



## Political Environment of the Incarnation; Spiritual Inversion of Judas Iscariot: Hatred of Rome, Crusader Arrogance, & Visions of A Messianic Coup d'État

### E. The Political Environment of the Incarnation:

It will be helpful to start with a brief summary of the politics of Israel during the time of the Incarnation.

Tenney, Merrill C. (ed.) *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).

- 1) **Sanhedrin:** The Greek word is **Συνέδριον / Sunedrion /** and means “sitting in council.” According to the Mishnah the membership numbered seventy-one, the seventy-first being the high priest.

Among them were the **chief priests: ἀρχιερείς / archiereis /**, who consisted of former high priests and priestly families, and the **scribes: γραμματεῖς / grammatis /**, professional scholars and experts in matters of the Mosaic Law and therefore “lawyers.” The chief priests were predominantly Sadducees.

- 2) **Sadducees:** (**Σαδδουκαῖοι / Saddoukaioi /**) These were Jewish aristocrats who in the first century held office by permission of Rome. Consequently, their policies were motivated by their vested interests. Preservation of the status quo motivated them to constantly appease Rome. This objective was realized by their ability to maintain a state of tranquility in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine. As a result the public excitement regarding Jesus was of grave concern to them.

They regarded themselves as proponents and guardians of the Mosaic Law. Sadducees rejected the position held by the Pharisees that the oral law could be traced back to Moses and thus was on equal footing with the Torah.

- 3) **Pharisees:** (**Φαρισαῖοι / Pharisaioi /**) These leaders were almost exclusively from the middle class and therefore had a large public following. The average Pharisee was not a theologian and thus had to rely on the biblical scholars of their party known as the **scribes**. The major characteristic of the Pharisees was the importance they attached to the oral law, known today as the Talmud. The Pharisees placed the oral law on equal footing with the Torah, or the Law of Moses, and this brought them into conflict with the Sadducees.

Their emphasis on the minutia of the oral law, even when its application was contrary to the written Law of Moses, is what prompted the Lord to pose the question in:

**Matthew 15:3 - “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God [ the Torah ] for the sake of your tradition [ the Talmud ]?”**

- 4) **Scribes:** (**γραμματεῖς / grammatis /**) These were scholars on the written law, the Torah, and the oral law, the Talmud. They are associated with the Sadducee and Pharisee parties. The scribes challenged Jesus principally on His disobedience to traditional practices contained in the oral law.
- 5) Another group of importance was the **elders: πρεσβύτεροι / presbuteroi /**, who were the officers in the synagogues and responsible for the government of the Jewish community.



- 6) **Zealots: (Ζηλωτής / zelotes /)** This was a Jewish political party that promoted a liberation movement in Palestine. Their members completely rejected Roman rule and believed that no one should rule Israel but God Himself. As a result their theology taught that strict compliance with the Mosaic Law would enable God to send Messiah, Who would subdue Roman rule, disband the Sanhedrin, and establish His millennial kingdom.

The Zealots were so driven by the alleged righteousness of their cause that they justified any means that they believed would contribute to their desired end. Consequently they often resorted to intrigue, violence, force, and deception in pursuit of their liberation of Palestine.

The Pharisees were as intensively patriotic as were the Zealots but had a different view about subservience to Roman rule. The Pharisees believed Roman control was the result of divine punishment whose intent was to bring about national repentance. On the other hand, the Zealots were in total opposition to Rome and believed that any subservience to the Empire prevented the coming of Messiah. As a result they refused to pay taxes, often harassed Roman officials, and refused to speak the Greek language.

- 1- When the Lord's ministry started, His working of miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead, and casting out demons resulted in a growing public following and its attendant controversy.
- 2- The Sadducees didn't like the idea of the public upheaval because it jeopardized the peace and tranquility of Jerusalem and Palestine. Civil disobedience brought about the unnecessary attention of the Roman authorities who expected the Sanhedrin to keep the Jewish population under control.
- 3- The Pharisees were opposed to the Lord's ministry because He was a threat to their control over public opinion in Palestine. Jesus' teachings along with his miracles and healings were winning over their constituency. Allowed to continue, Jesus would irreparably damage their reputation, discredit their theology, and undermine their power over the people. Consequently, their primary motivation was to catch him in violation of the oral traditions and in doing so demonstrate that he could not be the Messiah.
- 4- The scribes considered themselves to be the ultimate authorities on the Mosaic Law – the Torah, and the oral law – the Talmud. As the renowned theologians of the day, the scribes were desirous to test the Lord on both accounts. They are often found in concert with the Pharisees in the Gospel accounts that document their debates with Jesus. Pharisees in general were not scholars or experts on the Torah or the Talmud but the scribes were, thus they were always on hand to advise the Pharisees in their deliberations with the Lord.
- 5- Any interest that these groups had in the Lord was for the purpose of information gathering or attempts to discredit His claim of Messiahship, His message, and His ministry.

