

## LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS WITH THE TWELVE APOSTLES

### WHO ARE THE APOSTLES?

The word “apostle” means “one who is sent.” Some moments were shared by all the apostles. Other conversations and moments happened with specific Apostles. As we get to know the Twelve, we will be focusing more on their unique moments with Jesus.

### *Quick Glance with the Twelve Apostles Trading Cards*



Born: Possibly in Kerieth in Judea

Name(s): Judas is a form of Judah, which means “praise” or “God is praised” in Hebrew. Iscariot either means “man from Kerieth” or “member of the sicarii” (zealots). It could also draw from Aramaic, meaning either “red one” or “to deliver.”

Major Moments: Jesus Calls Judas the Devil; Anointing Jesus; Betrayal of Jesus Arranged; Named as Betrayer at Last Supper; Betrayed Jesus; Suicide

Death: c. 30-33 AD by hanging suicide in Jerusalem

See Him in Art: Often depicted with thirty pieces of silver

### BACKGROUND & CALLING

Not a lot is known about Judas's background. Scripture says that he was the son of Simon Iscariot. Other sources suggest that he was from the tribe of Reuben. When looking at the name “Iscariot,” some scholars say that means he was from Kerieth, which could be a region or a town in Judea. There are two towns in Judea that are known to have had that name.

Judas is traditionally considered to have been a zealot. Zealots were people who were devoted to their faith and horrified by the Roman occupation of Israel. Their grievance was about more than being a conquered people. They wanted to worship God freely without interference from the Romans. Depending on who was in charge, the Roman Empire would at times require worshipful sacrifices to the Emperor and/or to their gods. There were also times when they defiled the Temple and attacked the Jewish people.



Zealots believed in standing against idolatry no matter how powerful the forces supporting it were. Some of them worked to organize Judeans to bring grievances to the Romans (even up to the Emperor) so that they could worship in peace. Others advocated violence and revolt as the only way to secure their religious freedom. Judas was in the second camp. There was a group called the “sicarii” (literally, “dagger men”) who advocated violence against not only Rome, but also against Jews who supported Rome. They saw these people as traitors and wanted to establish consequences for those who were complicit in their own oppression. Some scholars suggest that the “sicarii” did not formally arise until the 40s or 50s. If that is the case,

Judas would have been a member of a precursor group. The Bible does not tell us how he came to be a follower of Jesus.

Because so little is known of Judas’s life before the Gospels, Christians have filled in the gaps over the centuries. There is a very elaborate legend about Judas that arose in Europe in the Middle Ages in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It says that before Judas was born, his mother Cyborea had a dream that her son would lead to the downfall of their people. Her husband told her to disregard the dream, saying that it came from an evil spirit. When her son Judas was born, she put him in a small chest and set him adrift on the sea. He washed up on an island where a childless queen adopted him to be her prince. She claimed him as her own son. But, before too long, the queen became pregnant. The children were raised together, but Judas’s evil nature showed itself more and more. He regularly beat and abused his brother. After a while, the queen had enough of Judas’s bad behavior. She told him the story of how she had found him. Judas was enraged and so killed his brother and fled to Jerusalem by ship. Because he was raised in a palace, he had the courtly manners to be a part of Pilate’s court.

Judas purportedly went to get fruit for Pilate from his father (not knowing that the man who owned the grove was his father). His father came upon Judas stealing fruit and Judas killed him, unwitnessed. Since his evil deed could not be proved, Pilate aided Judas in marrying his mother Cyborea and taking her house and property. Cyborea was distraught and Judas asked why. She told him her life story and Judas



recognized his own story within it, realizing that he had killed his father and married his mother. They were both stricken with grief and regret. Cyborea suggested that Judas ask Jesus to forgive him and that's how he became an apostle. Since this legend arose in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, we can be pretty sure that it is not a reliable account of Judas's life. Still, it is a response to a question that Christians have been asking for centuries: why did Judas betray Jesus?

## **LIFE & TIMES WITH JESUS**

Whenever the Apostles are listed in the Bible, Judas is always named last. In each of the three lists of apostles, Judas is named as the one who would betray Jesus (Mt 10:4, Mk 3:19, and Lk 6:16).

