

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot

A play by Stephen Adly Guirgis

Directed by David Koté

Actor Packet by Gabrielle Ghaderi, Dramaturg

gghaderi@iwu.edu



Table of Contents

About the Playwright: Stephen Adly Guirgis	3
Production History	3
Who's Judas Anyway?	4
What Do We Know?	4
The Betrayal of Jesus	4
Jesus's Trial and Persecution	4
The Death of Judas	5
The Unforgivable Sin	5
Judas vs. Peter: The Two Betrayers	6
About Purgatory	6
About Judea	7
Important Themes	8
Despair	8
Questioning the Existence of an All-Powerful and Loving God	8
Free Will and Salvation	9
Religious Symbolism	9
The Kiss	9
The Number Three	9
Terms and Other Things to Know	10
Bibliography	14

About the Playwright: Stephen Adly Guirgis



- He is an American playwright, screenwriter, director and actor
- His plays have been produced on five continents and throughout the US
- Born to an Irish Catholic mother and an Egyptian father
- Stephen was raised Catholic¹ and attended Corpus Christi School in New York, a Roman Catholic K-8 school
 - As a kid, the cautionary tale of the condemnation of Judas Iscariot was both frightening and contradictory to the idea of an all-loving and all-merciful God he was taught and read about in school. This troubling contradiction followed him into his adult life and is what later influenced the writing of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*.

Production History

- Ended a sold out run at the Public Theater in New York City in April 2005
- Co-produced by the LAByrinth Theater Company and the Public Theater
- Directed by Philip Seymour Hoffman

¹ Due to his Catholic upbringing, the story of *Judas* is told within those parameters. Therefore, it only makes sense to explore the biblical accounts of the play's characters using a Catholic bible. I recommend using the New American Bible (NAB) or the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE). NAB is the version used in Catholic masses and NABRE is an approved update of the NAB. The NAB is the version I drew from and cited in this packet. Both versions are available online for free. Here is a link to the online version of the NAB: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM

Who's Judas Anyway?

What Do We Know?

The answer, put simply, is very little. In fact, there are really only three main facts about Judas from the Bible:

1. Jesus recruited him to be one of his followers
2. Judas betrayed Jesus and handed him over to the authorities
3. After turning Jesus in, Judas hanged himself

Everything else regarding the character of Judas in pop culture or even in Christian tradition is, for the most part, all speculative.

The Betrayal of Jesus

Judas's betrayal of Jesus is found in all four Gospels with minor differences. The general storyline is as follows:

In the days before the Passover and the Last Supper, Judas Iscariot approaches the chief priest asking "what are you willing to give me if I hand him over?" (Matthew 26:15). They paid him thirty pieces of silver.

At the Last Supper, which took place on the evening of the first day of Passover, Jesus predicts to his disciples that "one of you will betray me" (Matthew 26:21). Later that evening, Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray while the disciples keep watch. Judas leads a crowd of chief priests and elders to the garden and tells them "The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him" (Matthew 26:48). Judas then enters the garden and greets Jesus with a kiss on the cheek. They then arrest Jesus.

Gospel accounts of the Last Supper and the Betrayal of Jesus:

- Matthew 26:14-16, 20-25, 47-56
- Mark 14:10-11, 17-21, 43-52
- Luke 22:1-6, 21-23, 47-53
- John 13: 21-30, 18:1-14

Jesus's Trial and Persecution

After being arrested, Jesus is taken before the high priest Caiaphas, where he is found guilty of blasphemy for saying he is the "Son of Man." The High Priest of the Sanhedrin is a religious leader and therefore does not technically have the power to convict someone. Therefore, after finding Jesus guilty of blasphemy, the Sanhedrin hands him over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, who does hold political power. This trial finds Jesus guilty of treason for his claims of being a king. It is this conviction that results in his crucifixion.

