

# Judas' Remorse

📖 Matthew 27:1-10

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Last time we looked at Peter's denials. We said this is interesting because Jesus predicted that all of the disciples would deny Him, yet only the denials of Peter are recorded in Scripture. This is because Peter was to be a first among equals in the early church. Furthermore, some have thought that the accounts of his denials could not be reconciled into just three denials, but perhaps as many as six or nine. In 26:69 "Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard" of Caiaphas. The parallels say they had made a fire and were warming themselves. At that time "a servant girl came to him," having recognized his voice as someone not from around those parts, "and said, 'You too were with Jesus the Galilean.'" The reference to Galilean was a derogatory remark. The Galilean's were rural folk and viewed by the Judeans as inferior. The fact she recognized his accent as Galilean and Jesus as a Galilean shows how Jesus' ministry was identified with the Galilee. In 26:70 Peter "denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you are talking about." That is denial one. In 26:71 he went "out to the gateway," the parallels say a porch area, evidently to escape the large crowd and join a smaller one where he was less likely to be detected. There, "another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.'" The reference to Nazareth was also derogatory. The Jews viewed Nazareth as a despised place and Jesus was despised. In 26:72 "again he denied it," but this time "with an oath," meaning he called down curses upon himself if he was lying, saying "I do not know the man." That is denial two. In 26:73, "A little later the bystanders came up," the parallel says "about an hour later." This was well into the night. Caiaphas was trying to find witnesses to testify against Jesus. The bystanders outside said to Peter "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away." It could not be denied; Peter's accent gave him away. McGee felt that Peter was nervous and his mouth began to run ahead of his brain. In 26:74 Peter "began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!'" The third denial was the most emphatic denial. All four gospel accounts then record, "And immediately a rooster crowed," except Mark which records that Peter recalled that Jesus had said he would deny him before a rooster crowed twice. The mention of twice seems to indicate two prophecies of three denials each. Careful study shows there was one prophecy in the Upper Room and one on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Two prophecies with three denials each amounts to six denials. A review of those whom he denied them before seems to bear this out. The parallel in Luke reports that when the rooster crowed the last time Jesus looked at Peter across the courtyard. 26:75 says he "remembered the word which Jesus had said, 'Before a

rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. Peter had just learned an important lesson; Jesus' word was equally authoritative as God's word. Whatever Jesus said would come to pass. It could not be thwarted. He also learned how weak his flesh was and when we depend upon the flesh we fail. Even so, Jesus had prayed that afterwards Peter's faith would not fail, that he would be restored. And, of course, Peter was restored, he went on to strengthen the other brothers who denied Him and continued to advance in the Christian life. From this we can be encouraged that when we fail there is room for restoration and growth. We can also gain confidence in the word of God, that when He speaks, even regarding something seemingly trivial, such as a rooster crowing, it comes to pass, so that what we are believing is true, all of it, and we have nothing to fear.

With the denials behind us we now come to 27:1, the formal decision of the Sanhedrin in 27:1. **Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death.** This would be the third religious trial. The timing of this trial was **when morning came.** The parallel in Mark 15:1 says it was "early in the morning" and in John 18:28 that "it was early." It was dawn and the sun was just breaking over the horizon. The trial at dawn had to be held because the two previous trials were held at night. They were, therefore, illegal. Thus the purpose of this trial was to make legal the decision the night before which was illegal. Barbieri said, "Jesus' first Jewish trials occurred under the cover of darkness. Since Jewish law required trials to be conducted during the day, the chief priests and the elders of the people realized an official trial was necessary."<sup>1</sup> Matthew tells us those who attended were **all the chief priests and the elders of the people.** This was probably most, if not all of the Sanhedrin, though Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus may not have been present. The Sanhedrin was composed of 70 men plus the high priest. During the night 26:59 said "the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus," but we determined that Caiaphas would probably not have awakened all of them during the night. By "whole Council" is probably meant the quorum of 23 required for a decision. But now that it was morning a larger representation of the council would have assembled. The parallel in Luke 22:66 indicates that this trial did not occur at Caiaphas' house but at the official place of deliberation, the Chamber of Hewn Stone within the Temple environs. Matthew says their purpose was to **confer together against Jesus to put Him to death.** That is, their purpose was already decided. This was simply to make it appear legal. Pentecost said, "In order to give a legal sanction to their notoriously illegal proceeding, the elders of the people were assembled immediately at the dawn of day..."<sup>2</sup> At the meeting one further point needed their attention. They had charged Jesus with blasphemy, which was a religious charge. That charge was significant to the Jews but they had no power to execute. Only a Roman ruler could issue a decision to execute. Therefore, they would need a charge that was significant to a Roman ruler. This means they needed to find a way to twist the religious charge of blasphemy into a civil charge of treason against Rome. Farrar said, "At present they had only against Him a charge of constructive blasphemy, founded on an admission forced from Him by the High Priest, when even their own suborned witnesses had failed to perjure themselves to their satisfaction....The problem before them was to convert the ecclesiastical charge of constructive

