

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

Tarsus he explains that all that happens to us in an unexpected, unintended, self-originated way, ought to be regarded by us as sent to us by the god, and therefore, as he has appeared in such a way before the Tarsian audience, they should regard him as speaking with authority as the divine messenger.<sup>1</sup> The speech was delivered probably in the third period of Dion's career, which began when he received news of the death of Domitian, and thus his case illustrates strictly contemporary belief about those travelling orators and teachers, who in many ways show so close analogy to the Christian Apostles and travelling preachers.

W. M. RAMSAY.

### THE DEATH OF JUDAS.

THE two brief accounts, seemingly independent of each other, given in St. Matthew's Gospel (xxvii. 3-10), and in the Acts (i. 18, 19) respectively, of the fate which overtook Judas are not easy to reconcile, and offer a brief study of them to the readers of the EXPOSITOR.

The earliest extant account, i.e. St. Mark's (followed also by St. Luke), of the bargain made with Judas simply says that the chief priests "promised to give him money" (Mark xiv. 11; Luke xxii. 5). Nothing is told in this narrative either of the amount of the bribe, or of the way in which it was ultimately expended, or of the fate of the traitor. The writer of the First Gospel has a good deal to tell on these points. He says that the price paid was "thirty pieces of silver" (Matt. xxvi. 15), and it is to be noted that he uses here the words of Zechariah xi. 12, *ἔστησαν τριάκοντα ἀργύρια*. He tells also that Judas, driven by remorse, brought the money back to the priests, and that

<sup>1</sup> I quote from memory, and must apologize for possible inaccuracy in the quotation.

he then went away and hanged himself (*ἀπελθὼν ἀπήγγαστο*, Matt. xxvii. 5). The priests, regarding the money as the price of blood, would not put it into the treasury, but bought therewith the Potter's Field (*τὸν Ἀγρὸν τοῦ Κεραμέως*) "to bury strangers in: therefore that field was called the Field of Blood (*Ἀγρὸς Αἵματος*) until this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, etc."

Upon this we first observe that the author of the First Gospel is particularly prone to quote the Old Testament: he finds prophetic prevision of the Christ more frequently than any other Evangelist.

Next, he does not quote here with accuracy from any texts now known to us. The prophecy cited is not from Jeremiah, but (apparently) from Zechariah; and further, the passage is quoted in a form which does not agree either with the Hebrew or the LXX of Zechariah, as will be seen by a comparison. Whether he is actuated by a desire to harmonize the prophecy and the narrative, must be considered.

The Revised Version of Zechariah xi. 12, 13, following the Masoretic text, gives:—

"So they weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter, the goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter, in the house of the Lord."

The LXX has:—

*Καὶ ἔστησαν τὸν μισθὸν μου τριάκοντα ἀργυροῦς. καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς μέ, Κάθεσ αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ χωνευτήριον καὶ σκέψομαι εἰ δόκιμόν ἐστιν, ὃν τρόπον ἐδοκιμάσθη ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν. καὶ ἔλαβον τοὺς τριάκοντα ἀργυροῦς καὶ ἐνέβαλον αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν οἶκον κυρίου εἰς τὸ χωνευτήριον.*

This the Evangelist quotes in the form:—

*Καὶ ἔλαβον τὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια, τὴν τιμὴν τοῦ τετιμημένου*

ὃν ἐτιμήσαντο ἀπὸ υἰῶν Ἰσραήλ, καὶ ἔδωκαν (v.l. ἔδωκα) αὐτὰ εἰς τὸν ἀγρὸν τοῦ κεραμέως, καθὰ συνέταξέν μοι κύριος.

