the Pharisees went out and conspired to kill Jesus. Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place". Professor Jonathan Price of Tel Aviv University said the following of how Pilate viewed Jesus: "he probably thought of Jesus as a minor rebel, the kind of which he saw many during his governorship".<sup>42</sup> Archaeologist Shimon Gibson adds: "he

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<sup>42</sup> "What we know about Pontius Pilate". CNN. March 16, 2017.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FoXlrbCVXc>



decides to make an example of Jesus, to have him crucified. I don't think he would have had a sleepless night over it."<sup>43</sup> According to the gospels certain factions work together to do Jesus in, such as the Sadducees and the Romans. However, these two parties already a prior-existing relationship. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were just as much opposed to one another as they were to Jesus and other factions. Therefore the idea that every faction in Judaea worked in concert to get rid of him does not hold up. More likely, there were independent, parallel conspiracies taking place at the same time. Jesus also preached messages of peace and passivity ("the Golden Rule", putting down one's sword in Matthew 26:52, and praying for one's enemies and persecutors as per Matthew 5:43-45), nonviolence ("turn the other cheek" of Matthew 5:39), and even acceptance of Roman rule ("render unto Caesar" of Matthew 22:21). To the Sicarii and Zealots, groups, that, if they existed at this time, were pushing for armed struggles of liberation against the Romans and wanted Jesus dead because he presented a clear threat to their causes.

The fundamental question in discussing the other religious, political, and social factions that were present in the 30's is *cui bono*- who benefited from the death of Jesus? The answer is everyone. For the Romans it meant that a man who was claiming to resurrect a monarchy that they had forcibly removed in 6 CE when they unseated Herod Archelaus had been stopped. It also meant that a revolutionary figure who posed a threat to their allies, the Temple priesthood, had been done away with. In other words, with Jesus dead, the status quo was restored, a potential revolution/rebellion/revolt had been quelled before it even began, and few Roman

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

resources had been expended in the process. For the Sadducees and Priesthood, a man who attacked them at their very center of power was gone. For the Pharisees (according to the Gospels they had been attempting to kill him for some time) it meant that a man who publicly called out and humiliated them for their philosophy and theology was now out of the picture. For the Zealots, Sicarii, and other Jews of this camp, the pacifist whose message of peace and love had directly contradicted and undermined their desire to raise the Jewish population of Judea up in armed struggle against the Romans, had been eliminated. Finally, for the Essenes, with Jesus dead, they once again held a monopoly over Asceticism in the land. Ultimately though, for Jesus' enemies it was not enough to have him dead- his message and his philosophy had to die with him. This however, as history shows, did not happen.

#### *Judas the Jew vs. Jesus the Jew*

A second commonly accepted premise is that Jesus was a Jewish man. This is the common denominator among Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, atheist, agnostic, i.e. anyone who was willing to accept the existence of the historical person known as Jesus of Nazareth. In the same thread, Judas was also a Jew. Therefore, this betrayal was an internal act. Adding to this was that Judas betrayed Jesus to the High Priest Caiaphas, a third Jew. This means that this whole narrative is a highly internal, somewhat parochial matter. To this, many will ask or say "who cares?", "So what?", and "Why does this matter?" This matters because it demonstrates that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, something that is possible, was a common sight and frequent occurrence in the turbulent political, religious, and social of landscape of first

century CE Judaea. Looking at this matter as infighting rather than decide drastically alters the whole trajectory and viewpoint by which Judas, the trial, and the indeed the entire passion has been traditionally viewed. Considering that 2000 years of anti-Semitism have been based largely around the premise that Jews had killed (the son of) God, replacing that with the thesis that all of this was in fact a purely internal struggle within a defined community, is nothing less than revolutionary.

There is a famous expression: “If you have two Jews, you’ll get three opinions”. In other words, the Jewish people and faith have a history and tradition of disagreement and argument. Sadly, debate and argument have throughout Jewish history many a time escalated to discord and from discord into violent infighting and internal strife. As such, the notion of an unbroken Jewish unity extending throughout history is an optimistic and unrealistic myth. Infighting is something that has been going on since the Bible. Here are but a few examples:

-Judges 19 describes a devastating civil war among the tribes.

-David’s own son Absalom led a revolt against his divinely chosen father.<sup>44</sup>

-After the death of Solomon, the nation-state of Israel ruptured into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

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<sup>44</sup> 2 Samuel 15:1-16:14

-Although many view that the Seleucid-Judaean War (168-163 BCE), which is remembered during the festival of Hanukkah, as a fight between the Jews liberating themselves from a foreign oppressor, the conflict actually began as an internal struggle over control of the priesthood.<sup>45</sup>

-The Talmud mournfully laments the fact that on the ninth of Adar, the students from the School of Shammai invited the students of the House of Hillel to the Sanhedrin for discussions on 18 halakhic matters. Upon meeting, civility quickly broke down and violence erupted between the two parties. The resulting melee claimed the lives of 3,000 students.<sup>46</sup> The Shulchan Aruch actually held that this day was supposed to be treated as a tragedy and should be remembered with a fast.<sup>47</sup>

-Under the second Hasmonean king, Alexander Jannaeus, there was a brutal six year civil war that saw the deaths of 60,000 Judaeans.<sup>48</sup>

-[Most relevant to our discussion is that] While the Romans were besieging Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Jewish defenders were not solely and desperately fending off