blasphemy into a civil charge of constructive treason. But how could this be done?...He had solemnly admitted that He was the Messiah and the Son of God. The latter declaration would have been meaningless as a charge against Him before the tribunal of the Romans; but if He would repeat the former, they might twist it into something politically seditious."<sup>3</sup> In the end they twisted it into the charge that Jesus was claiming to be a King and any claim to be king was a threat to Caesar. Of course, Jesus was a King, but He was no threat to Caesar at this time because the nation Israel had rejected Him and the kingdom had been postponed. Therefore, Rome would remain for the time and be the eventual instrument in the hand of God to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple.

Having decided to twist the charge in this way, verse 2 says, **they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.** Here we briefly meet Pontius **Pilate**. Pontius was his family name. He was governor of Judea and Samaria from AD26-36. He usually resided at Caesarea by the Sea in his beautiful seaside palace but he would go up to Jerusalem during annual festivities in order to show a strong Roman presence and quell any riots. In 1961 a rock was discovered in the theater at Caesarea with his name inscribed on it. It had evidently been destroyed and re-used in the construction of the theater. The inscription reads, "S TIBERIEUM PONTIUS PILATUS PRAEFECTUS IUDAEAE .....E....." TIBERIEUM is a reference to Emperor Tiberius, PONTIUS PILATUS is clearly the name of Pilate, PRAEFECTUS IUDAEAE means Prefect of Judea. This accords perfectly with the biblical text that states that **Pilate** was **the governor**. The Greek title *τω ηγεμονι* refers especially to the procurators or prefects of Judea. Pilate was the Prefect of Judea.

In 27:3 Matthew gives us an aside about Judas Iscariot that is not recorded by any of the other gospel writers. This is Judas' response to the verdict. **Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us?" See to that yourself!" And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.** The event is a strange one indeed. Judas, upon seeing **that Jesus had been condemned... felt remorse**. He evidently did not think that the Jews would try to get the death sentence for Jesus. Barbieri said, "He had not envisioned this as the outcome of his betrayal, but what he had hoped to accomplish is not mentioned in the biblical text."<sup>4</sup> When he saw that Jesus was **condemned he felt remorse**. The Greek word translated **felt remorse** is from *μεταμελομαι*. This word is not the same as "repent" or "change of mind" which is *μετανοια*. Some state that Judas repented, but this is not so. Trench observed that *μετανοια* in Scripture meant "a change of mind" that resulted in a regret for the ill done in the past and out of this a change of life for the better. But Judas did not have a change of life for the better. **He went away and hanged himself.** *Μεταμελομαι*, on the other hand, may involve "a change of mind" resulting in regret for the ill done without a change of life for the better. This is the description of Judas. In other words, *regret* can stand alone but *repentance* includes it and goes farther. If Judas had repented, He would have come to salvation. But he did not. John 17:12 labels him as "the son of perdition." Trench said, "there does remain, both in sacred and profane use, a very distinct preference for