Gospel accounts of Jesus before the Sanhedrin and Pilate:

- Matthew 26:57-68, 27:11-26
- Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-15
- Luke 22:66-71, 23:1-25
- John 18:19-24, 28-40

The Death of Judas

After seeing Jesus condemned, Judas deeply regrets his betrayal. He tries to return the thirty pieces of silver to the high priests saying he sinned by betraying an innocent man. Judas throws the money into the Temple then goes to hang himself.

Death of Judas:

- Matthew 27:3-10

The Unforgivable Sin

Despite God being an all-loving and all-merciful God, according to the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, there is one sin which is eternal and unforgivable: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-29, Matthew 12:31-32, Luke 12:10).

According to the Douay Catechism of 1649, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is divided into six different offenses and are as follows:

Six blasphemies against the Holy Spirit:

1. Despair of salvation
2. Presumption of God's mercy
3. To impugn the known truth
4. Envy at another's spiritual good
5. Obstinacy in sin
6. Final impenitence

The first unforgivable sin, the sin of despair, is most noteworthy in the context of *Judas* as it is the sin that Judas Iscariot succumbed to, which led to the subsequent belief in Catholic and Christian tradition regarding his condemnation to hell. Despair of salvation is "a diffidence in the mercies and power of God as also, in the merits of Jesus Christ, as if they were not of force enough to save us" (Douay Catechism 103). In other words, it is the belief that God is not powerful enough, nor is he merciful enough, to forgive even our worst sins.

Therefore, according to Catholic belief, Judas's act of betrayal was not the reason for his damnation. It was the following denial that God could possibly forgive his sinful act, which ultimately led to his suicide.

Judas vs. Peter: The Two Betrayers

This despair of salvation is what differentiates Judas and Peter. Peter also betrayed Jesus by denying that he knew Jesus three times on the night of his arrest (see Mark 14:66-72). Despite betraying Jesus like Judas did, Peter is celebrated as the leader of the Catholic Church and the one who guards Heaven's Gates.

How is it that two disciples who both betrayed Jesus were met with polar opposite fates? It all relates back to the unforgivable sin of despair. Both were ashamed of their actions, but whereas Judas didn't believe God could forgive him for his wrongdoings, Peter did, thus saving him from the same eternal damnation.

Further reading:

<https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/25/books/the-deadly-sins-despair-the-one-unforgivable-sin.html>

About Purgatory

Purgatory as the setting for the courtroom is notable when recognizing the role purgatory has in repentance and forgiveness of sin.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, purgatory is defined as a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030). It is important to note that "this final purification of the elect...is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (CCC 1031).

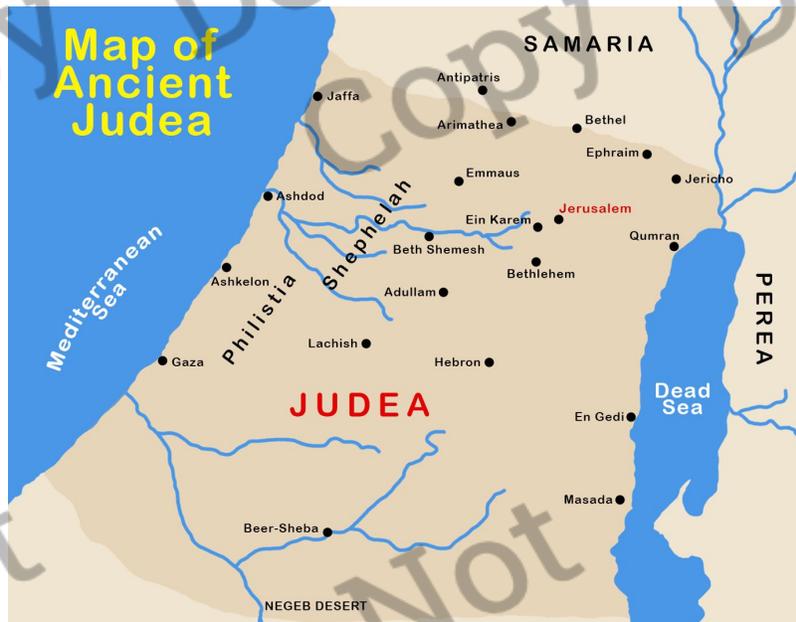
Purgatory is a liminal space of repentance for sins committed but not absolved. Though purgatory involves suffering, the result is purification of the soul now worthy for entrance into Heaven.