#### F. **The Spiritual Inversion of Judas Iscariot:**

- 1- Judas Iscariot was possibly one of the earliest disciples. He was allegedly drawn to the Lord's ministry in Galilee where, according to an extra-biblical account in the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, he was among those called to the rank of permanent disciple in Matthew 4:18-22 along with Peter, Andrew, James, and John.



- 2- There is not enough information, nonbiblical or biblical, to establish if Judas was a Pharisee or a Zealot but his behavior during the Lord's public ministry seems to indicate the latter.
- 3- Whatever his political persuasion, we get a feel for the personality of Judas from an article about him by:

Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Apostles of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 101-102:

As discipleship had to precede apostleship, there must have been qualities and capacities in Judas which Jesus recognized. When Judas joined Jesus it was more as a patriot or political leader than as a personal friend, and his mind interpreted the words and deeds of Christ through the medium of his own anticipation.

Strong-willed, as well as conceited, Judas could not brook the idea of being mistaken in his first opinion of the new King. The other disciples had found a Teacher who awoke admiration and love, but with Judas it was different. Political ambition, love of place and power, prospect of the Kingdom being proclaimed were his main inducements in joining those who were following the King.

The love of money had been in his heart from earlier days, and he was thus a double-minded man. Had he followed the Master fully he might have had the noblest of lives, and the most blessed of destinies, but he took his sin with him into the service of Christ until ultimately his habitation became desolate, and his bishopric [his promotion to the rank of permanent apostle] was taken by another.

- 4- We learn a great deal about Judas from the fact that the Lord appointed him treasurer of His group of disciples. As the Lord's ministry grew during the Incarnation there were those who contributed logistical necessities to the disciples including money.

**Luke 8:1** - And it came about soon afterwards, that He began going about from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with Him,

**v. 2** - and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,

**v. 3** - and Joanna the wife of Chuza / COO-za /, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

- 5- The word "contributing" is the imperfect active imperative of the verb:

**διακονέω / diakonew /** - "to give help and support to someone."

imperf.: Progressive of duration; contemplates the process as having gone on in past time up to the time denoted by the context but without any necessary inference as to whether or not the process has been completed.

active: The women in context produce the action of making consistent contributions to the Lord's treasury.

indic.: This is a statement of historical fact.

- 6- This "help and support" can consist of property, possessions, or private means which includes money. That these ladies were following the Lord as He traveled does not imply material goods but rather financial support.



- 7- The one to whom these grace gifts were entrusted was Judas Iscariot. Why Judas? Since the Lord assigned to him the treasury it is obvious that He perceived in Judas an aptitude for finance. It is also obvious that the other eleven disciples trusted Judas with the funds because up until the very end they never questioned his disbursement of them.
- 8- However, we have already learned from John 12:1-6 that Judas had a lust for money. As the period of the Incarnation progressed that lust developed into monetary reversionism.
- 9- Whether Judas was a Pharisee or a Zealot cannot be determined with certainty but it is apparent that as the Incarnation progresses his displeasure with the Lord is fed by the fact that Jesus never challenges the Roman establishment.
- 10- The fact that Judas accepted the position of treasurer implies that he had an affinity for the position. When it becomes apparent that Jesus does not intend to set up the kingdom immediately Judas's disenchantment increases.
- 11- This seems to indicate that he had his mind set on the Secretary of Treasury for Client Nation Israel in the millennial kingdom.
- 12- We find that Judas is onboard and supportive of the Lord as Messiah at the beginning of His public ministry. In the early days, A.D. 26, the message was "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- 13- This was the message that Judas as a Zealot would have supported. In his mind it meant an end to Roman rule, the beginning of the Messianic kingdom, and he himself as a major player in the new administration.
- 14- The Lord established the headquarters for His public ministry at Capernaum, a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee on a major trade route between the Mediterranean Sea and Damascus. It was here in Galilee that the Lord performed His first miracles and Judas was on hand to witness them as a disciple:

**Matthew 4:23** - Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

**v. 24** - And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics, and He healed them.

**v. 25** - And great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

- 15- It was out from this these "multitudes" that disciples of Jesus emerged to hear His teaching. His first major address is found in Matthew 5-7 and is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. The site of the speech is traditionally located about 2 miles west of Capernaum.
- 16- This sermon was Jesus' formal announcement of the policies He would establish in His kingdom. Judas would have interpreted this speech as a logical first step in establishing His millennial government.
- 17- Also encouraging to Judas was the Lord's opening volley against the scribes and Pharisees in:

**Matthew 5:19** - "Whoever annuls one of the least of the commandments, and so teaches others shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.



**v. 20** - "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

- 18- Following the sermon on the mount the Lord returned to Capernaum, took a boat trip to Gergesa /GUR-ge-sa / and back, and then traveled among all the cities in the area of the Sea of Galilee.
- 19- Because of the tremendous response by the multitudes the Lord determined that He could not minister to all the people by Himself.

**Matthew 9:36** - And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.

**v. 37** - Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

**v. 38** - "Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."