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<sup>45</sup> Gilad, Elon. "The Revolt of the Maccabees: The True Story Behind Hanukkah". *Haaretz*. December 10, 2014. <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/.premium-1.630770>

<sup>46</sup> Slivko, Sidney. "Pursuing Peace In The Classroom". *Times of Israel*. February 5, 2014. <http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/pursuing-peace-in-the-classroom/>

<sup>47</sup> Roth, Daniel. "The Ninth of Adar: The Day Constructive Conflict Turned Destructive". Jerusalem: Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. February 2013. <http://pcjcr.pardes.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/The-Ninth-of-Adar-by-Daniel-Roth.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Milman, Henry Hart. *The History of the Jews: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time, Volume 2*. New York: J. & J. Harper. 1830. p.67

their sworn foreign enemy; rather they were at the very same time murdering one another in the Temple. Generations later, in commenting on the fall of the Second Temple and Jerusalem, Yoma 9b of the Talmud Yerushalmi states

“...people during the Second Temple period were engaged in Torah study, observance of mitzvot, and acts of kindness, and that they did not perform the sinful acts that were performed in the First Temple, why was the Second Temple destroyed? It was destroyed due to the fact that there was wanton hatred during that period. This comes to teach you that the sin of wanton hatred is equivalent to the three severe transgressions: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed.”

In other words, the intense factionalism and infighting (summed up in the concept of *sinat chinam*, *baseless hatred*) among the Jewish population was the true reason that the Jewish state was destroyed.<sup>49</sup> Josephus recorded that the Romans were keenly aware of this factionalism and actually took advantage of it, writing in book IV, chapter 6 of *The Wars of the Jews*:

“The commanders of the Romans deemed this sedition among their enemies to be of great advantage to them. They were very earnest to march to the city, and they urged Vespasian, their lord and general, to make haste. They said to him: ‘The providence of God is on our side by setting our enemies against one another.’ But Vespasian replied that they were greatly mistaken in what they thought fit to be done ... for if they now go and attack the city, ‘They shall but cause their enemies to unite together, and shall convert their force, which is now in its height against themselves. If they stay a while, they shall have fewer enemies because they will be consumed in this sedition. God acts as a general of the Romans better than I can do, and is giving the Jews up to us without any pains of our own... Therefore, while our enemies are destroying each other with their own hands, and falling into the greatest of misfortunes, which is that of sedition, it is our best way to sit still as spectators, rather than to fight hand to hand with men that love murdering, and are mad one against another.’...The Jews are vexed to pieces every day by their civil wars and dissensions, and are under greater miseries than—if they were taken—could be inflicted on them by us,”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Rabbi Fohrman, David. “What is Sinat Chinam, or Baseless Hatred?” *My Jewish Learning*. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/watch-what-is-sinat-chinam-or-baseless-hatred/>

<sup>50</sup> Laitman, Michael. “AMERICAN JEWRY — ON THE PATH TO SELF-DESTRUCTION”. *Jerusalem Post*. July 19, 2017. <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/American-Jewry-on-the-path-to-self-destruction-500130>

Josephus (himself bias towards the Romans) was so disgusted by the sectarian fighting that he actually felt that the Roman destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem was somewhat curative: “it was most of all unhappy [for the Jews] before [Jerusalem] was overthrown. Those that took it did it a great kindness, for I venture to affirm that the sedition destroyed the city, and the Romans destroyed the sedition. Thus, we may justly ascribe our misfortunes to our own people,” (Book V, Chapter).<sup>51</sup>

-The great Rabbi of the Talmud and founder of Yavne, Rabbi Gamliel II (Gamliel of Yavne), excommunicated his own brother-in-law, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurcanus.<sup>52</sup> Rabbi Gamliel II was himself later temporarily deposed as Nasi of the Sanhedrin for humiliating Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah.

-One of the oldest (and still ongoing) feuds is between Karaites and Jews. Both groups claim to be the actual Jews, with the Karaites claiming that the Talmud and Rabbis are aberrations and apostasies of true Judaism, while Jews claim that one cannot have Judaism without the Talmud.

-In the 10th century, the feud between exilarch David be Zakkai and the Saadia Gaon not only divided the Babylonian Jewish community, but became so intense that it

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Eisenberg, Ronald L. *Essential Figures in the Talmud*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield. 2013. p.59.

required the intervention of the Abbasid caliph Abu'l-Fadl Ja'far ibn Ahmad al-Mu'tadid.<sup>53</sup>

-Maimonides's Mishne Torah was banned in many parts of the Jewish world because it was considered heretical. Spinoza was excommunicated by the Jewish community of Amsterdam for his philosophical and religious beliefs.

-In the 17th and 18th centuries respectively, the false messiahs Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank were incredibly harmful and divisive in their impact upon the Jewish community.

-The Vilna Gaon declared the Chasidim heretics.