μετάνοια as the expression of the nobler repentance... He who has *changed his mind* about the past is in the way to change everything; he who has an *after care* may have little or nothing more than a selfish dread of the consequences of what he has done.<sup>5</sup> This seems to be Judas; he has nothing more than a selfish dread of the consequences for what he has done. He had not expected Jesus to be given the death sentence and he did not want to be held responsible for His death. When he saw that He was responsible, he wanted to immediately be extricated from involvement. Because of this he told the priests, **"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."** By confessing that he **sinned** he only meant he had erred in turning Jesus over to be executed. By saying he **betrayed innocent blood** he did not mean he thought Jesus was innocent altogether, but simply that Jesus was **innocent** of a capital crime. He was trying to absolve himself of any responsibility for killing Him. Pentecost said, "He sought to extricate himself from involvement and "returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders."<sup>6</sup> But they would not accept the money. **They said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"** In other words, the priests and elders refused to assume the responsibility for Jesus' death, they placed sole responsibility on Judas. However, they could not absolve themselves from their role in Jesus' death either. They were all guilty of destroying innocent blood to one extent or another.

At that 27:5 says Judas **threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and went away and hanged himself.** Simply having the money was a continual reminder of his sin and he wanted to get rid of it. Perhaps he threw the money in the temple hoping it would atone for his sin. The reference to **the temple sanctuary** is the word *ναός* and refers to the holy place of the temple, the room just outside the most holy place. That is where he cast the silver, but this did not give him relief, for it says that he **departed, and went away and hanged himself.** This is not a change for the better, and therefore there was no *repentance*, no change of life for the better, only *regret*, a change of mind leading to severe mental anguish. Because of his mental anguish he committed suicide by hanging himself.

In 27:6 **The chief priest took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them in the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood.** The **price of blood**, or "Blood money is... money gained at the cost of another person's life or livelihood."<sup>7</sup> Suddenly these guys get a conscience, but their hypocrisy is evident. They were willing to pay Judas out of the temple treasury but would not put the money back in the **temple treasury.** Figart said, "Ironically, they did not want to acknowledge any part in the acquisition of the pieces of silver, as though this would absolve them of their evil deed in condemning to death innocent blood. Their corrupt practices allowed them to pay Judas for betraying Christ, but their warped thinking would not permit them to put that same money back into the Treasury."<sup>8</sup> Constable added, "Here again they appear scrupulous about ritual observance of the law while at the same time they failed to defend what is more important, namely the innocence of Jesus (cf. 12:9–14; 15:1–9; 23:23; 28:12–13)."<sup>9</sup>

In 27:7, **they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers.** They reasoned thus; under Jewish Law money that was illegally acquired could not be used in the

Temple treasury. Judas had acquired this money as blood money and thrown it in the temple. Usually it would be returned to the donor. However, Judas had killed himself. Under the Law if the donor died prior to the money's return, it would be used to purchase something for the common good. The priests decided to purchase **the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers**. This would qualify as a project for the common good and make them feel like they were keeping the Law. The **Potter's Field** was a location where potters dug for clay but apparently was depleted. It was located at the southern foot of the city just west of where the valley of Hinnom and the Kidron valley met before heading toward the Dead Sea. This was near the area where residents of Jerusalem took their trash and burned it, an area known as Gehenna which became an apt figure in the teaching of Jesus for the eternal lake of fire. This particular field had been known as the Potter's Field but in light of this purchase of the field it received a new name.

In 27:8, **For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day**. Apparently the priests wanted everyone to know that they had funded this project for the common good with blood money, that they had no part in it. In this way they hoped to gain the favor of the people for appearing to do good. And Matthew notes that it has been called this **to this day**, meaning to the day that Matthew wrote his gospel, which was approximately AD51. It, therefore, ironically stood as a continual reminder of what Judas had done, that he had betrayed innocent blood, that is, that Jesus was innocent.