### **-JESUS CALLS JUDAS A DEVIL (JOHN 6:66-71)**

After Peter says that Jesus is the one who has the words of eternal life, Jesus tells the disciples, "Did not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." He said this in reference to Judas.

### **-ANOINTING OF JESUS (JOHN 12:1-8)**

The day before Palm Sunday, Jesus was at the house of Mary of Bethany. She poured expensive perfume over Jesus's head and feet. Judas challenges her and says that this is a waste of money. Jesus says, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Then the Gospel writer says that Judas was the one who kept the Apostles' money and that he was a thief.

#### Arranging the Betrayal of Jesus (Luke 22:1-6)

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. <sup>2</sup>The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.

<sup>3</sup>Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; <sup>4</sup>he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. <sup>5</sup>They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup>So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. This story is traditionally thought to have taken place on Wednesday of Holy Week (sometimes called "Spy Wednesday"). Broadly speaking, when you are a conquered people, you have three choices about how to interact with your conquerors. You can assimilate into their culture and support their regime; you can reject their culture and fight against their regime; or you can stand in the middle – trying to maintain your

cultural uniqueness and work with the regime to try to survive. Judas, as we know, chose the second option. Most of the leaders of the Jewish people chose the third option. They didn't want bloodshed and they didn't want to lose the tentative compromise with the Romans that allowed them to continue practicing their religion. But Passover is a festival that celebrates God's deliverance against the oppression of the Egyptians. It was also a pilgrimage festival which means that a lot of people from out of town would be visiting Jerusalem with great enthusiasm about the might and power of the God of Israel. In other words, this is a perfect storm kind of situation where someone could rally the people to rebellion with potentially disastrous consequences. The leaders were afraid of the people because they were afraid that their holiday exuberance would overcome their ability to think realistically about how fragile they really were in the hands of the Romans. In the Gospel of John, the high priest Caiaphas said, "It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50). Though we certainly disagree with their impulse to get Jesus out of the way, it is important to recognize that these leaders were trying to protect their people. Thinking about our own time, how do we balance the risks we take for our faith with practical concerns? Should a religious leader require followers to die for their cause? When religious leaders call for risk taking of any kind, what steps should they (we) take to ensure that we are following Christ's leading and not our leaders' egos?

2. Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11, and the Luke passage above all talk about Judas arranging to betray Jesus. In Matthew, Judas seeks the chief priests out and asks them, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" and they agree on thirty pieces of silver. In Mark, Judas sought out the chief priests to betray Jesus. They were greatly pleased and promised him money in return. In Mark, Judas wasn't looking for money or for any kind of compensation. Luke, though, tells a different story. It says that Satan entered Judas and that his betrayal is strictly at the direction of the devil. Other reasons have been offered for Judas's betrayal as well. Some have suggested that Judas had expected Jesus to overthrow the Roman Empire. When Jesus spoke of laying down his life for the people, Judas knew that he was not leading a rebellion. So, he betrayed Jesus because he was not the revolutionary that Judas was looking for. Some also say that Judas was fulfilling part of God's plan and that his action was, therefore, a faithful one. This interpretation is hard to swallow for many, particularly considering Matthew 26:24 where Jesus says, "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." What do you think? Why did Judas betray Jesus?

### **-LAST SUPPER (MATTHEW 26:17-25; JOHN 13:1-3)**

At the Last Supper, Jesus foretells his betrayal by indicating that the one who dipped their bread in the bowl is guilty (in Matthew) or by giving bread to Judas (in John). Jesus tells Judas to do what he must do quickly.

### **-JESUS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED (MATTHEW 26:47-56; MARK 14:43-50; LUKE 22:47-53; JOHN 18:1-11)**

Judas comes to the garden of Gethsemane because he knew that Jesus often went there with the disciples. Judas came with chief priests, elders, scribes, soldiers, and police who had lanterns, torches, and weapons. Judas kissed Jesus to indicate who they should arrest. One of the

disciples drew his sword and cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest. Jesus healed the slave and they all fled.