-In the late 1600's and very early 1700's, the Jewish congregation in Berlin was split by the personal conflict between Court Jews Jost Liebmann and Marcus Magnus.<sup>54</sup>

-The 18th century Rabbi of Altona, Jacob Emden, launched so many attacks and accusations against fellow Rabbis Moses Hagis, Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen, and

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<sup>53</sup> Pasachoff, Naomi. *Great Jewish Thinkers: Their Lives and Works*. Springfield, NJ: Behrman House. 1992. p.20

<sup>54</sup> Lowenstein, Steven M. *The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family and Crisis, 1770-1830*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1994. p.16

Jonathan Eybeschütz that he received death threats, was forced to flee Altona, and ultimately had to seek the safety and assistance of King Frederick of Denmark.<sup>55</sup>

-During the American Revolution (1775-83), there were those Jews who famously sided with the Patriot cause (ex: Francis Salvador, Haim Solomon, David Salisbury Franks, and Solomon Bush) and others with the Loyalists (Isaac Touro and Isaac Hart). In this conflict, many of America's leading families were torn apart by their differing loyalties.<sup>56</sup>

-In 1848, Abraham Kohn, the Chief Rabbi of Lemberg in Galicia, was poisoned along with his family for having a liberal and reformist outlook by reactionary orthodox elements of the local Jewish community.

-In 1850, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the father of Reform Judaism in the United States, was punched by the president of Temple Beth-El (Albany, New York) on Yom Kippur while on the bimah for introducing too many reforms into the congregation. Pandemonium broke out and the local sheriff had to be called.

-Jews fought vehemently for both the North and the South in the American Civil War.

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<sup>55</sup> MJL Staff. "Jacob Emden: Scholar Quarreled with almost all of his Contemporaries". My Jewish Learning. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jacob-emden/>

<sup>56</sup> Sarna, Jonathan D. "The Impact of the American Revolution on American Jews". *Modern Judaism Vol 1*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press. 1981. pp.149-160



-In 1864, Rabbi David Einhorn, then in Philadelphia (having fled there from Baltimore because of his pro-abolitionist stance during the Civil War) decried how Jews were sadly serving as belligerents on both sides in a war taking place in Europe, the Prussian-Danish War, and were thereby in a position to kill one another.<sup>57</sup>

-French and Prussian Jews fought vehemently for their respective countries during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71.<sup>58</sup>

-Jews fought and died serving in the American, British, Italian, French, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman, and Belgian armies (i.e. both the Allied and Central powers) during the First World War.

-In 1916, while British and Dominion Jews were fighting in the trenches of the Western Front, a handful of Irish Jews were planning and actively engaged in the famous Easter Rising.<sup>59</sup>

-In 1918, a council of Rabbis placed a herem on Leon Trotsky and other Jewish members of the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Penslar, Derek J. *Jews and the Military*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2013. p.137

<sup>58</sup> Penslar, Derek J. *Jews and the Military: A History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2013. p.139

<sup>59</sup> Turkington, Sharon. "Solomons' Rising: The Personal Revolution of an Irish Woman in 1916." *Tablet Magazine*. April 15, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Rubenstein, Joshua. *Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionary's Life*. New Haven, CT. Yale University Press. 2011.

-In 1933, Liberal Zionist Haim Arlosoroff was assassinated by Revisionist Zionists for having dealt with Nazis, when he negotiated the acceptance of German Jews into Palestine.

-In the Winter War of 1939-40 and Continuation War (1941-44), Jews served in both opposing factions, Finnish Jews with the Finnish Army and Soviet Jews with the Red Army.

-In 1945, Mordechai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, was formally excommunicated by the Orthodox group Agudat HaRabbanim, and his siddur burned.

-In 1948, during the Israeli War of Independence, there was a brief “civil war” (the Altalena Affair) between the Haganah and the Irgun. Prior to this, during the Second World War, the Haganah had handed Irgun and Stern Gang members over to the British because the latter groups still wanted to continue fighting the United Kingdom despite the fact that that country was at war with Nazi Germany.

-In 1957, the controversial figure Rudolf Kastner was murdered in Tel Aviv. On one hand Kastner saved the lives of 1,684 Jews who were bound for Auschwitz. On the other, he was a collaborationist leader who worked intimately with the Nazis, never told tens of thousands of Jews that they were being sent to their deaths, and made

statements defending several high-ranking members of the SS who were involved in carrying out the Final Solution.

-In 1982, Jews fought in both the Argentine and British militaries during the Falklands War.

-Also, in 1982, the Israeli military campaign into Lebanon was so controversial and divisive among the Israeli public that it was called "Israel's Vietnam".

-In 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir for making peace with the Palestinians, an act he felt was treasonous and against Jewish law.

-During the 1990's and early 2000's, the last two Jews in Afghanistan, Ishaq Levin and Zablon Simintov, had a falling out that led to a rivalry during which they would report on one another to the Taliban.<sup>61</sup> Their feud became so famous, not only in Afghanistan but around the globe that a play was produced about them in 2013.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Walsh, Declan. "Death Ends Feud of Kabul's Last Jews". *The Guardian*. May 7, 2005; Holmes, Paul. "Last Two Jews in Afghanistan". *The Irish Times*. December 3, 2001.

<sup>62</sup> Mastroianni, Brian. "In Ned Goldreyer Play, the Last Two Jews in Kabul Make Peace". *The Berkshire Eagle*. June 6, 2013.

-Currently, there is a tremendous fight going on between liberal and progressive streams of the Jewish people who want to open the Western Wall for egalitarian prayer, and Orthodox denominations who want to safeguard the status quo.

-Another major source of contemporary strife between Jews is the conflict between J Street and AIPAC.

Therefore, the notion of a betrayal of a historically-grounded/based Jewish man from one faction by another historically-grounded/based Jewish man from another faction is not that remarkable. In other words, from a Jewish historical perspective, Judas's betrayal is nothing special. And given how fractured, contentious, and strife-ridden Judaeen society was at the time, such an occurrence was perhaps even the norm, a very common sight. Only once a divine aspect and another religion are added to the mix does a less internalized, more external, significant and unique trajectory actually begins to take shape.