Quotes on Purgatory:

"Between heaven and hell—there is another place. This place: Hope. Hope—is located right over here in downtown Purgatory" (8)

"Now Purgatory, contrary to popular belief, has plumbing, and bodegas, and they even got a movie theater and a little park that people can walk their dogs at. Hope—well, it ain't got none a that, and it definitely don't smell good" (8)

About Judea



Important facts:

- During the time of Jesus, Judea was under Roman rule
- Romans instituted high taxes and were unpopular with the majority of the Jewish people
 - Tax collectors were incredibly unpopular and considered thieves and traitors, especially when the tax collectors were also Jewish, since they were collecting taxes from Judeans for the Roman empire
 - Most people avoided and shunned tax collectors, such as Matthew Levi, which is why Jesus approaching him and calling him to be a disciple was seen as radical and taboo
- Political unrest led to the search for a political Messiah to free them from Roman oppression
 - Zealots believed Jesus to be this political Messiah
- Procurators such as Pontius Pilate were sent by the Roman Emperor to govern Judea and maintain peace and order
 - Procurators reported directly to the Roman Emperor and had the ability to sentence people to death
- Members of the Sanhedrin were religious authorities in charge of the Temple and maintaining the Sacred Laws
 - High priests of the Sanhedrin, such as Caiaphas, were aristocrats and also worked with the Roman empire for their own benefit

Further Reading:

<https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/jesus.html>

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/jews.html>

<http://stpaulk-8.org/stpaul/media/documents/sheumaker/2roman-empire-at-the-time-of-jesuskey.pdf>

<https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/tax-collector-faq.htm>

Important Themes

Despair

Despair is a central theme in *Judas*. Succumbing to despair is what condemned Judas to hell, whereas overcoming despair is what led to the veneration of St. Peter and Mother Teresa.

Quotes on despair:

- “Judas Iscariot committed the one unforgiveable sin...The sin of despair!” (12)
- “You may not know this, but I at one time in my life suffered a great spiritual darkness” (27)
- ““Despair...is the ultimate development of a pride so great and so stiff-necked that it selects the absolute misery of damnation rather than accept happiness from the hands of God and thereby acknowledge that He is above us and that we are not capable of fulfilling our destiny by ourselves” (27)
- “Judas, he succumb to despair. The music of God’s love and Grace kept playing, but he, he made himself hard of hearing...Judas, he threw his earphones away—and dat is very sad, but dat is what he chose and dat is what happened” (27)
- “Your client succumbed to Despair” (69)
- “And if human despair is so powerful as to render God powerless over it, then, what does that say about God?!” (69)

Questioning the Existence of an All-Powerful and Loving God

The ability for Judas to succumb to despair seems to conflict with the idea that God is all-powerful. If God were all-powerful, then God would have the ability to prevent Judas from falling into despair or at least be forgiving of Judas.

Quotes on the existence of an all-powerful and loving God:

- “The synthesis of Love and justice can produce only Mercy and Forgiveness, Your Honor! If a just God sits in Heaven, it can fall no other way!” (12)

- “I remembered how Jesus had said that God has the biggest love for the least of his creatures—and Judas was the leastest creature I had ever seen.” (14)
- “And if human despair is so powerful as to render God powerless over it, then, what does that say about God?! It says one of two things, Mister Satan: Either God’s not All-Powerful and therefore useless—or—God’s Love is Conditional, which renders that Love false and Unworthy!” (69)

Free Will and Salvation

Free Will is explored as a way to reason with the conflicting ideas of the unforgivable sin and God’s mercy. Though God is all-merciful, one must be open to receiving that mercy. We see that Judas is in fact not open to such love in the final encounter between him and Jesus.

