Chapter 7
Betrayal

Abstract

This chapter is about Judas and the betrayal of Jesus. In the discussion it is shown that Judas, contrary to the common belief in the church that he had a satanic character and purposes, was seemingly a responsible church leader with good intentions. Against the humanitarian sympathy for Judas the depth of his betrayal is shown exactly in the fact that it was done with good intentions. Judas was confronted by Jesus’ strange pronouncements about the Chosen People, the Temple and the Law as well as his incomprehensible behaviour when the woman anointed his feet in Bethany. He experienced these things as a betrayal. The name and person of Judas reveal the ambiguous nature of the act of betrayal. The use of the word “betrayal” and related concepts in the Word of God explain its ambiguous character even further. The disturbing conclusion of the chapter is that Judas betrayed Jesus through his good intentions and in service of God.

Introduction

It is easy to disregard the problems posed by the life of Judas. The name Judas brings with it a world of betrayal and all the negative connotations associated with the terrible depths of evil into which humans can sink. When we are forced to think about him it does suit us well to portray him so unattainably evil or, as within the secular humanism, as a tragic and noble figure. This humanistic approach, which does also feature within the church, attempts to

402 This chapter was published as an article in the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif 45, no. 3, 4 (2004): 908-914.
403 As an article, this chapter was dedicated to my father, who knows how costly is His grace that is sufficient.
404 Philips, D R. “We don't want to own the likeness: contemporary literature and films have recast Judas as a tragic and therefore noble figure”, Christianity Today 24 (April 1980): 30.
understand him by looking at his motives and in so doing pointing out the relative character of his guilt.

Against the general view in the church this chapter proposes that Judas was not a bad person. Against the humanistic view it attempts to show that it is exactly by way of his noble motives that he did betray Jesus.

It is shown how Judas was confronted by the strange sayings of Jesus concerning the Chosen People, the Temple and the Law as well as Jesus’ incomprehensible actions when the woman of Bethany anointed his feet. In the discussion on the name and person of Judas, the ambiguity of the betrayal is brought to light. The meaning of betrayal and its use in Scriptures will further underline that Judas was a responsible church leader with the noblest of motives, but that he did betray Jesus for this very reason.

**Judas - humankind**

The most disturbing truth about Judas is that despite the evil representations of him in the church throughout the centuries, his fellow-disciples did not suspect any such behaviour from him as Origen concurs. Scriptures does not speak extensively about his bad deeds, on the contrary he is portrayed as one that was trusted enough to handle the finances. Even more than that – he was the one of whom it was explicitly mentioned that he was concerned about the poor (Jn 12:5). If one scrutinises Scriptures one would see that except for John who mentions that he took some of the money for himself there are no extraordinarily bad things said about him. Scriptures does not say that he had a bad character or a tendency for crime. He was a good Christian – one of those that Jesus himself has chosen (Jn 6:70). He would have had the appearance of a good church leader.

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From their Jewish background, Judas and the other disciples found themselves in a difficult position. Looking at Judas from a broader perspective, his behaviour would possibly look more comprehensible to us. Jesus made unacceptable statements regarding the Jewish people, the Temple, the Law and the Chosen People. These things were holy and untouchable aspects of their faith. All the traditions handed down for centuries, which had been imprinted on them from a very early age, Jesus had come to challenge. He said He would break down the Temple (Jn 2:19) and He regarded Himself as more important than the Temple (Mt12:6). Concerning the Law, He says that the one who breaks even the least of these laws will be regarded as the least in the Kingdom. However, He breaks the Law concerning the Sabbath Himself (Mt 12:8) and teaches the disciples a new law (Jn 13:34). Furthermore, He says that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from the Chosen People and that it will be give to another people. (Mt 21:43). He is almost thrown from the cliffs when he dares insulting the Chosen People by saying that God sent Elijah to the widow of Zarephath rather than to a widow in Israel during the drought in the time of King Ahab (Lk 4:26).