This is not to say that Jewish unity does not exist. The first priority of a Jewish community was to purchase a cemetery, so that any members who died could be buried. In the shtetls of Eastern Europe, there were committees organized to help grooms pay their future father-in-laws for their beloveds' dowries. In every community there is an organized group called the Chevra Kadisha who ritually prepares a recently deceased Jew for burial.<sup>63</sup> In Judaism, Jews pray three times a day, and in order to have a prayer service, 10 Jewish men are required to present. Therefore if a Jew goes into the street and calls out that they need men for a prayer service, a passerby is

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<sup>63</sup> Gordiejew, Paul Benjamin. *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. 2012. p.225

obligated to help. One of the highest Jewish principles is that of *Pidyon Shvuyim*, or the obligation of a Jewish community to pay the ransoms and secure the release of fellow Jews. In 1840, when 13 Syrian Jews were falsely accused of ritually murdering a Christian monk in Damascus, Jews from the United States and the United Kingdom successfully lobbied their governments to persuade the Ottoman Empire to free the 9 Jews who had not died under torture. In 1881, the American Jewish community successfully lobbied the Congress and the President to admit millions of Jews who were persecuted throughout the Russian Empire into the country. In 1930's the worldwide Jewish community lobbied and were able to secure the entry of tens of thousands of German Jews into their countries. In the 1980's American Jews successfully lobbied for emigration of Soviet Jews to the United States and Israel because of the persecution and oppression they experienced under Communism. Finally, the State of Israel airlifted 120,000 Ethiopian Jews to the Jewish state because of the imminent threat they faced in Africa.

Despite these noble acts, the fact remains that in first century CE Judaea, the Jewish population was extremely divided and often violent towards one another. Nor does it undo the long history of internal Jewish quarreling of which Jesus and Judas were part.

Factionalism and infighting is not limited to the Jewish people as history clearly demonstrates. The split of the Islamic world into the Sunni and Shia camps in 632 has led to centuries of violence that is still taking place at this very moment in places like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan. The schism of 1054 between the Eastern and Western churches sewed the seeds of division and separation between Eastern and

Western Europe for the rest of modern history. The devastation wrought by the 1204 Siege of Constantinople was carried out not by invading Muslim armies, but rather by the Crusades. The decision of Henry VIII to break away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 with the Act of Supremacy changed the entire scope and trajectory of British history. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648), fought between mostly between German Protestant Principalities and the Catholic League, led to the deaths of approximately eight million people. The KKK was famous for its hatred of Catholics. A final example is that the violence in Northern Ireland was carried out just as much along Catholic-Protestant lines as it was the Republican-Unionist divide.

In the end, factionalism and infighting are a major component of and topic within all religious, national, anthropological histories. Judas versus Jesus and Jesus versus the other factions of first century Judea are sadly the norm of history, not an exemption.

#### *Historiographical, Exegetical, and Etymological Lenses*

The notion of looking at a purely historical/historically-based Judas is not entirely a novel concept. Since the 19th century, there has been a fascination with finding as much historical evidence as possible in order to demonstrate the historical basis and existence for Jesus. Likewise, many Christian theologians have, in the last hundred years because of movements and events like Liberation Theology, Vatican II, revelations of what took place in the Holocaust, and the various social movements of the 1960's and 1970's, begun to take more liberal, open-minded, sympathetic, empathetic, nuanced, comprehensive and broader interpretations and stances on Biblical characters to include Peter, Paul, John, Joseph, Mary Magdalene, Satan, Judas, and Jesus.

Whether from a historical, theological, psychological, or literary perspective, there is an absolute fascination with Judas. Who was he? Where did he come from? What was he like? But most importantly, what led him to betray one of the most important figures in the corpus human history? Jews of course have a vested interest in how Judas is portrayed because he is portrayed as a Jew and has been the archetypal Jew for two millennia.

Classical Jewish Exegesis is based off four different vantage points- Peshat, Remez, Drash, and Sod- which together form the word PaRDeS or Paradise. P'shat is a literal meaning of the text, remez looks at allegorical and metaphorical possibilities, drash compares a sample verse to similar texts, and sod takes a mystical stance. These perspectives cumulatively allow the scholar or reader to view the same piece of text from multiple angles. Judaism is not alone in this exercise. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church utilizes historico-grammatical interpretation and patristics with which to study its sacred scriptures.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, Islam uses an exegetical system called Tafsir with which to study the Quran.<sup>65</sup> Many Jewish and Christian scholars have, since the 19th century, thoroughly engaged the historical critical method when examining the Bible.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, looking at Judas and offering new possibilities for his actions is not entirely revolution nor it is insulting to or inconsistent with the wide-breadth of Christian doctrine.