#### Judas's Suicide (Matthew 27:3-10)

<sup>3</sup> When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. <sup>4</sup> He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." <sup>5</sup> Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.

<sup>6</sup> But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." <sup>7</sup> After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. <sup>8</sup> For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

<sup>9</sup> Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, <sup>10</sup> and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. This story is only included in the Gospel of Matthew. Judas had betrayed Jesus Thursday night (or possibly early Friday when it was still dark) and he repents in the morning on Friday while Jesus is being brought before Pilate for questioning. At this point, Jesus is still alive and Judas tries to undo what he has done. Why do you think Judas changed his mind? What do you think he regretted – betraying his teacher and friend, being paid blood money to do what he must have known was wrong, condemning an innocent person, committing a sin against God? The scripture tells us that Judas repented and he tried to restore the blood money to begin making restitution. Do you think that God forgave Judas?
2. Judas and the priests are dealing with the sin articulated in Deuteronomy 27:25, "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood." Deuteronomy 19:16-21 also explains that the penalty for bearing false witness is that you receive the same fate as the victim you slandered. Judas looks to the priests to instruct him on how he can atone for this sin: perhaps counsel, a sin offering, or some other punishment. The priests give him nothing in his quest for atonement. The original hearers of this story would be shocked that the religious leaders abandoned Judas and did not help reconcile him to God by their shared faith. Further, after Judas kills himself, they clearly recognize that the money is tainted because they won't use it for the Temple treasury, but, rather, for a cemetery for

foreigners. What is our responsibility when we are confronted by sin – our own or someone else’s? If the chief priests’ response is our “what not to do,” what would you say that we should do in situations like this one where the wheels are already unstoppably in motion?

3. The last part of this passage is tricky. It’s a combination reference to Zechariah 11:7, 12-13 and Jeremiah 32:6-14. The Zechariah passage is a sign from God about worthless shepherds of the people who threaten the peoples’ unity and endanger the favor of God for the people. Zechariah becomes the shepherd of the people and asks for his wages – 30 shekels of silver. Verse 13 says, “Throw it into the treasury – this lordly price at which I was valued by them.” The word for “treasury” could also be read as “potter” since the Hebrew text had no vowels and both words could be read from the same consonants. The Jeremiah passage speaks of the LORD telling Jeremiah to purchase a field while Jerusalem was under siege from the Babylonians. This passage is more of a creative reading of scripture, melding multiple passages together. How do you think all of these stories connect? Why do you think the field is important?

## THE EARLY CHURCH

The book of Acts mentions that Judas Iscariot was replaced during a meeting of the other apostles.

Judas died around 30-33 AD by hanging suicide in the Gospel of Matthew. However, Judas’s death is described differently in the book of Acts. Acts says that Judas bought a field with his blood money, fell, split his belly open, and his guts fell out (Acts 1:18-20). Some have suggested this could be a description of someone being thrown down and killed by stoning.

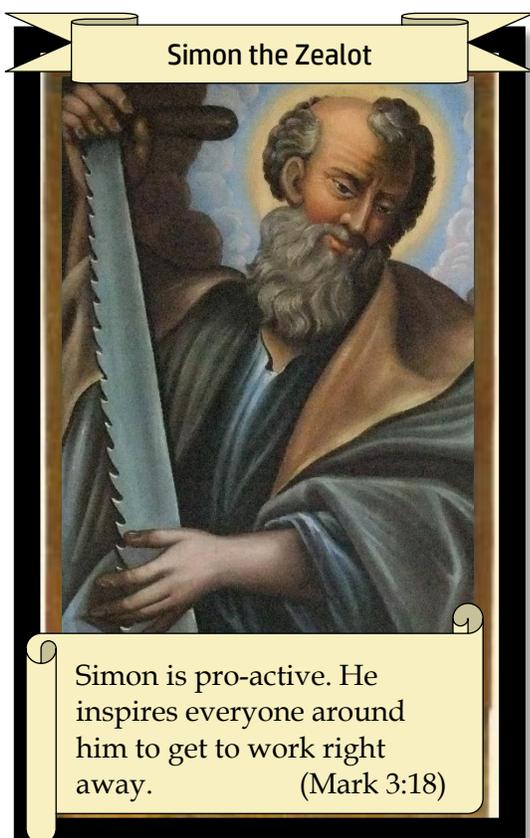
Augustine, the Church father, suggested that Judas hanged himself in the field, the rope snapped, and then his body opened in the fall. In any case, his remains are in Akeldama, near the Valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem.