All these things must have been very strange to the disciples. How many times were they not disturbed by his words (Mt 19:25; Jn 6:52-71)? He announced the salvation of the poor and continually kept them in mind. Still He allowed the woman of Bethany to wash his feet. How could he then be astonished that Judas was outraged at this wasting of money? Interestingly in all the other gospels all the disciples are shocked by this waste, but that in John only Judas protests. It is even stranger that in Matthew (26) Judas goes to betray Jesus just after this episode. According to all Christian principles one would have to say that Judas was holier than Jesus. Judas is concerned for the poor – Jesus is not. His first thought is of the poor and a workman deserves his wages (Luk 10:7). In opposition to Jesus, he is a responsible leader in the church.
The Spirit on All Flesh

Judas Iscariot – betrayer?

The possible meanings for his name presents a few interesting perspectives on the person of Judas. There are a variety of theories concerning the meaning of his name. Some reckon that the name Iscariot comes from the Latin *sicarius* (Greek *σικάριος*), which refers to the *Sikarii* or “men of the dagger,” others says that it comes from the Latin *scortea*, which would refer to the leather purse he carried. Iscariot could also refer to a town (*נְרִיִּים*) in Judah, which would make of Judas the only disciple from Judea. Derret proposes that his name comes from *עָשַׂק*, which means “business” and *רֵעַ*, which means “friend.” Judas would then be one who makes business out of friendship.

Morin mentions a possibility, which really makes one think: namely, that his name comes from the Hebrew *רֶפֶשׁ*, which means “payment” or “reward.” This does seem to fit in well with the reward he took for himself from the purse, as well as the thirty silver coins he accrued for betraying Jesus. The amount of money he took from the purse and the thirty silver coins look more like the amount for a salary than the spoils of a thief. No good thief would accept the mere 30 silver coins, which was the price of a slave, for services rendered to the high priests. Jesus’ announcement that the woman is anointing him for his death would also not have spelled anything good for Judas’ salary. Where would he go if Jesus died and how would he be able to take care of his wife and children? The question remains whether anyone could blame Judas for going

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back to the established ‘church’ to assure for himself a future. Would not all of us do the same?

Jesus asked Judas to chose not only against all the established traditions of his people (the law and the temple), but to chose against the Law and the Temple of God as represented by the spiritual leaders of His Chosen People. Jesus was seen as an instigator and trouble-maker who blasphemed against God (Jn 10:33, 36).

Judas’ conversation with the religious leaders almost sounds like a conversion (Lk 22:5, 6), where he confesses (εξομολογέω) and they are glad (χαίρω) to receive back into their midst this lost sheep. Strangely enough the name Judas could also mean ‘confess.’411 By confessing his faith before the priests he betrays Jesus.

It is quite disconcerting for any church leader to realise that one would hardly have acted differently than Judas did in the same circumstances. He followed the church leadership of the High Priest, who was appointed by God. He acted out of respect for the Holy Law, the Temple and the Chosen People for the benefit of the poor. He wanted a year of hope, while Jesus wanted to die. Like a good minister (Levite in Jdg 19) he pushed Jesus out into the dark of Sodom, for the greater good.

Morin’s interesting article sees Judas as a zealot with Simon the Zealot.412 Morin explains how the zealots ruthlessly killed anyone who disrespected God, the Law and the Temple. He refers to Phinehas413 in Nm 25:6-13, who pierced a spear through the Israelite and his Midianite wife – in service of God. This act ended the plague and averted God’s anger.


In Jn 16:2 Jesus himself says that the people who ban the disciples from the synagogues, will think they are doing it in service of God. If one were to look past one’s preconceived ideas about Judas and look at him from this perspective, the terrible implications are that Judas handed Jesus over to die in service of God.

In considering this disturbing possibility and looking at Judas from a Jewish perspective, one would realise that it is not Judas who betrayed Jesus, but rather Jesus who betrayed Judas. Jesus, with his statements concerning the Law, the Temple and the Chosen People, betrayed the Jewish people.

In his article “Verräter oder verraten”?, Pinchas Lapide says that Judas came to realise that Jesus is not the Messiah, but that Jesus betrayed him and the Jews and that “Jesus is no Messiah, but a Seducer of the nation. Not Judas is the Betrayer, but Jesus – and therefore Judas betrayed him ...” As is fitting for a protector of the Law, Temple and Chosen People, Judas handed Jesus over.