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<sup>64</sup> Herbermann, Charles George. *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church, (Vol 7)*. New York: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc. 1913. p.273

<sup>65</sup> Naqvi, Ejaz. *The Quran: With Or Against the Bible? : a Topic-by-topic Review for the Investigative Mind*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse. 2012. p.89

<sup>66</sup> Katz, Ethan B., Leff, Lisa Moses and Mandel, Maud S. *Colonialism and the Jews*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 2017. p.59

A further methodological element is examining the actual Judas Iscariot for the possible ramifications it might have, and to see if Judas was an actual person or invented character brought about to prove a certain point. There have been many interpretations of the qualifier “Iscariot”:

- 1) The first possibility is that Iscariot means “man of/from Kerieth”. Kerieth was a town 10 miles south of Hebron. While some might see this as simple background information, other scholars understandably read a lot into this. While Jesus and his disciples were from the Galilee region, Judas under this premise, was the lone member of the group who was from the Jerusalem-Judah region.<sup>67</sup> In addition to his acts, philosophy, and message, the fact that Jesus was from outside the capital region presented yet another concern to those in power and further enhanced his reputation as an upstart who was coming to usurp the status quo. When one considers that in the Second Temple Period, Jerusalem was the cultural, political, religious, and economic center for the Jews (both those that lived in the Land as well as the communities in Babylonia and Egypt), a Jew from a backwater region displaying influence would have been an existential threat for those in power. With this theory there are many possibilities as to who Judas was and what his role consisted of.
- 2) The second possibility is that Iscariot means “sicarii”, in other words, Judas the Sicarius. This is an incredibly popular conjecture and theory because it allows for so many reasons and motives as to why Judas would betray Jesus. As

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<sup>67</sup> Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Apostles of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 1988. P.101



popular as it is, there is a major knock against it- the first recorded Sicarii activity is not listed until the 50's, approximately 20 years after the crucifixion.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Unterbrink, Daniel. *Judas the Galilean: The Flesh and Blood Jesus*. New York: iUniverse, Inc. 2004. p.65

### Chapter 3: Meat of the Matter- The Possibilities and theories as to why Judas Betrayed Jesus

Now that the methodology for how to study Judas has been established, it is possible to look at possible theories as to why Judas betrayed Jesus.

#### *Infiltration*

The Sicarii are considered by many to be the world's oldest order of assassins predating groups like the Japanese ninjas and Muslim Hashashin.<sup>69</sup> Their murders and methods were precise, surgical to be exact. Their aim was to eliminate their enemies (almost all of whom were Jews that were collaborating with the Romans) and put fear into their foes with the ultimate endgame being a return of Jewish autonomy and independence from Rome.

The question begs then, why not murder Jesus himself? Simply put, killing Jesus would have fit into their overall strategy. Knowing Jesus had a large following, getting the Romans to kill him could help spark a war between the general populace and the Romans, something they were hoping and praying for. Additionally, Jesus, with his message of love and peace, was undermining their insurrectionist agenda. Having Jesus killed would essentially "kill two birds with one stone". Under this theory or hypothesis, Judas was a plant or mole sent by the Sicarii (or some other hostile party) sent to undermine and sabotage Jesus and/or even get him killed by another party,

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<sup>69</sup> Smith, Paul J. *The Terrorism Ahead: Confronting Transnational Violence in the Twenty-First Century*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. 2015. p.19

primarily the Romans.<sup>70</sup> Its an intriguing, even tantalizing theory that logically makes a great deal of sense. The problem however, is that the Sicarii do not begin to appear in any sources until the 50's, twenty years after Jesus' death.<sup>71</sup> The infiltration theory might still work, because even if not sent by the Sicarii, Judas could have been employed and dispatched by the priesthood and Jerusalem establishment. These groups were very threatened by Jesus' revolutionary message, rebellious acts, and status as a Galilean (an outsider) and thusly wanted him [Jesus] done in.

### *Dissatisfaction and Disillusionment*

This hypothesis assumes that Judas was attracted to the message and dynamism of Jesus, so much so that he abandoned the Sicarii or whatever other faction or group he belonged to follow him. If we accept the theory that Iscariot means Sicarius (the singular form of Sicarii), and Judas was a Sicarius, and he left the assassin sect to follow the man and ministry of Jesus, then he was not the only one of the apostles to do so. Indeed, another member of the group was Simon the Zealot (unlike Judas of course, Simon the Zealot did not actively betray Jesus). However, Judas ultimately became disappointed and disillusioned with the fact that Jesus had not brought about an immediate end to Roman occupation of Jewish land.<sup>72</sup> This anger and resentment led Judas to betray his leader to Caiaphas.

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<sup>70</sup> Hebron, Carol A. *Judas Iscariot: Damned or Redeemed: A Critical Examination of the Portrayal of Judas in Jesus Films (1902-2014)*. London: Bloomsbury. 2016. P.215

<sup>71</sup> Hauerwas, Stanley and Huebner, Chris K. *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2005. P.140

<sup>72</sup> Kuehl, Nancy L. *A Book of Evidence: The Trials and Execution of Jesus*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2013. P.202

Perhaps Judas was not alone in his disillusionment of Jesus. What happened for a man who was able to gather to him 5,000 people at the Mount of Olives and then be welcomed into Jerusalem as a hero by loving crowds (Palm Sunday), to only a short time later being betrayed by one of his followers (Judas), purposely denied and ignored by another (Simon Peter), condemned by the common people before a foreign government, and then abused by them both on the way to his place of execution (Via Dolorosa) and at his site of death (Calvary)? This rise and fall from “power” or popularity takes place rapidly to say the least. What happened?

