

(Luke 13:24). Together, they will constitute what may be called “an endtime throng of spiritual has-beens.”

According to the NEW SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, a “has-been” is “a person who or thing which has lost a quality or proficiency formerly possessed.” Spiritual “has-beens” would, accordingly, be those who have lost the qualities that would characterize them as Christians, and their former proficiency in Biblical piety. They are—in a word—apostates from the Christian faith (though they be the friends of contemporary religion), or at the very least, border-line backsliders on the brink of apostasy.

For the purpose of our instruction, we would highlight three instances recorded in Scripture for our admonition, lest we being “led away with the error of the wicked,” should “fall from [our] own steadfastness” (II Pet. 3:17). We will look at the sad story of Judas, the betrayer of our Lord, the sudden departure of Demas, Paul’s former co-worker, and “the many” of John chapter 6, who, when confronted with the hard saying of Jesus, walked no more with Him. As we shall see, these samples drawn from Scripture serve as a prototype of three, distinct classes of “spiritual has-beens.”

The Story Of Judas: A Study In Apostasy

Acts 1:16-18,24-25: “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth

of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out;” “And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”

Judas Iscariot. The very name is associated with betrayal, disloyalty, selfish ambition, and Satanic evil. But many fail to recognize that Judas began as an apparently sincere, ardent follower of Jesus Christ. He was personally selected by Christ Himself, after an all-night season of prayer (Luke 6:12-16). Administrative ability must have been one of his strong points, for he was permitted to administer, under Christ of course, the commonly-held, material assets of Jesus and the apostolic band (Jn. 12:6;13:29). He took part in the spiritual ministry of the apostles (Acts 1:24,25), exercised special God-given power in casting out devils and healing the sick (Mk. 6:7-13), and was even given the distinct prospect of reigning on a royal throne in the coming millennial Kingdom of Christ (Matt. 19:28). But something went seriously wrong. Through a series of developments ominous flaws in his commitment to Christ began to emerge until he was brought to the brink of doing the unthinkable. We will seek at this point to trace the steps that led to his tragic betrayal of

the Lord of Glory.

Shaky at the loss of popularity. John Chapter 6 records a crisis in the Great Galilean Ministry of our Lord. Hard and pointed sayings concerning Sovereign election, and an identity with Christ made possible only by a spiritual assimilation of His message, led to a large scale defection among His followers. So powerful was the influence of this “great falling away,” that Jesus became concerned about the spiritual stability of the twelve, and in light of the current trend, posed the soul-searching question, “Will ye also go away?” After Peter’s affirmation of commitment, Christ proceeded to utter words fraught with dire implication, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil” (Jn. 6:70). Evidently, the impact of this popularity loss in Christ’s ministry to the masses, was keenly felt by Judas and clearly discerned by Christ, Who perhaps saw in this original defection an harbinger of Judas’ final apostasy. This crucial remark by Christ was an early warning (approximately one year prior to the crucifixion) of future trouble.

Disillusioned with the course of Christ’s career. Judas, like all the disciples, joined the ranks of Christ’s disciples, because Jesus was viewed as the long-awaited Messiah Who had come to establish God’s Kingdom on earth by overthrowing Israel’s enemies, and exalting the oppressed nation to a position as head of the nations.

However, when Christ’s ministry generated a mounting conflict with the religious establishment which plotted to arrest and kill Him, and it became increasingly clear that the present aspect of the Kingdom was a spiritual dominion within the hearts of men and not an earthly empire (Luke 17:20), the twelve, including their spokesman Peter, were sore-perplexed. For instance, when Peter was confronted with the reality of Christ’s upcoming death, he actually rebuked Jesus for voicing what seemed a pessimistic prospect. His objection was forceful and blunt, “*Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee,*” as was Christ’s reply, “*Get thee behind me, Satan*” (Matt. 16:22,23). The unrealized expectation of an immediate earthly Kingdom, and the dawning recognition that anticipated prominence in that Kingdom was predicated on present suffering, dashed the ill-founded hopes of the apostles and seem to have been especially felt by Judas, who became increasingly alienated from Christ’s cause.

