This will be my last post in this thread on Judas Iscariot, and it deals with a question that has long been asked, often answered, and never satisfactorily: what motivated Judas to betray Jesus? No answer has ever satisfied because there is simply no way to know. When I say the answers are never satisfactory, and that they do not satisfy, I don’t mean that no one is satisfied. Lots of people — including possibly you! — have an answer that you think works perfectly. OK then!

But there’s no consensus on the matter and even though I have my preference of an answer, I don’t think it’s possible to enter into some person’s mind — especially a person living 2000 years ago that we know virtually nothing about — to come up with a psychological explanation for why he did what he did.

Here’s the reality: you can’t come up with a convincing and conclusive psychological explanation for MOST things that MOST people do. You actually have no idea what is motivating me to write this post. Is it because I’m hoping it will convince more people to give money to the charities supported by the blog? Is it to show off how much I know about the Bible? Is it to trash an academic rival whom I don’t like who has written a book on the topic. Is it out of a sense of guilt that I’m not doing enough public service in spreading the knowledge about the New Testament that the taxpayers of North Carolina are giving their hard-earned money in taxes for me to both acquire and disseminate? Is it because I’m bored and would on the whole rather do this then watch a sit-com? Is it … ? These are all plausible explanations. Maybe one is right. Maybe they are all right. Maybe some are right. Maybe only one is more right than the others. How would you know? And in fact, how would *I* know?

OK, so, ascribing motivation is a very tricky enterprise. But still, hey, it’s a lot of fun to think about. And we do it all the time, for all sorts of people, both those close to us and those that we read about incessantly (oh boy, incessantly…) in the news. Why did they do that??? And so, with Judas. Why did he do that?

I talk about the issue in my book The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot. Here are my reflections found there:

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The Gospels give various answers to the question of “why.” In the (newly discovered) Gospel of Judas, he betrays Jesus because that’s what Jesus wants him to do — Jesus needs to escape from the material trappings of his body, which requires him to die, and Judas both recognizes this and makes it happen. In our earlier accounts from the New Testament there are a range of different reasons given: (a) John portrays Judas as inherently evil, “a devil,” and so naturally he does what he is inclined to do (John 6:71; (b) Luke suggests that “The Devil made him do it” (Luke 22:3-6); (c) Matthew indicates that he does it for the cash (Matt. 26:14-16).

But what was the real motivation behind Judas’s act? At the end of the day, I’m afraid we can’t know for certain. It might be that the scenario I’ve suggested above [i.e., earlier in the chapter] is the right one, that Judas simply wanted Jesus removed from public view until after the Festival of Passover had ended and they could return to Galilee to continue their public preaching.

But there’s another option that might be even more intriguing, possibly hinted at in Mark, our earliest surviving account. Throughout Mark’s account ...
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But How Did Judas Die?
What Did Judas Betray?