If the context of the Zechariah passage be read, it will be seen that certain shepherds having neglected the unhappy "flock of slaughter," the prophet "fed" them for a time in obedience to the command of Jehovah. Wearying of them, he ceased from his work, breaking his staff Beauty, the token of the covenant between him and the people. "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver," etc., as quoted above from the R.V. There is, then, no apparent parallel as to character or conduct between the recipient of the thirty silver pieces in Zechariah and Judas, for the prophet was no traitor, but had earned his reward by the faithful discharge of duty. Next, we notice that the meaning of casting the money "unto the potter" (according to the Masoretic text) is to indicate how contemptible a sum it was, the money-value of a slave (Exod. xxi. 32). The Syriac version puts a different complexion on the action by rendering "into the treasury" instead of "unto the potter"; that is, according to the Syriac, the money paid as hire to the prophet was treated as Jehovah's due: it was not put to his own uses by Zechariah, but paid "into the treasury." Yet another turn is given to this perplexing piece of symbolism by the LXX. As is shown by the Greek cited above, the LXX understood the motive of casting the money to the potter to be that the silver might be tested, to ascertain whether it were good or base coin. But neither in Hebrew nor Syriac nor LXX is there any mention of a "potter's field," or of the purchase of one; nor is there anything which would naturally suggest such a thing, either in the Zechariah passage or in the chapters of Jeremiah (xviii., xix.) which speak of a "potter." Thus we arrive, at any rate, at one certain conclusion, viz.: that the purchase of the

potter's field recorded in the First Gospel is not evolved by the writer's imagination out of the Zechariah passage. He must have been working on a tradition which, quite independently, connected Judas and a "Potter's Field." And there is another inference which we may draw, though not with the same certainty. Freely as the writer of Matthew xxvii. 9 has dealt with the original in the quotation which he makes, and although it is quite clear from Matthew xxvi. 15 that he has the Zechariah passage in his mind all through, he can hardly be accused of having rehandled his prophetic text in the interests of his narrative. For he leaves out the special point in the episode in Zechariah to which his narrative presents the most striking parallel. He omits to quote the words *εἰς τὸν οἶκον κυρίου* which describe the situation of the *χωρευτήριον* of the LXX, into which the money was cast. Yet of Judas he had written (v. 5), *ρίψας τὰ ἀργύρια εἰς τὸν ναόν*. The Evangelist's omission of Old Testament words, which would serve well as a prefiguration of this point, is, on any hypothesis, remarkable.

We may say, then, of St. Matthew's narrative, that it rests upon a tradition *independent of the prophecy cited*; the applicability of which is, in truth, by no means apparent. And the salient features of the tradition were these: (a) Judas, stricken by remorse, returned the money paid him; (b) He hanged himself in despair; (c) the priests with the money bought a field called the "Potter's Field," which thenceforth was called *Ἄγρος Αἵματος*; (d) The field was used as a cemetery for foreigners.

Let us now take up St. Luke's account in the Acts. It runs as follows:

*Οὗτος μὲν οὖν ἐκτήσατο χωρίον ἐκ μισθοῦ τῆς ἀδικίας, καὶ πρηγῆς γενόμενος, ἐλάκησεν μέσος, καὶ ἐξεχύθη πάντα τὰ σπλάγχα αὐτοῦ. καὶ γνωστὸν ἐγένετο πᾶσι τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν*

Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὥστε κληθῆναι τὸ χωρίον ἐκεῖνο τῇ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν Ἀκελδαμάχ, τοῦτ' ἔστιν Χωρίον Αἵματος (Acts i. 18, 19).

There are marked differences between this and St. Matthew's narrative.

(a) Nothing is said of Judas' remorse, nor is he represented as returning the money. (b) His death is not self-inflicted, nor was it caused by hanging; it is described as due to a fall and a consequent rupture of the abdomen. (c) He himself is said to have bought a field with his wages, whereas St. Matthew tells that it was bought by the priests. (d) Nothing is said by St. Luke of the purpose for which the field was used after the death of Judas. (e) St. Luke knows nothing of its having been a "Potter's Field." (f) According to St. Matthew, the "blood," which gave its name to the field, was the blood of Christ shed through Judas' treachery; according to St. Luke, it was the blood of Judas by which the field was defiled.