There are several possibilities as to why Jesus experienced such a rapid decline. For those who wanted expedient action (i.e. the prompt and expeditious overthrowing of the Roman yoke), Jesus was not delivering on his promises with the wholesale immediacy and urgency with which they wanted. Did they like that he upended the tables at the Temple and chased many of the money-changers? Yes, but it was not enough in their minds. On the other side of the equation, Jesus’ enemies wanted him disposed of. There is no doubt that the Priesthood, the Romans, and the other factions saw Jesus as a threat to the status quo and their power and authority, and therefore launched powerful propaganda campaigns against him.<sup>73</sup> The fact that Jesus was willing to commit such limited acts of rebellion was not enough for those who not only wanted the land back in the hands of the Jews, but wanted it done so with both immediacy and purpose. The final straw for them, however, was his call “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). In essence,

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<sup>73</sup> Ellens, J Harold and Rollins, Wayne G. *Psychology and the Bible: From Christ to Jesus*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing. 2004. p.128

he was telling his followers who saw him as the hope for liberating their nation that they should instead embrace Roman rule and hegemony.<sup>74</sup> It is therefore easy to see why Jesus was so thoroughly abandoned and betrayed. In the minds of the people, they had not betrayed him, but rather he had betrayed them.<sup>75</sup>

With this in mind, Judas is in fact an intimate, personal microcosm of the population who not only abandoned but also ended up deriding and hating the very man they had once called Messiah.

### *The Gospel of Judas: Ordered by Jesus to betray him*

According to Christian belief and doctrine, only Jesus alone could atone for the sins of humanity, close the old laws, and establish a new covenant between mankind and God through his sacrificial demise. This redemption had to be accomplished by this singular individual alone. As such, the arrest, the trial, the condemnation, the torture, the carrying of the cross, and the crucifixion were all necessary. This also means that the betrayal by Judas was necessary for everything else to take place. This is the theme and message of the Gospel of Judas, a Gnostic gospel from the 2nd-3rd century that was first brought to the public's attention in 1983 and ultimately translated into English in 2006 by the National Geographic Society.<sup>76</sup> This work claims that Judas betrayed Jesus at the latter's request and instigation so that he could be sacrificed to atone for mankind. In other words, Judas's "betrayal" was actually both an order and an

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<sup>74</sup> Roberts, Mark D. *Jesus Revealed: Know Him Better to Love Him Better*. New York: Crown Publishing Group. 2010. p.107

<sup>75</sup> Isaacs, Ronald H. *Questions Christians Ask the Rabbi*. New York: KTAV Publishing House. 2006. P.3

<sup>76</sup> *Gospel of Judas*. National Geographic Society. 2006.

act of loyalty. As a result, this Gnostic gospel puts forth that Judas was actually the most loyal of the apostles! Under this powerful premise, even the fateful kiss takes on a powerful new meaning.

### *Demonic Possession or Mental Illness*

One of the major hallmarks of Reform Judaism when it emerged in 19th century Germany and Central Europe was to cast off much of the supernatural traditions, superstitions, customs, and even theology around which Jews had lived and bound themselves for hundreds, if not thousands of years in favor of the intellectual and scientific principles of the Enlightenment and the Jewish Haskalah (Enlightenment).<sup>77</sup> In the United States, where Reform Judaism and other liberal denominations are the majority, supernatural elements are seen as something archaic and anachronistic of their great-grandparents' generation which they abandoned when they left the shtetls of the Pale of Settlement for the crowded tenements of the Lower East Side. However, in the Tanakh, Talmud, Midrash, and other classical Jewish works, supernatural elements were not only replete with them, but people fervently believed in them and felt that they were active in all facets of everyday life. Perhaps the best examples is the following: in the Books of Samuel, it states that after God departed from Saul, he was subjected several times to an evil spirit entering or taking hold of him, causing him to go after David and even his own family.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Imhoff, Sarah. *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 2017. p.170

<sup>78</sup> | Samuel 16:14; 1 Samuel 19:9

From a Reform perspective which wholeheartedly embraces modern secular sciences such as medicine, psychology, physics, geology, history, biology, and chemistry, biblical demonic possession can often be expressed or now interpreted as mental illnesses such as manic depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. How then does this relate to Judas? In John 13:27, it states: "After Judas took the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to Judas, 'What you are about to do, do quickly.'" Perhaps this means that Judas was afflicted with a severe mental illness or more classically and straightforward, demonic possession by Satan.<sup>79</sup> Both Judaism and Christianity love and embrace those who are afflicted classically by demonic possession or today by mental illness. Both religions teach their followers to graciously help and comfort and to not cast out those who are suffering from such maladies. If Judas was suffering from demonic possession or mental illness, and therefore not in charge of his faculties or actions, can he be held responsible or accountable for the betrayal?

Furthermore, from a Rabbinic standpoint, Judas cannot be culpable for actions (both the John 13:27-based betrayal and his suicide) as he was under extraordinary spiritual, emotional, and duress i.e. he did not have control of his faculties. Rabbis Yosef Karo, Jacob ben Asher, and Nachmanides determined that there were in fact two types of suicides, b'da'at and anuss.<sup>80</sup> B'da'at literally means "with knowledge" and holds that if a person was in complete control of their cognitive and emotional self when

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<sup>79</sup> McCulloch, J. Wallace and Prins, Herschel A. *Signs of Stress: The Social Problems of Psychiatric Illness*. UK: Routledge. 1978. P.1

<sup>80</sup> Drazin, Israel. *Maimonides and the Biblical Prophets*. New York: Gefen Publishing House Ltd. 2009. p.112

they killed themselves, they cannot be mourned or buried with the rest of the Jewish community, as their act of suicide was a sin. However, if it is determined that they were in an inordinate and uncontrollable amount of physical pain, emotional instability, or suffering from severe psychological trauma- “anuss”, they are allowed to be buried and mourned just like anyone else. The exemplum primi, or benchmark for the Rabbis is King Saul's battlefield suicide in 1 Kings 34. Saul, mortally wounded by Philistine archers and not wanting to be captured and tortured by his enemies, ordered that his arms-bearer slay him. When the man refused, Saul killed himself. The Rabbis, not altogether condoning this act, certainly did not condemn it. This gave rise to the term *Anuss k'Shau!*.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, Judas, whether afflicted by demonic spirits or mental illness, seems to be a perfect example of *anuss*.

