

HISTORY'S MOST
SPECTACULAR SIN

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History's Most Spectacular Sin

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Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

LUKE 22:3-6

The most spectacular sin that has ever been committed in the history of the world is the brutal murder of Jesus Christ, the morally perfect, infinitely worthy, divine Son of God. And probably the most despicable act in the process of this murder was the betrayal of Jesus by one of his closest friends, Judas Iscariot.

Judas was one of the twelve apostles whom Jesus had personally chosen and who had been with Jesus during his entire public ministry. He had been entrusted with the moneybag for the whole group (John 13:29). He was close enough to Jesus at the Last Supper to be dipping bread with him in the same cup (Mark 14:20).

“Satan Entered into Judas”

On the night of the Last Supper, Luke tells us in Luke 22:3–6 that “Satan entered into Judas. . . . He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray [Jesus] to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.” Later he led the authorities to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Luke 22:47–48). With that, Jesus’ death was sealed.

When Luke tells us in verse 3 that “Satan entered into Judas,” several questions come to our minds. One is whether Satan simply mastered a good Judas or whether Judas was already walking sinfully in step with Satan, and Satan simply decided that now was the time. Another question is why Satan would do this, since the death and resurrection of Jesus would result in Satan’s final defeat, and there is good reason to think that Satan knew that. And the third and most important question is: Where was God when this happened? What was his role or non-role in the most spectacular sin that ever was? Let’s take these questions one at a time.

Satan’s Power in Judas’ Sinful Passions

When it says in Luke 22:3 that “Satan entered into Judas,” how are we to think about the will of Judas and the power of Satan? Judas was not an innocent bystander when Satan entered into him. The apostle John tells us in John 12:6 that he was a “thief.” When Judas complained that Mary had wasted money in anointing Jesus, John comments, “He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

If that sounds incredible, just think of the scandalous behavior of so-called Christian leaders today who use ministry gifts to buy \$40,000 worth of clothes at one store in a year, and send their kids on a \$30,000 trip to the Bahamas, and drive a white Lexus and a red

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Mercedes. As Judas sat beside Jesus with his pious, religious face and went out and cast out demons in Jesus' name, he was not a righteous lover of Jesus. He loved money. He loved the power and pleasures that money could buy.

Paul tells us how that works together with Satan's power. Listen to Ephesians 2:1–3: "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air [*notice the connection: dead in sins, following Satan*], the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Dead in our sins, walking in the passions of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of body and mind, and *therefore* following the prince of the power of the air.

Satan does not take innocent people captive. There are no innocent people. Satan has power where sinful passions hold sway. Judas was a lover of money, and he covered it with a phony, external relationship with Jesus. And then he sold him for thirty pieces of silver. How many of his ilk are still around today! Don't be one. And don't be duped by one.

Satan's Role in His Own Destruction

The second question is why Satan would lead Judas to betray Jesus. Didn't he know that the death and resur-

rection of Jesus would result in his final defeat (Col. 2:13–15; Rev. 12:11)? There is good reason to think Satan knew that.

When Jesus began his ministry on the way to the cross, Satan tried to turn him away from the path of suffering and sacrifice. In the wilderness, he tempted him to turn stones into bread and jump off the temple and get the rulership of the world by worshiping him (Matt. 4:1–11). The point of all these temptations is: “Don’t walk the path of suffering and sacrifice and death. Use your power to escape suffering. If you’re the Son of God, show your right to reign. And I can help you do it. Whatever you do, don’t go to the cross.”

And remember the time when Jesus predicted he would suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and be killed, and Peter rebuked him and said, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt. 16:22). In other words, I will never let you be killed like that.

Jesus did not commend Peter. He said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matt. 16:23). Hindering Jesus from going to the cross was the work of Satan. Satan did not want Jesus crucified. It would be his undoing.

But here he is in Luke 22:3 entering into Judas and leading him to betray the Lord and bring him to the cross. Why the about-face? Why try to divert him

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from the cross and then take the initiative to bring him to the cross? We are not told. Here is my effort at an answer.

Satan saw that his efforts to divert Jesus from the cross had failed. Time after time Jesus kept the course. His face was set like flint to die (Luke 9:51, 53), and Satan concluded that there was no stopping him. Therefore, he resolved that if he couldn't stop it, he would at least make it as ugly and painful and as heartbreaking as possible. Not just death, but death by betrayal. Death by abandonment. Death by denial (Luke 22:31–34). Death by torture. If he could not stop it, he would drag others into it and do as much damage as he could. It was a spectacular sequence of sins that brought Jesus to the cross.

God's Role in the Murder of His Son

Which brings us now to the third and final question—the most important one: Where was God when this happened? Or more precisely: What was God's role or non-role in the most spectacular sin that ever happened—the murder of Jesus Christ?

To answer a question like that we should put our hands on our mouths and silence our philosophical speculations. Our opinions don't count here. All that counts is what God himself has shown us in his word. And the first thing he shows us is that the details surrounding the death of Jesus were prophesied in God's word hundreds of years before they happened.