Before we go on to how this fulfilled prophecy, we have one other record of Judas' demise that is found in Acts 1:18ff. So turn to Acts 1. This is the scene where the Eleven were selecting a replacement for Judas. Judas had turned aside from his office and so there was a vacancy to be filled. In verse 16 Peter said, "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup>"For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." Verse 18 gives an aside about his demise. "(Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. <sup>19</sup>And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)" However, this report seems to conflict with the report in Matthew on two accounts. First of all, who purchased the field? The account in Acts seems to say that it was Judas purchased the field himself, whereas the account in Matthew seems to say that it was the priests that purchased the field with Judas' money. Who then purchased the field? Which account is correct? They are both correct. Just how is resolved from the standpoint of Jewish Law. Under Jewish Law money that was illegally acquired could not be used in the Temple treasury. Judas had acquired this money as blood money and thrown it in the temple. Usually it would be returned to the donor. However, Judas had killed himself. Under the Law if the donor died prior to the money's return, it would be used to purchase something for the common good. Therefore, the priests decided to purchase a field to bury poor people in. The Law further stated that such purchases had to be done in the name of the donor, even though he was dead. Thus, Judas' name was ascribed to the field as the owner of the land. In this way, all records would cite Judas as the owner of the field, even though the actual purchasers were the

priests. Second, how did Judas die? The account in Acts seems to say that Judas died by falling headlong, bursting open and all his intestines gushing out, whereas the account in Matthew seems to say that he hung himself. Which account is correct? They are both correct. Judas did go and hang himself, but at some unknown time his body gave way, fell headlong, burst open and all his intestines gushed out. Just how it all happened is not explained by Scripture. Many think that he went to the valley of Gehenna and hung himself on a tree which gave way. Edersheim said, "Down to the horrible solitude of the valley of Hinnom, the "Tophet" of old, with its ghastly memories, the Gehenna of the future...Here jagged rocks rise perpendicularly; perhaps there was some gnarled, bent, stunted tree. Up there he climbed to the top of that rock. Now slowly and deliberately he unwound the long girdle that held his garment. It was the girdle in which he had carried those thirty pieces of silver. He was now quite calm and collected. With that girdle he will hang himself on that tree close by, and when he has fastened it, he will throw himself off from that jagged rock. It is done; but as, unconscious, not yet dead perhaps, he swung heavily on that branch, under the unwonted burden the girdle gave way, or perhaps the knot, which his trembling hands had made, unloosed, and he fell heavily forward among the jagged rocks beneath, and perished in the manner of which St. Peter reminded his fellow-disciples in the days before Pentecost."<sup>10</sup> Other's such as Carson suggest that he may have hung for days before falling. Carson said, the "...hot sun might have brought on rapid decomposition till the body fell to the ground and burst open."<sup>11</sup> Fruchtenbaum viewed things a bit differently. He viewed Judas as having hanged himself within the city and being cast over the wall by the priests. He said, "If a body is found within the walls of Jerusalem then the city is considered unclean so they could not proceed with the sacrifice. But another Jewish Law helped them get past this. It said that if they took the body and dumped it over the wall facing Gehenna then the city would be ceremonially clean and the sacrifice could continue. Judas did hang himself, profaning the city, but was found during the night and was thrown over the wall with his head falling headlong and his bowels gushing out."<sup>12</sup> However, it might have occurred, the horrible manner of Judas' death is a foretaste of the horrible end of all unbelievers. They are making a dreadful mistake by not believing in Him.

In Matt 27:9 we are told that this fulfilled prophecy. **Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; <sup>10</sup>and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord directed me."** The trouble with this quote is that it is not found anywhere in **Jeremiah** but sounds more like a passage in Zechariah. Zechariah 11:12-13 is something of a rough quote with a few changes. Several explanations for its attribution to Jeremiah have been given. First, that Jeremiah wrote Zechariah 9-11. This is a conclusion of critical scholars who don't believe the Bible is the inspired word of God. They came to this conclusion by reading their modern source theories into the Bible. Second, some have explained that a scribal error changed "Zechariah" to "Jeremiah". However, this is highly unlikely given that the manuscript evidence highly favors a Jeremiah reading. Third, others have explained that Matthew is quoting allusions from Jeremiah that also borrow heavily from Zechariah and that both quotes are assigned to the more prominent prophet, Jeremiah. This is possible since in another