**High treason**

In his discussion on the Hebrew נָתַן, equivalent of the Greek παραδίδωμι (to betray or hand over), Derret points out that the handing over of someone from inside the group to people outside the group would only be justifiable if the whole community was in danger and the person deserved to die. He uses 2 Sm 20 as an example. Sheba, who rebelled against king David, is handed over from inside the city. His betrayal of the king and the danger into which he had placed the city, justified the townspeople in handing him over.

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To hand over a guilty Jew to the Jewish authorities was regarded as an obligation for any zealous Jew. Morin discusses the fervent zeal for the People and the Temple. The spilling of the blood of a transgressor was seen as an offering to God, as illustrated in the deeds of Phinehas (Nm 25). Did Judas not bring an offering to God by handing over Jesus?

The handing over of a Jew to the heathen was considered a grave trespass and only occurred very rarely. Derrett explains that David’s handing over of Saul’s descendants to the Gibeonites (2 Sm 21) was something the Rabbi’s had great difficulty in justifying. This was betrayal in the highest degree, seeing as these were children of Saul, the Anointed of God (2 Sm 21:6). This is the same Saul that David did not dare kill even though he had ample opportunity. Sheba was also a servant from the house of Saul, the chosen of God.

In 2 Sm 15-23 one reads of Absalom who betrayed and took away the crown from David, his own father. David’s trusty counsellor, Ahithophel sides with the conspirators (2 Sm 15:31). To listen to Ahithophel’s advice was like listen to the Word of God itself (2 Sm 16:32). His advice to Absalom was to kill only David and only after David’s men fled (2 Sm 17:2). It sounds like the words of Caiaphas that it is better that one person dies for the nation (Jn 11:50). Ahithophel’s advice is not followed and he hanged himself (2 Sm 17:23). He betrayed the anointed of God like Judas and died in the same manner (Mt 27). These are the only two suicide cases in Scriptures.

Absalom comes to his end by hanging between heaven and earth on the branches with a spear through his body (2 Sm 18:9-14). Interestingly, one of David’s servants is not interested in the ten silver coins offered by Joab to kill Absalom. He even goes as far as

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saying he will not do it even for a thousand silver coins (2 Sm 18:12).

God’s Son, like David’s son hung on a tree with a spear through his body. Did Jesus not betray his Father, like Absalom, by desecrating his Temple, Law and People? Garland points out that Judas also saw Jesus’ actions as a betrayal of God.\(^{418}\)

In 2 Sm 20 one reads of the rebellion of Sheba. Amasa, who was placed in charge of Absalom’s army during his rebellion, seems to have been reconciled to David after the rebellion. David sends him to obtain Judah’s help in the struggle against Sheba. He tarries and David suspects foul play. Joab, who is on his way to track down Sheba, runs into Amasa. With a “... How are your, my brother”? and a kiss he stabs him in the abdomen (like the zealous Phinehas) and Amasa’s intestines to spill out on the ground like Judas’ in Ac 1:18.

The ambiguity of the betrayal appears on different levels. Absalom betrays David, the anointed king, but dies like Jesus. Amasa betrays David, the anointed king, but dies like Judas, even though he is betrayed with a kiss like Jesus. Absalom anoints himself as king in opposing his father and Jesus is anointed by a prostitute as king in seeming opposition to his Father.

Joab’s zeal for God and Judas’ zeal for God is like Saul’s zeal. Saul’s zeal for God’s Temple, Law and People was his reason for persecuting the Christian community (Gl 1:13, 14). He burned with fervent zeal for the traditions (παραδόσεων) of his forefathers. He had to become a betrayer of his People and their traditions before he could become true to Christ.

It is disconcerting to read about the Christian’s confrontations with the Jews in Acts. Just like Saul killed Stephen in service of God, the Jews persecuted the Christians in service of God.