Quotes on free will and salvation:

- “The music of God’s love and Grace kept playing, but he, he made himself hard of hearing” (27)
- “One must participate in one’s own salvation. In order to hear, one must be willing to listen. When you turn off God, you are saying, “I know better than you.” No good, boy. No good” (27)
- “But isn’t Judas responsible because he did what he did of his own free will?” (44)

Religious Symbolism

The Kiss

A kiss on the cheek is a common form of greeting or symbol of friendship seen throughout the Bible, but it is also a symbol and reminder of Judas’s betrayal.

Related Quotes:

- “*Jesus, carrying a bucket, has crossed to the woman. He kisses her cheek. She does not notice. They vanish*” (8)
- “*Matthias kisses Judas on the cheek, exits*” (22)

The Number Three

The number three is an extremely significant number in Christianity with over 467 references made to it in the Bible. In the Passion story, the number three, and multiples of three, appears numerous times: Judas betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, Peter denies Jesus three times, Jesus lays in the tomb for three days before his resurrection, and so on. The number three also appears throughout the play.

Related Quotes:

- “I sat with Judas Iscariot for three days” (14)
- “And what if you let him in, Cunningham, and you sat down with The Man for just, say, three minutes?” (16)
- “So consider this: your friend Judas? He had Jesus for three years” (17)
- “The guy wasn’t wandering around in the desert for three years with Jesus...cuz he was looking to get rich” (56)
- “And you were beautiful there. And you left there three inches taller” (72)
- “Three years into our marriage, I took a job teaching at the state college” (76)

Further reading:

<https://occatholic.com/the-power-of-three/>

Terms and Other Things to Know

Prologue

“Domine Adjuva Incredulitatem Meam” (7) Translates to “Lord, help my unbelief”

Potter’s field (7) A burial place for paupers and strangers. Originates from Matthew 27:7, which refers to the area of land near Jerusalem bought for Judas’s burial with the money given to him for betraying Jesus.

Field of Blood (7) see Matthew 27:6-8. Refers to potter’s field bought with blood money, the money given to Judas for betraying Jesus

Acrid (7) having an irritatingly strong and unpleasant taste or smell

“The world tells me...that my son is in hell” (8) reference to belief that Judas was condemned to hell

Act One

Attila the Hun (11) ruler of the Huns from 434-453. Considered to be one of the most famous and brutal rulers of the ancient world.

Garden of Gethsemane (12) [Geth-SEMM-ah-nee] See Mark 14:32-52. Garden outside of Jerusalem and location of the agony and arrest of Jesus

“Peter took out his sword...of the authority!” (12) See John 18:10-11.

Beatitudes (12) See Matthew 5:3-12. Eight blessings that are recounted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Word beatitude comes from Latin word beatus, meaning “happy” and “blessed”

Kierkegaard (12) 19th century Danish philosopher. Says God can forgive the unforgivable, but he cannot force anyone to accept it.

Hegel (12) 19th century German philosopher

Mick (13) an offensive term for an Irishman

Father of the Church (13) ancient and influential Christian theologians and writers from the 2nd-7th century who are recognized by the Church for establishing the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of Christianity

Saint Augustine (13) St. Augustine of Hippo, 4th century Father of the Church and son of St. Monica

“I nagged God’s ass to save him” (13) St. Monica is known for her persistent prayers to God for her son, Augustine. As a young adult, Augustine was promiscuous and wayward and it is believed that Monica’s unrelenting prayers are what brought Augustine back to the faith

“Nagged my ass day and night for forty days” (14) In the Bible, the number 40 is used to symbolize important periods of time. For example, Moses was atop Mt. Sinai for 40 days and nights to receive the Mosaic law (Exodus 34:28). Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:2).

Foxhole (17) hole in the ground used by troops as a shelter against enemy fire or as a firing point

Allatoona (18) reference to Civil War Battle of Allatoona. One of the Civil War’s shortest yet bloodiest battles and ended in Union victory.

