

Could Judas freely decide not to betray Jesus?

Q - I believe that although Judas was "a devil" and the son of perdition and was therefore intentionally selected by Christ to betray him, yet he was still a free moral agent and could have chosen not to. Even after the betrayal, the opportunity was still afforded to him to confess (to God, not the religious leaders) and repent. If, my thinking is correct, what scriptures can I use to support it?

A. - Semantically speaking, Judas was not a devil although what he did was 'of' the devil and Jesus called him a devil because he was, like the Pharisee's, those who were of their "father" the devil (John 8:44)! Satan had become his 'father' because Satan's agenda (Isaiah 14 & Ezekiel 28) is of course to be above God and to overthrow God and to have man to bow to him as he does to God (Matthew 4). Jesus was just consigning Judas and the religious leaders to what they already had chosen to be anyway (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Judas was indeed though, a 'free moral agent' who through his willingness to sin (1 John 3:4) and his own personal agenda in following along with Jesus, "became" the son of perdition. Anyone who is unsaved, even though they become 'religious' will apostasize, or become 'perditionous', meaning to fall back to destruction (Galatians 5:2-4; Hebrews 6 & 10). Judas' agenda was to go along for the ride with Jesus to get from this a place of honor in the kingdom, if Jesus indeed proved himself to be the Messiah (Luke 19:11).

Once Judas could not see the immediate entrance of the kingdom, his wicked heart no longer saw his advantages with Jesus. He began to hear intently what he had heard all along through the hatred of the religious leaders as they argued and disputed against the Lord, and he turned his attention to wherever he could best maximize what he could get for himself.

Lets look at Luke's account of Peter with the disciples after the Lord has ascended into heaven:

• Acts 1:15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, 16 "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. 17 "For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." 18 (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. 19 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.) 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.'

• The scripture never dismisses sin from any person simply because it is prophesied that they would do something in the future. Who of the disciples or anyone else of the Lord's day knew that Judas of Iscariot would be the one fulfilling this passage that Peter quotes by the direction of the Holy Spirit from Psalm 69:25 & 109:8? As Luke records this 'revelation' of Peter's words to them, I'm sure that it was quite an eye opener for them. In fact the disciples were baffled and concerned that one of them had indeed been identified by the Lord as a traitor.

Notice that Peter says that "it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem", meaning that from God's perspective, Who knows all things from beginning to end, Judas was the man that would fulfill this prophecy. From man's perspective, he had to wait until history unfolded to see that it was indeed the man named Judas Iscariot. This is similar as with Mary being chosen as the virgin spoken of in Isaiah 7:24. Who knew this woman would be that chosen vessel? Not even she herself knew until the Angel Gabriel revealed God's plan to her.

• Matthew 27:3-10 3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 6

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. 8 That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, 10 and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.

Notice that this passage in Matthew quoted from the NASB is quoted as saying that Judas "was seized with remorse", although, the KJV says that he 'repented' [Greek = *metamelomai* {met-am-el'-lom-ahee}, it is *acare* to one afterwards; it repents one, to repent one's self. This is different from *metanoeo* {met-an-o-eh'-o} which means "to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins"].

The NASB has more accurately captured the 'context' of the use of this word and therefore helps us to understand that this was not a change of heart to receive God's forgiveness (as you said), but it was simply an overwhelming feeling of remorse for having done something so evil. The devil used him because he made himself 'useful' to the devil because of what was already in his heart to do. Judas was remorse because he had participated in the shedding of innocent blood. He knew no real repentance or forgiveness but we certainly have to conclude that his being human cannot be taken out of the equation.

• Luke 22:3 And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. 4 And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. 5 They were glad and agreed to give him money. 6 So he consented, and began seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the crowd.

• John 6:70 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" 7 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him. "

Now, I believe in answering your question even though Jesus called Judas a devil, John reports to us that Jesus is indeed talking about a man. And that "this man", as Peter called him in Acts 1:18, was called this by the Lord because his heart was fully given over to do evil. Jesus was doing here what we have done ourselves when we have known someone who is completely full of wicked schemes that seek to destroy people for personal and selfish desires. Such were the Pharisees' & Sadducees', and such was Judas.

* John goes on in his gospel to show us the real nature of Judas as he continues to comment on him up until Judas' actual betrayal:

• John 12:4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" 6 Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. • John 13: 2 During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,

• Finally you will see much reference and commentary to this same behavior in John 18.

I hope I have helped here in some way. If you are looking for a passage that says exactly that 'the opportunity was afforded to him to repent', I don't believe that you will find anything that spells that out.

Judas represents the ultimate wickedness within man. His 'betrayal' of Jesus was that which was done with Jesus physically present on the earth. Yet all men who reject Him do so with Him loving them as he loved Judas along with the other disciples. The Lord will physically reign on the earth during the millennial kingdom.

Even then it will displayed how even though the Lord Himself is physically with us, loving us and ruling us with a rod of Iron, that men will still choose wickedness over righteousness because their hearts, not God's sovereignly forcing them, are darkened and concerned only of doing evil continuously (Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Psalm 14:1-3; Proverbs 6:18; Matt. 15:19; Romans 1:28-32).

Man sins because he chooses to. He also repents because he chooses to, in time and space (Romans 8:28-29; Ephesians 2:8-10). He cannot choose against the sin that condemns him to hell without being regenerated by the Lord's Spirit. Even then, after being regenerated, is sin always present with him in his 'members' (Romans 7).

He comes to repent because God brings him to that repentance (Matthew 11:27; John 6:65).

These passages I have given you, and the discussion I have shared with you expose our finite understanding of an infinite God. We are encompassed by the Sovereignty of God who has made divine decree's and actions from eternity, and we are overwhelmed at the understanding of human responsibility in the midst of God's sovereignty as we see His decree's unfold in time & space which is only a capsule of eternity. In other words, God see's things from eternity, we see them and act them out as they unfold in time.