place there is a quote from Isaiah and Malachi and yet both quotes are attributed to Isaiah, the more prominent prophet. However, perhaps another explanation is more plausible. Fourth, some have pointed out that Jeremiah is the book that stands at the head of the prophets and therefore anything within the prophets could be attributed to Jeremiah. Therefore, a quote from Zechariah was within the section of Jeremiah. Walvoord said, "Probably the best explanation is that the third section of the Old Testament began with the book of Jeremiah and included all that followed. ...the reference is related to this section of the Old Testament rather than to the book of Jeremiah."<sup>13</sup> Probably view three or four is the best. But the important thing is that Matthew viewed this as the fulfillment of prophecy. Everything that was occurring was occurring in order to fulfill Messianic prophecy. The taking of the thirty pieces of silver, the price set by Judas, and the giving of the silver for the Potter's Field all fulfilled prophecy.

In summary, in 27:1-2 we have the third religious trial. This was required because the two religious trials before Annas and Caiaphas were held at night and illegal. In 27:1 they convened early in the morning in order to make the decision reached during the night legal. In 27:2, they bound Jesus, and led Him away to be led to Pilate, the governor of Judea who was in Jerusalem for the festivities. Having seen Jesus condemned 27:3-10 reports Judas' reaction. In 27:3 Judas had not expected them to condemn Him to death. When he saw this he regretted the decision he had made, though it was only regret and not repentance. He tried to absolve himself of responsibility for innocent blood by returning the thirty pieces of silver, but in 27:4 the chief priests and elders would not accept the money. In 27:5 he threw the money into the holy place and departed. He went away and hanged himself, his body eventually falling headlong and bursting open so that his intestines gushed out. In 27:6, the chief priests apparently trying to follow the law refused to take the money into the temple treasury. Instead in 27:7 they decided to put the money toward a community project that would benefit the poor. They purchased a field known as the Potter's Field as a burial plot for strangers. In 27:8, because of this the field was renamed the Field of Blood in memory of Judas whose blood money was used by the priests to purchase the field. In 27:9 this was to fulfill prophecy from the third section of the Hebrew Bible attributed to Jeremiah, and which comes more directly from Zechariah, namely that they would take the thirty pieces of silver, the price set by Judas for betrayal, and give it for the Potter's field. This is the hand of the Lord and He has done it. Even the enemies of God end up fulfilling the word of God.

In conclusion, why was this recorded in Matthew's gospel? How does it contribute to Matthew's argument? First, to show that even the betrayer himself admitted that Jesus was innocent. Toussaint said, "The remorse of Judas at seeing Christ led away to Pilate attests the holy character of Jesus."<sup>14</sup> This would be a strong apologetic argument for Jesus' Messiahship. Jewish believers could point to Judas' remorse and the field as evidence to Jewish unbelievers that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, even though Messiah's kingdom had not come. Second, to remind us of the bitter end of all who reject God. Occasionally in Scripture the horrible deaths of the enemies of God are described in painstaking detail; Jael's hammering a tent peg through the head of Sisera for oppressing Israel twenty years, Jezebel falling out a window and being eaten by dogs for killing the prophets of

God, Herod Agrippa II being eaten by worms by taking the glory of God, and, of course, Judas hanging himself and falling headlong, bursting open and his intestines falling out for betraying the Son of God. Sometimes we can get concerned about the prospering of the wicked. But these examples are laid down in history to remind us that in the end God's justice will prevail and they will suffer eternal torment in the lake of fire. Third, to show that all these events fulfilled prophecy, thus again serving as an apologetic for the Messiahship of Jesus. Toussaint said, "To the last bitter detail, the path of the Messiah's life was foretold by the prophets centuries before."<sup>15</sup> As it is written, so it will be. The word of God cannot be defeated.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 86.

<sup>2</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 464.

<sup>3</sup> Farrar cited by Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 465.

<sup>4</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), 260–261.

<sup>6</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 466.

<sup>7</sup> James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 481.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas O. Figart, *The King of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 510.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 27:5.

<sup>10</sup> Edersheim, cited by Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 466.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, 8:562.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Class Notes from the Book of Acts*, Tyndale Theological Seminary, Acts 1:18.

<sup>13</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 227.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 309.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 309.