#### *An overzealous follower*

The fifth theory is also fascinating. This theory, which was championed by German scholar H.E. von Kalinowski in 1930, puts forth that Judas was a loyal, albeit overzealous and misguided follower who set his leader up so as to prove his leader's (Jesus') supremacy on the cross.<sup>82</sup> Believing that if captured by the Sanhedrin or Romans, Judas believed that Jesus would somehow turn the situation to his favor, and thereby both humiliate his opponents and demonstrate his supremacy. Judas was therefore also acting as a “Don King”-type figure, trying to organize a “Rumble in the Jungle” or “Thrilla in Manila” showdown between Jesus and the Sadducees and

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<sup>81</sup> Kolatch, Alfred J. *The Second Jewish Book of Why*. New York: JONATHAN DAVID Company Incorporated. 1985. p.184

<sup>82</sup> “Says Judas Iscariot Hoped to Make Jesus King of the Jews”. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. January 2, 1930.



Romans. Having witnessed the miracles of reviving Lazarus, turning the water into wine, the feeding of the multitude (also known as the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew 14:13-21), and the walking on water (Matthew 14:22-34), there was no way he thought Jesus could lose. In other words, he was trying to set Jesus up for an epic showdown. Such an ultimate confrontation was nothing new, especially in terms of the Tanakh. Examples of this included Moses' staff turning into a snake and devouring the Egyptian magicians' rod-serpents (Exodus 7:11-12), Elijah and God outperforming and humiliating the priests of Ba'al on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), and the trumpets bringing down the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:20). It is one thing to perform a miracle, but what truly cements a prophet's reputation is performing that same miracle as a competitive joust against the prophet, priest, or magician of a rival faction, nation, religion, or ideology. It is surmisable that this is what Judas had in mind. He may have believed that perhaps Jesus, if captured, could miraculously escape and humiliate his foes. However, his plan failed, or at least in the way he had hoped and envisioned. His leader was tortured, humiliated, mocked, and executed. This backfire is palpable with the Roman Soldiers saying to the crucified Jesus, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (Luke 23:36-37). The priests add to this humiliation saying "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God." (Matthew 27:42). Feeling ashamed and guilty that both his grand plan had gone so terribly awry and that he had gotten his friend and leader killed, Judas commits suicide.

### *A Purely Supersessionist Character*

The sixth theory is parallelistic and supersessionist in nature. Part of what gives Jesus credibility as the Messiah in Christian theology, specifically as Moshiach ben David (“Messiah Son of David”), is that he is a descendant of King David. 2 Samuel 7:13 proclaims that the Messiah will be descended from the House of David. Both Matthew (1:1-17) and Luke (3:23-38) make a point of demonstrating this lineage and ancestral connection upfront. However, lineage is not the only concern for the Christian authors. They also wanted to see a more perfect David, one who exemplifies the best qualities of the Judean king and his narrative, while not being saddled with his faults and sins. In essence, he is supposed to be a David 2.0.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, to further buttress the Davidic connection to Jesus, a Davidic-story character had to be added. So, just as David was afflicted by a traitorous counselor who ultimately committed suicide (Ahithophel), so too was it necessary for Jesus to be harmed by one. Judas is Jesus’ Ahithophel.<sup>84</sup> The Book of Acts (1:16) seems to support this, proclaiming “and [Peter] said, ‘Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.’”

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<sup>83</sup> Green, Joel B.; Brown, Jeannine K.; Perrin, Nicholas. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2013. p.883

<sup>84</sup> The story of Ahithophel can be found in 2 Samuel 17; Zacharias, H. Daniel. *Matthew’s Presentation of the Son of David*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 2016. p.162

## Chapter 4: Enduring Points and Questions

Even though several possibilities have been examined as to why Judas might have betrayed or did “betray” Jesus, this thesis is far from done. There are still enduring questions that need to be examined.

### *Is Judas Necessary?*

Could the Passion work without the inclusion of Judas- his kiss, his betrayal, his suicide- literally any of it? The Book of Acts (1:16) takes the standpoint that Judas was in fact necessary, even preordained. It states “and [Peter] said, ‘Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.’” However, the question remains, if Judas’s betrayal was removed, could the narrative and overall theology still logically work?

### *Hammering the point home: the painful and graphic death of Judas*

It is important to note that Judas does not simply die by hanging. In fact Acts 1 goes into extremely graphic detail. 1:18-20 states:

“With the reward of his wickedness Judas bought a field, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines spilled out. This became known to everyone living in Jerusalem; so they called that field in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) “For it is written in the book of Psalms: ‘May his dwelling be deserted; let there be no one to live in it,’ and, ‘May another take his office.’”