The only point common to the two accounts is that the name by which the field was known in the next generation was an Aramaic word which was variously translated Ἀγρὸς Αἵματος and Χωρίον Αἵματος by St. Matthew and St. Luke. St. Luke gives a transliteration of this Aramaic name; he says it was Ἀκελδαμάχ, that is, he understands it as ܐܟܠܕܡܚܐ, "a Field of Blood." Ἀκελδαμάχ, is, no doubt, a possible transliteration of this Hebrew, for we have other instances of final ܟ being represented by the Greek χ; as, e.g., in the equation Σιράχ = ܣܝܪܚܐ. But we should certainly not expect a final χ, although it might be defended, if the last part of the Aramaic title were ܐܟܠܕܡܚܐ; the presence of χ suggests rather that the Aramaic title ended with the letters ܕܡܚܐ. Now it is remarkable that ܕܡܚܐ = κοιμᾶσθαι, so that κοιμητήριον, "cemetery," would be the exact equivalent of ܕܡܚܐ ܐܟܠܕܡܚܐ. And Klostermann has suggested that this was really the name by which the field

was known to the native Jews, and that we have here a corroboration of St. Matthew's tradition that it was used "to bury strangers in" (Matt. xxvii. 7). We have, then, to suppose that the name became corrupted in popular speech into אֶרֶץ דָּמָא, and that at the time when the Acts and the First Gospel were written, it was generally pronounced in the latter way. This would be like the corruption of (say) "Bodyfield" into "Bloodyfield" in English, and is a possible transformation. Whether it took place or not, however, the concurrence of the two independent accounts leaves us in no doubt that a field, commonly called the "Field of Blood," was associated in the popular mind with Judas and his hire; and there is no reason for refusing to accept St. Matthew's statements that it had been formerly used for a potter's field or pit, and was, at the time when he wrote, used as a burial place for foreigners. These are points as to which tradition was little likely to be mistaken, and—as we have seen—there is nothing in the prophecy quoted by St. Matthew which could have suggested them.

We now turn to the points of divergence between St. Matthew's narrative and the Acts, and they compel us to regard the two writers as following independent traditions. The efforts that have been made to bring them into correspondence are but futile. The Vulgate boldly combines the narratives by reading *suspensus crepuit* in Acts i. 18, and an older Latin version quoted by Augustine had *et collum sibi alligavit et deiectus in faciem disruptus est medius*.<sup>1</sup> But this is to alter the text in the interests of the harmonizer. It has been supposed as in the Vulgate that Judas having hanged himself, his body fell to the ground by the breaking of the rope, or that he did not succeed in his attempt at suicide but died of a fall afterwards. But these hypotheses are only expedients adopted to evade the plain divergence

<sup>1</sup> Blass actually inserts *καὶ κατέδησεν αὐτοῦ τὸν τράχηλον* in the Roman text of Acts i. 18, relying on this passage from Augustine.

of the narratives. The one fact which we may regard as established by both accounts of Judas' death is that it took place within a few days after his treachery. It is just as clear in Acts i. as if it were explicitly stated that Judas was dead when St. Peter addressed the assembled disciples with the view of electing a successor to him in the Apostolate. Consequently the hypothesis of a *lingering* death due to a disease like dropsy or elephantiasis may be set aside. Nevertheless, such an hypothesis, however improbable it may seem, had wide currency in the early Church, and it was based on a statement of Papias. Papias, whose words have come down to us in various forms, says that Judas swelled up to an enormous size, and that his death was caused (according to one version) by a fall, or (according to another) by a passing waggon.<sup>1</sup> He says nothing of suicide. It is probable that Papias read *πρησθείς*, "swelled up" (a reading which is found in the Armenian Catena on the Acts), for *πρηνής* in Acts i. 18; but it is entirely unlikely that this was the original reading. Papias' story, which enters into gruesome and repulsive details, has several parallels in folklore literature;<sup>2</sup> one example of which is apposite to our text and must be quoted here. It occurs in the *Acta Thomae*, § 33. The legend tells that a dragon killed a young man by his bite and was compelled by the Apostle to suck the poison out of the wound, and then *ὁ δράκων φουσηθείς ἐλάκησε καὶ ἀπέθανε καὶ ἐξεχύθη ὁ ἴος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἦ χολή*. The dragon having thus burst asunder was swallowed up in a chasm which opened in the earth, and the Apostle commanded houses to be built upon the site

<sup>1</sup> Πρησθεις γὰρ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον τὴν σάρκα, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι διελθεῖν ἀμάξης ραδίως διερχομένης, ὑπὸ τῆς ἀμάξης πταισθέντα τὰ ἔγκατα ἐγκενωθῆναι is the form of Papias' story as reported by Apollinaris of Laodicea in Cramer's Catena on St. Matthew.