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In opposition to the Word of God, which Paul and Barnabas preached, the Jews incited *God-fearing* women of high social standing and prominent men of the city (Ac 13:50). How many times did Paul have to explain himself before the Jews? They accused him of bringing schism in among the Jews (Ac 24:5), which was also one reason why they convicted Jesus in Jn 11:50. Paul, who was in the service of the high priests and elders and persecuted the Christians (Ac 22:5) for their opposition to the Temple, the Law and the People of God, is persecuted for speaking against this very Temple, Law and People (Ac 21:28). The whole Nation is in uproar about Paul’s betrayal and the Jews formed a conspiracy to murder him (Ac 23:12-14). All of this was done in service of God, just like Judas did by handing Jesus over to the high priest of God.

Judas or Judah comes from the Hebrew verb יָדָה, which is the root of יְהוּדָה – the word for the Jewish people. The word Judas can also mean “confess” as mentioned earlier, but could also mean “thankfulness.” This is the how Leah named her son (Gn. 29:35) out of thankfulness towards her creator.419 Interestingly this is the Judah who proposes that they sell Joseph for 20 silver coins. The arrogance of Joseph (who would allegedly rule over his brothers) is the reason for wanting to kill and eventually to sell him. This places the whole Jewish nation’s handing over of Jesus in an interesting perspective, because Jesus himself makes the most blasphemous statements concerning his being God himself (Lk 5:21; Jn 10:36; Mt 27:63-65). It is noteworthy that Judah and his brothers also ate bread (Gn 37:25-28) while they decided about Joseph,420 almost like the Last Supper where Judas goes to betray Jesus for 30 silver coins. Judah’s responsibility for the handing over of Joseph is shared by his brothers, even by Ruben with his good intentions. Judas’ handing over of Jesus is also shared by the other disciples who ran away.


Peter and Judas’ responsibility did not differ greatly. The one betrayed the other denied. The one got thirty silver coins the other got to keep his life. Judas was actually better than Peter. Peter goes out and cries about his betrayal, while Judas takes full responsibility by paying himself.

It is quite remarkable that Barth shows how the word for betrayal (παραδίδωμι) is also used in Lk 1:2 for the apostolic handing over of the Word of God. In a sense to preach is to betray.

Judas was a good minister with good intentions, just like Peter, but he betrayed the People of God for his chosen people. He betrayed the temple of the Body of Christ for the Temple of God. He betrayed the One who fulfilled the Law for the Law of God. He betrayed the One who was the perfect offering by bringing his own offering.

Judas is not more sinful than Peter or Paul, but he could not stand before God as a sinner, but tried to sanctify himself. God did not reject him, he rejected himself. He could not believe that Jesus Christ was the all-sufficient offering. Oepke Noordmans says that the coming of the Spirit of Truth means: “... one new nation (1 Pt 2:9), one new temple, one new offering (Rm 12:1), one new law (Rm 7:22).”

Christ fulfilled the Law, rent the temple curtain, made the Perfect offering and called together the People of God through his Spirit. God betrayed his Son (Rm 8:32) for us, Jesus betrayed himself for us as for Paul (Gl 2:20). Let us say

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422 “...een nieuw volk (1 Petr. 2:9), een nieuwe tempel, een nieuwe offerande (Rom. 12:1), een nieuwe wet (Rom. 7:22)” (Noordmans, *Verzamelde Werken Deel 8* 1990b, 356).
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with Paul, the betrayer: “I do not reject the grace of God ... ” (Gl 2:21), even if we see only betrayal in our hearts, like Judas.

Conclusion

This chapter has proposed that Judas was an ordinary person and not an obvious evil-doer. He seemed to be a responsible church leader with good intentions. Jesus’ view of the holiest things for the Jewish people; namely, the Chosen People, the Temple and the Law had to be very difficult for Judas to accept. The fact that he handed Jesus over just after Jesus had wasted the oil, which could have been sold and given to the poor, supports the fact that Judas was no obvious villain, but had good intentions. The discussion of his name, person and the meaning of the Greek word for “betrayal” in the Bible highlighted the ambiguity of betrayal.

The most disturbing feature of Judas’ betrayal is the fact that he was convinced that he was serving God by betraying Jesus.