Stung by Christ’s rebuff. The lavish love of Mary, in sacrificing the costly cruse of spikenard ointment in the anointing of Jesus, drew an indignant response from Judas whose selfish ambition had given way to thievery, and whose callous heart could not recognize the virtue of Mary’s action. John tells of Judas’ response and of Christ’s subsequent reproof: “*Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not*

that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this (Jn. 12:5-7). This unpleasant encounter (Matt. 26:10-16; Luke 22:3) prompted Judas to commune with the enemies of Christ for the sake of monetary gain (I Tim. 6:10). This was his final break with Christ, and from this moment on, the betrayal became a mere matter of course. How many have likewise been alienated from Christ because in reproving their besetting sins His words have pierced to the quick, and prompted some hasty reaction that placed them in league with the world, the flesh, and the devil? May God's jolting Word (II Tim. 4:1-4), never make of us a modern-day Judas!

Blatant Insincerity. In tracing Judas' spiritual demise, we should also note his deceptive guise. An actor once commented on the acting profession, and in effect said that sincerity was everything in acting, and "if you can fake sincerity, you've got it made." Judas, as he failed of the grace of God (Heb. 12:15), began to wear the disguise of discipleship and "fake sincerity." Not only had Judas been stealing from the common fund, but he had also begun to live the double life of a seeming disciple and a denizen of darkness. Tuesday night before the Thursday night last passover, Judas had communed with the authorities and so his apparently innocent question "Master is it I?" in

response to Christ's prediction of betrayal, was a classic case of insincerity, as was his submission to Christ's footwashing, and his hypocritical kiss of betrayal (Jn. 13:2-5, Luke 22:47,48). Only the agency of the Master Deceiver (Luke 22:3; Jn. 13:2, 27) can explain the blatant insincerity of this "man of Kerioth."

Demas: The Disloyal Defector

2 Timothy 4:10: "For Demas hath forsaken [ἐγκαταλείπω- to abandon, desert, leave in the lurch] me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia."

Formerly a trusted associate (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24), Demas deserted Paul at a crucial point in his career (during his second Roman imprisonment) and became the prototype of those who abandon Christ and His ministry in order to shelter or save their life in this world (Jn. 12:24,25). In a short six-year period (he was present with Paul in his first imprisonment) he had developed a dormant love for the world that prevented him from jeopardizing his life by a further identification with Paul's controversial message and ministry. His spirit of devotion was weakened through world-love (I Jn. 2:15-17) and his preoccupation with things present prompted him to yield to the instinctive desire for self-preservation. As persecution increases in our day, many one-time disciples will duplicate the disloyalty and departure of Demas, choosing this life above life in the world to come (Luke 14:26), and leaving some poor man of God to face the on-

slaught of a Christ-hating world without any human support. At such times Christ Himself stands with the forsaken (II Tim. 4:16,17), while the defector loses all that is worthwhile, in both this world and the world to come. May Jesus purge us from the leaven of world-love and deliver us from the disloyalty of Demas!

The Many Who Walked No More

John 6:66: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

They opted out of following Jesus and walked away, going back to their homes and former pursuits (εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω), because they failed to comprehend the inner sense of His sound teaching concerning the necessity of identification and union with Him by virtue of assimilating His flesh and drinking His blood. "This is an hard [σκληρός- 'difficult, offensive, intolerable'] saying; who can hear it?" they said, murmuring at its implications. And when He proceeded to affirm that no man could come to Him apart from a Divine endowment (Jn. 6:65, see also v. 44), they, like their modern-day counterparts, turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them, to wallow in the pig sty of the formerly-forsaken past (II Pet. 2:21,22). The strong meat of Christ's deeper teaching revealed the superficiality of their commitment.

The apostate Judas, the disloyal Demas, and the discipleship-drop-outs of John chapter 6 were unwilling to maintain their love for Jesus. How will it fare with us?

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Spiritual Has-Beens

Matthew 24:10-13: "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

According to the Scriptures, the last days will witness an unprecedented upsurge in the number of men and women who, for one reason or another, simply walk away from Christianity. These erstwhile believers will bolt from the Christian fold, and find common cause with an unregenerate world that is hurtling toward hell. They will give up their life of holy separation, surrender to satanic temptation, and drift with the current on the sea of spiritual oblivion. Among their ranks one will find former preachers, deacons, youth leaders, and persons of influence who have grown weary in well-doing and ceased to strive to enter in at the strait gate