<sup>2</sup> See Rendel Harris *Did Judas really commit Suicide?* in the *American Journal of Philology* for July, 1900; a highly interesting paper, with the conclusions of which, however, I do not agree.

ἵνα οἰκησὶς γένηται τοῖς ξένοις, "that it might be a dwelling-place for strangers." We seem to have here reminiscences of the Judas story; the rare word ἐλάκησε and the word ἐξεχύθη recalling Acts i. 18, while the last sentence about the use to which the site was put suggests Matthew xxvii. 7. But the *swelling up* of the dragon is not necessarily derived from Papias. Mr. Rendel Harris has pointed out that in folk-lore tales this was a common fate for evildoers, and it is probable that both Papias and Leucius (or whoever was the author of the *Acta Thomae*) are building on the same superstition. But all the information that Papias' story gives us as to the death of Judas is that it was regarded in his day as a natural death and not a suicide. So far Papias supports the Acts, rather than St. Matthew; but I cannot think that there is any reasonable probability that *πρησθείς* was the original reading for *πρηνής* in Acts i. 18, or that the death of Judas, which, according to both canonical accounts, took place within a few days of his treachery, was a gradual death due to a lingering disease.

One other possibility as to the narrative in the Acts should not be overlooked. The speech of Peter (Acts i. 16 ff.), and indeed the whole Lucan account of the election of Matthias, have reference both explicit and implicit to the fulfilment of prophecy, and more particularly to the fate of Judas as foreshadowed in Psalm cix. May it not then be the case that, as Strauss thought, the words of Psalm cix. 18, "It came into his inward parts like water and like oil into his bones," suggested that a dropsical swelling was the appropriate fate of Judas (cf. Num. v. 22)? This might possibly account for the Papias legend, but I cannot think that it is a sufficient explanation of Acts i. 18. For it must be repeated that St. Luke knows nothing of a lingering death or of a gradual swelling up of the body of Judas, which are indeed quite inconsistent with his narrative. There is nothing in Psalm cix. or

in Psalm lxix. which would suggest *πρηνῆς γενόμενος ἐλάκησεν μέσος καὶ ἐξεχύθη πάντα τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ.*

It appears, then, as the result of this investigation, that while the narrative of the First Gospel was composed with the idea of prophetic fulfilments in the writer's mind, and while the narrative of the Acts was overlaid in the next generation with details borrowed from folk-lore literature, we have no right to say either that Matthew xxvii. 1-9 was evolved out of Old Testament prophecies or that Acts i. 18, 19, is a mere piece of folk-lore. The two narratives have in common the death of Judas within a few days after Gethsemane and the field Aceldamach that was bought with the wages of his treachery. They differ as to whether his death was self-inflicted or not, and as to whether it were he or the priests who purchased the field. We cannot reconcile these divergences; our knowledge is insufficient for the purpose, even supposing that a reconciliation were possible. But it may be maintained—and I should myself be disposed to maintain—that the vivid and striking narrative of Matthew xxvii. 1-9 is more likely to present us with a true version of the facts than the short explanatory note (for it is no more) inserted in the middle of St. Peter's speech by the author of the Acts.

J. H. BERNARD.

### THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS.

IN discussing the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians I must ask to be allowed to take for granted two points, both of which will probably be readily conceded.

1. That what we know as 1 Thessalonians is an authentic work of the Apostle Paul.

2. That it was written before 2 Thessalonians, and not after it, as has sometimes been held.