“I believe, because...it is impossible!” (19) reference to *credo quia absurdum*, often misattributed to early Christian author Tertullian. Many have taken this paradox as commentary on the irrationality of the Christian faith.

Beatified (24) the step before sainthood. Beatification is a recognition from the Catholic Church of a dead person’s entrance into Heaven and the ability to intercede for those who pray in his or her name.

“They got a basilica named after me in Rome” (24) refers to St. Peter’s Basilica where the Pope resides

“One day, Drew didn’t turn up...a fisher of men” (25) See Matthew 4:18-22. Refers to biblical call of the first disciples: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew.

“I, at one time in my life, suffered a great spiritual darkness” (27) in her book *Come Be My Light*, Mother Teresa revealed that for the last 50 years of her life she struggled with a deep sense of God’s absence and abandonment.

Thomas Merton (27) An American Trappist monk, theologian, and writer. This quote on despair comes from his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Zealot (30) a member of a fanatical Jewish sect in Judea that sought to rebel against the Roman domination of Palestine

Gentiles (30) any person who is not Jewish

Torah (30) the law of God as revealed to Moses in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures

“Disturbance at the Temple” (31) see Mark 11:15-19

Lou (34) short for Lucifer

“Never ‘entered into him’” (35) see Luke 22:3

Bathsheba's Bar and Grill (36) Bathsheba is the woman whom King David lusted over after seeing her bathe. He later had an extramarital affair with her (2 Samuel 11)

Maitre d' (36) [MATE-ra-DEE] person in a restaurant who oversees waiting staff and ensures guests are satisfied

Cappadocia (36) [kappa-DOK-kia] or [kappa-DOH-shia] Historical region that lies in central Anatolia, the heartland of modern day Turkey

Pariah (36) [pur-AYE-uh] a member of a low caste of southern India

Nubian (37) from region of Nubia along Nile river between southern Egypt and central Sudan

Eunuch (38) [YOO-nuhk] a man who has been castrated to serve certain social functions such as guards and servants in harems

Mary Chapin Carpenter (38) an American singer-songwriter

Job (39) [JOB] biblical figure who led a prosperous life and trusted completely in God. Satan believed that Job was faithful to God only because he had a good life. With God's permission, Satan tested Job by taking away the things that meant most to him (he lost his children, his health, and his material belongings). Despite his suffering, Job remained faithful and trustworthy towards God. Job's story explores God's relationship with human suffering and remaining faithful.

Act Two

"Sic Deus Dilexit Mundum" (41) translates to "God So Loved The World"

Fraulein (42) [fr-OY-line] a title or form of address for an unmarried German-speaking woman

Psychoanalysis (43) aims to treat mental disorders by investigating the interaction of the conscious and unconscious mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind with techniques such as dream interpretation and free association

Don Ho (46) an American traditional pop musician, singer, and entertainer

Hi-jinx (47) boisterous or rambunctious carryings-on

Sanhedrin (47) [san-HEE-drin] the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews during Jesus's time. Headed by a High Priest who had religious, civil, and criminal jurisdictions. Great Sanhedrin had 71 members and the Lesser Sanhedrin had 23

King Herod (50) Roman appointed King of Judea from 37-4 BCE.

Pulchritudinous (50) [puhl-kri-TOOD-n-uhs] beautiful

Salacious (50) [suh-LEY-shuhs] having or conveying undue or inappropriate interest in sexual matters

"Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah" (51) refers to the book of Isaiah which contains Messianic prophecies (see Is 7:14, 8:14, 11:12, 53:5)

Deuteronomy (51) [doo-tuh-RON-uh-mee] fifth book of the Old Testament and the Torah. Reiterates the laws given by God in the previous books of the Torah

Baptist (51) refers to St. John the Baptist, Jesus's cousin, who was also outspoken about the coming of God's kingdom and prophesied the coming of the Messiah.