He receives a uniquely grotesque and humiliating death that recalls for the reader other such deaths that take place in the Tanakh: Absalom and his hair, Lot’s wife being turned into a pillar of salt, a drunken and incapacitated Shechem being murdered

after lured into circumcision, the assassination of the obese Canaanite king Eglon, Abimelech and the millstone, King Saul begging to be killed at Gilboa, Sisera, Yael, and the tent peg, Goliath and the sling, and Samson and his humiliation by the Philistines. In other words, in the Tanakh, a trope developed wherein villains and other incredibly flawed characters are punished with painful and embarrassing deaths.<sup>85</sup> Christianity is somewhat different in that beginning with Jesus, painful and humiliating deaths were seen as a sign of purity, piety, faith, and martyrdom.<sup>86</sup> However, the contention can easily be made that Judas's death is actually a throwback to "an Old Testament villain's death". Medieval and Renaissance artists such as Giovanni Canavesio (*Remorse of Judas and Crucifixion* 1491), the Chapel of St Sebastian in Villard-de-Lans, Rhone-Alpes, France (*Death of Judas* c.15th century), and the glass window *Hanging of Judas* (southern Germany or Alsace) all go a step further and show a demon or devil grabbing Judas's soul (which in the form of a miniature version of Judas himself) from his bursting intestines.

### *Why is Judas Vilified and Peter Forgiven?*

One of the most pressing questions from a Jewish (and indeed any other non-Christian perspective) is why is Judas vilified and eternally damned while Peter is not only pardoned, but in fact honored and elevated to lead the church? Both Judas and

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<sup>85</sup> Batovici, Dan and de Troyer, Kristin. *Authoritative Texts and Reception History: Aspects and Approaches*. Netherlands: BRILL Publishers. 2016. p.46

<sup>86</sup> Sparry, C. *The Illustrated Christian Martyrology: Being an Authentic and Genuine Historical Account of the Principal Persecutions Against the Church of Christ, in Different Parts of the World, by Pagans and Papists*. Philadelphia: J. & J.L. Gihon. 1851. p.36; Salisbury, Joyce E. *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. 2004.

Peter betray Jesus. Judas betrays Jesus to the Roman authorities in the garden at the last supper while Peter three times denied knowing him [Jesus] while his leader was being interrogated, tried, and tortured. Finally, Peter only apologizes and atones for abandoning Jesus when questioned by the risen Jesus (John 21:15). This is in complete contrast to Judas who not only returns the money to Caiaphas, but hangs himself out of guilt, remorse, and shame (Matthew 27:3-5). In other words, Peter has to be forced to apologize and reconcile while Judas is proactive and comes to this realization out of his own conscience and volition. In this framework, it actually seems that Judas appears somewhat more favorable than Peter. The bigger and more important question is are Judas and Peter parallels of each other? Why does Peter receive not only absolution, but indeed exaltation and promotion while Judas receives eternal condemnation?

### *Is Judas Forgiven?*

“Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34) is one of the famous utterances from the Passion. In this scene, Jesus begs God to forgive those who are mocking and executing him at Calvary. This brings about the question: If Jesus died atoning for the sins of all mankind, would this atonement therefore extend not only to those who mocked him along the Via Dolorosa, but also those who chose his death sentence over that of Barabbas in front of Pontius, and yes, even Judas as well? If Jesus begs and commands forgiveness for all those who scorned and assailed him, how could hatred persist against those individuals’ ancestors? Furthermore, does Jesus’ statement extend to just the crowd present along

the Via Dolorosa and at Calvary, or does it likewise extend to all those who bore him ill will including the Pharisees, Pontius, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and of course, Judas?

If it is indeed a statement of blanket clemency and forgiveness, then under Christian theology itself, Judas has been forgiven by divine power. The theological implications of this would be nothing less than revolutionary. When one considers that one of the major theological attacks on Jews by Christians for two millennia has been the responsibility for Jesus' death and that through characters and tropes such as Ahasuerus and the "wandering Jew", Jews are collectively and eternally seen as cursed for the death of the Savior, looking at Luke 23:34 with more emphasis and a new set of lenses can undo thousands of years of hurt and maltreatment.<sup>87</sup> In essence, can Luke 23:34 cancel out Matthew 27:25 and Mark 14:43-45?

#### *Chapter 4 Summary*

These points and questions are not trivial conversation starters. Rather, they have major theological implications both for Christianity itself and for Jewish-Christian relations. They can affect how Christians see Jesus, Judas, Jews, and themselves.

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<sup>87</sup> Glikson, Yvonne. "Wandering Jew". *Anti-Semitism*. Israel Pocket Library Series. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House. 1974. pp.105-109.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Judas Iscariot has the potential to be one of the most complex and intriguing characters both in world literature and even Christian scripture even though for most of history he has been painted as a simplistic and purely evil man driven by nothing more than monetary gain. Whether it is the Gnostic Gospel of Judas, the volatile, dynamic, politically-charged century in which he lived, or the implications of his full name, Judas Iscariot if fully examined, is far more than a simple, one-dimensional character who is traditionally meant to personify treason, greed, and all Jews everywhere. Additionally, Jews need to have a very clear of who Judas is, and know that he has been the archetypal and stereotypical Jew for 2000 years of world history. Finally, possessing greater knowledge of not only Judas, but indeed the full content of New Testament provides an incredible opportunity for Jewish-Christian dialogue and even better interfaith relations. The character Judas provides both parties with a unique starting point.

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