John Piper

The Scriptures show that evil men would reject Jesus when he came. Matthew 21:42: “Jesus said to them [quoting Psalm 118:22], ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”’”

The Scriptures showed that Jesus must be hated. In John 15:25, Jesus quoted Psalm 35:19 and said, “The word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’”

The Scriptures showed that the disciples would abandon Jesus. In Matthew 26:31, Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7: “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

The Scriptures showed that Jesus would be pierced, but none of his bones would be broken. John quotes Psalm 34:20 and Zechariah 12:10 and says, “One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear. . . . For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken.’ And again another Scripture says, ‘They will look on him whom they have pierced’” (John 19:34–37).

The Scriptures showed that Jesus would be betrayed by a close friend for thirty pieces of silver. In John 13:18, Jesus cites Psalm 41:9 and says, “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’” In Matthew 26:24, Jesus

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says, "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!" And Matthew 27:9–10 says, "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me'" (Jer. 19:1–13; Zech. 11:12–13).

And not only the Scriptures, but Jesus himself declared, down to the details, how he would be killed. In Mark 10:33–34 he says, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." And on that last night, Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times" (Matt. 26:34).

According to His Sovereign Will

From all these prophecies, we know that God foresaw and did not prevent and therefore included in his plan that his Son would be rejected, hated, abandoned, betrayed, denied, condemned, spit upon, flogged, mocked, pierced, and killed. All these are explicitly in God's mind before they actually happen as things that he plans will happen to Jesus. These things did not just happen. They were foretold in God's word. God knew

they would happen and could have planned to stop them, but didn't. So they happened according to his sovereign will. His plan.

And all of them were evil. They were sin. It is surpassingly sinful to reject, hate, abandon, betray, deny, condemn, spit upon, flog, mock, pierce, and kill the morally perfect, infinitely worthy, divine Son of God. And yet the Bible is explicit and clear that God himself planned these things. This is explicit not only in all the prophetic texts we have seen, but also in passages that say even more plainly that God ordained that these things come to pass.

God Brought It to Pass

For example, Isaiah 53:6, 10 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and *the LORD* has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . *It was the will of the LORD* to crush him; he has put him to grief." The Lord crushed him. God was at work in all the circumstances that brought Jesus to the cross. Behind the spitting and flogging and mocking and piercing is the invisible hand and plan of God.

And I say that carefully and with trembling. This truth is too big and too weighty and too shocking to be glib about or to be cocky about. I choose to say that *the invisible hand and plan of God* are behind these most spectacular sins in all the universe—more grievous and more spectacular than the Fall of Satan or any other

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sins. The reason I use these very words is because the Bible says it in these very words.

The Hand and Plan of God

In Acts 4:27–28 we have the clearest, most explicit statement about God's hand and plan behind the horrific crucifixion of his Son. "Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your *hand* and your *plan* had predestined to take place." Those are the two words I am using: the *hand* of God and the *plan* of God.

It is a strange way of speaking—to say that God's *hand* and *plan* have predestined something to happen. One does not ordinarily think of God's "hand" predestining. How does a hand predestine? Here's what I think it means: The hand of God ordinarily stands for God's exerted power—not power in the abstract, but earthly, effective exertions of power. The point of combining it with "plan" is to say that it is not just a theoretical plan; it is a plan that will be executed by God's own hand.

This explains Isaiah 53:10: "It was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief." Or more literally, with the King James Version, "It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." The Lord bruised him. Behind Herod and Pilate and the

Gentiles and the people of Israel was Jesus' own Father who loved him with an infinite love.

The Gospel: God at Work in Death

Why should this matter to you? It should matter because if God were not the main Actor in the death of Christ, then the death of Christ could not save us from our sins, and we would perish in hell forever (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9). The reason the death of Christ is the heart of the gospel—the heart of the good news—is that God was doing it. Romans 5:8: “*God* shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” If you separate God’s activity from the death of Jesus, you lose the gospel. This was God’s doing. It is the highest and deepest point of his love for sinners. His love for you.

Romans 8:3: “*Sending his own Son* in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.” God condemned sin in Jesus’ flesh with our condemnation. So we are free.

Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” *God cursed Jesus* with the curse that belonged on us. So we are free.

2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he [*God*] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” God imputed our sin to him, and now we go free in God’s righteousness.

Isaiah 53:5: “He was wounded for our transgres-

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sions; he was crushed for our iniquities.” *God wounded him*. God crushed him. For you and me. And we go free.

The Cross of Christ as the Work and Love of God

If you embrace the biblical truth (and I pray you will) that God ordains spectacular sins for the global glory of his Son, without God in any way becoming unholy or unrighteous or sinful in that act, then you will not shrink back from the cross of Christ as a work of God. You will not be among the number of those who call the most loving act that ever was “divine child abuse.” You will come to the cross and fall on your face. And you will say: This is no mere human conspiracy. This is the work of God and the love of God. You will receive it as his highest gift. And you will be saved. And Christ will be glorified. And I will not have written in vain.



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