## PRAYER

God of the zealous, we pray to you as people who walk with your Apostle Judas. It is uneasy for us to remember that you called even Judas to be so close to you. He was so passionate and certain about what he believed, about what was good and correct. He walked in your inner circle, heard your teachings, supported your ministry, and was still able to betray you. Remind us that our own knowledge, our own certainty are not the same as divine inspiration and holy truth. Challenge us to humility so that we might hear your word unfolding to us through the mystery and the uncertainty of the present moment. Give us patience and openness to be reformed by you again and again – as many times as it takes. Let our zeal be fiery, flexible, and fluid as we flow with your Holy Spirit. Amen

## Quick Glance with the Twelve Apostles Trading Cards



Born: in Judea

Name(s): Simon means “God hears” in Hebrew. The word translated “Zealot” in Aramaic (*qan’an*) could also mean “The Canaanite” or “The Cananaean.”

Major Moments: In lists

Death: c. 61 or 65 or 67 or 74 or 107 AD in Pella, Armenia or Beirut, Lebanon (crucifixion); Suanir, Persia (crucified or sawn in half) or Edessa, modern day Turkey (died peacefully) or Britain (crucifixion).

See Him in Art: He is usually shown with a boat, cross and saw, a book, a fish or two fish, a lance, being sawn in half lengthwise, or with an oar.

### BACKGROUND & CALLING

We don’t know a lot about Simon the Zealot. Some have suggested that he was from Cana or even that he was the man getting married at the wedding at Cana where Jesus changed water into wine. He was likely born in Judea. Some think that he was a part of the zealot movement like Judas had been, but that may not have been the case. In those days, zealot also had the positive meaning of being deeply committed to your religion.

The Bible does not give a call story for Simon the Zealot.

### LIFE & TIMES WITH JESUS

Simon the Zealot was present for the major events with Jesus, but there aren’t other events where he’s mentioned specifically. He is included in the lists of Apostles.

## THE EARLY CHURCH

The book of Acts mentions that Simon was there for the Ascension and for the meeting to find a replacement apostle for Judas Iscariot.

The Church has traditionally held that each of the Apostles had their own mission field. They came together and drew lots to find out where God wanted each of them to go. Here are a few traditions:

1. Simon and Jude preached the Gospel in Persia, Babylonia, and Armenia or Beirut, Lebanon. In this tradition, Simon and Jude were both martyred in Armenia or Lebanon in 65 AD by crucifixion.
2. Another tradition says that he went to the Middle East and Africa. There is an Ethiopian tradition that he was crucified in Samaria. Another tradition says he was crucified in Edessa in 67 AD. Yet another tradition says that he was sawn in half in Suanir, Persia in 107 AD.
3. There is a tradition that Simon was the second bishop of Jerusalem for 26 years. In one version of this tradition, he was said to be crucified in Jerusalem. In the other version, he fled to Pella in Perea (modern day Jordan).
4. Lastly, there is a tradition that he went to Britain at the beginning of Boadicean war in 60 AD and was crucified in 61 AD in Caistor (modern day Lincolnshire). Alternately. He preached in Mauritania on the west coast of Africa before travelling up to England and being crucified in 74 AD.

## PRAYER

God of the givers, we pray to you as people who walk with your Apostle Simon. You have called us to be doers of the word and not just hearers. You challenged us to give saying, “give, and it will be given to you...for the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Lk 6:38-39). You have given us everything, O Lord, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Teach us to give love and care, support and encouragement so that our lives may bring glory to your holy name. Amen.



## References

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