Saint Patrick's Cathedral (52) Roman Catholic Cathedral in New York City

Sacrosanct (54) [SAK-roh-saynct] regarded as too important or valuable to be interfered with
“The guy who said I wouldn't believe” (55) see John 20:24-29

“Quincy” (55) medical examiner in an American mystery medical drama TV series of the same name

Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes (55) See Mt 14:13-21. Miracle where Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish

Centurion (56) [sen-TYOOOR-ee-uhn] the commander of a century in the ancient Roman army

Semite (57) a member of a group of people who spoke a Semitic language, including, in particular, the Jews and Arabs

Ducat (58) [DUHK-uh] gold or silver coin used as a trade coin in Europe from late Middle Ages until as late as the 20th century

Pax Romana (59) initiated during the reign of Augustus. It was a period of relative peace and cultural achievement in the Roman Empire

Philo of Alexandria (59) Jewish thinker from the first half of the first century BCE

“Washed your hands” (60) see Matthew 27:24. By Pilate washing his hands, he denied any responsibility for Jesus's execution

“Ninth circle of hell” (61) last and most damning circle of hell in Dante's *Inferno*. The Ninth circle is then divided into 4 Rounds, each named after an individual who personifies the sin, with the fourth round being the most severe. The 4th round is named Judecca after Judas Iscariot.

Cantankerous (61) [kan-TANG-ker-uhs] bad tempered

“Crowds of cheering supporters” (61) see Luke 19:28-40

Darvon (65) an opioid

Tarry (66) stay longer than intended; delay leaving a place

Fallujah (70) city in the Iraqi province of Al Anbar. In 2004, was the site of the Second Battle of Fallujah, the highest point of conflict in the Iraq War

Darfur (70) region in Sudan. Location of the first genocide of the 21st century, beginning in 2003 and has resulted in the deaths of 80,000-500,000 Darfuri people as well as people from the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa tribes

Ellen Barkin (71) American actress and producer

Ron Perelman (71) American banker and billionaire

Donald Rumsfeld (71) Republican Secretary of Defense under Gerald Ford and George W. Bush

Mohammed Atta (71) one of the hijackers on 9/11

“Ol' Caanan again” (72) See John 2:1-12. refers to Jesus's first miracle: turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana

Paul of Tarsus (72) formerly Saul, a man who persecuted followers of Christ. Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. Saul became Paul and converted to be a follower of Christ

Lazarus (72) raised from the dead after being entombed for four days

W.H. Auden (76) English-American poet

Do Not
Copy

Bibliography

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2N.HTM

Götz, Ignacio L. *Faith, Humor, and Paradox*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002.

Mark, Joshua J. "Attila the Hun." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 19 Mar. 2018, www.ancient.eu/Attila_the_Hun/.

Martin, James. *A Jesuit Off-Broadway*. Loyola Press, 2007.

McDonald, William. "Søren Kierkegaard." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017, plato.stanford.edu/entries/kierkegaard/#Reli.

Menezes, Wade. "The Significance of '40' in Sacred Scripture." *The Fathers of Mercy*, 4 Mar. 2019, fathersofmercy.com/the-significance-of-40-in-scripture/.

New American Bible. Saint Mary's Press, 2005.

Oxford University Press, 2019. www.lexico.com

"The Roman Empire: in the First Century. The Roman Empire. Jesus." *PBS*.

www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/jesus.html.

Tuberville, Henry. *The Douay Catechism of 1649*.

<https://www.remnantnewspaper.com/The%20Douay%20Catechism%20of%201649.pdf>

Vogt, Brandon. "How St. Monica Can Help Your Child Return to the Church." *Word on Fire*, 26 Aug. 2016,

www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/how-st-monica-can-help-your-child-return-to-the-church/21869/.

"9 Circles of Hell (Dante's Inferno)." *9 Circles of Hell (Dante's Inferno) - History Lists*, historylists.org/art/9-circles-of-hell-dantes-inferno.html.