

1. Jesus' betrayal and arrest

18:1 *When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples.*

18:2 *Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples.*

After Jesus had spoken the words in John 14-17 (Carson, 576), He and His disciples left the house where they had gathered and crossed the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem. Literally, the phrase is "the brook of Kidron", for the ravine was created by an intermittent stream that was dry most of the year. The ravine itself falls two hundred feet below the temple's outer court and when it is flowing during rainy season, creates a torrent that empties into the Dead Sea. To the east of the Kidron rises the Mount of Olives. The Olive grove on its slope is called Gethsemane (meaning "olive press"). There, Jesus and the disciples "entered" the garden. Later, it says they "went out" which suggests that it was a private, walled garden that Jesus was given permission to use and which He did use frequently. In Luke 21:37 it says that during the passion week, "He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet." Luke 22:39 also says, "He proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives." Judas knew the place well.

The agony that Jesus experienced in the garden that plays such a big part in the synoptic gospels is conspicuously missing in John's account of the event. Morris' explanation makes the most sense. He says, John "was not giving a complete account of all that happened, but painting a picture. The incident did not suit his purpose so he omitted it" (Morris, 740). In other words, John is emphasizing Jesus' determination to fulfill the sovereign will of God and so his focus is on Jesus going to the place where He can count on Judas finding Him, not on everything that took place that night.

18:3 *Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.*

Judas has fully switched sides; he now stands with Jesus' enemies.

A full Roman cohort was made up of one thousand men, but in practice was about six hundred (some say 200). The Romans used surprisingly large numbers of soldiers in dealing with a single person (like the 470 soldiers protecting Paul in Acts 23:23), especially when they feared a riot. The number of Romans is not inconceivable considering the huge crowds that gathered for Passover. Large numbers of soldiers were deployed at all the Jewish festivals, because at them nationalism ran high and there was a greater potential that mob violence might arise.

Mobs had already been seen gathering around Jesus. He had fed more than 5000 people and the people wanted to make Him their king (Jn. 6). The day before, He had entered Jerusalem on a donkey where people took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel" (Jn. 12:12-13).

The Jewish authorities may have expected violent resistance from Jesus and the eleven men with Him, or problems from the fickle crowds who at times wanted to make Jesus king, so the group of soldiers came armed. Though the light of the Pascal moon would have been enough to see by, they came with lights and torches as well, perhaps thinking that Jesus might hide in the dark recesses of the garden (Morris, 742). The mention of lanterns and torches shows that it was still dark.

The sizable number of armed soldiers is in stark contrast to Christ's peaceful nature. Christ's friends were few, his enemies many.

18:4 So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

18:5 They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them.

Throughout the Book of John, the author stresses Jesus' supernatural knowledge and the fact that Jesus was in complete control of every situation – even the road to the cross was a result of His will. Thus, we see Jesus actively going forth to meet the soldiers.

When asked who He was, Jesus replied "I am" which is the title of deity He used in John 8:58 and elsewhere (see notes on John 8:24). "This must have been a most unexpected move on His part. The soldiers had come out secretly to arrest a fleeing peasant. In the gloom they find themselves confronted with a commanding figure, who far from running away comes out to meet them and speaks to them in the very language of deity" (Morris, 743).

The effect of His comment is borne out in verse 6.

18:6 So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Jesus' confidence and His comment combined to produce a moment of terror or perhaps awe, and the soldiers retreated and fell to the ground (Morris, 743).

Matthew Henry comments, "When He struck them down, He could have struck them dead; when He spoke them to the ground, He could have spoken them to hell . . . but He would not do so" (Henry, Commentary) for the hour of his suffering had come. Jesus would not bypass the cross but through His action He demonstrated that His life was not taken from him; He laid it down of His own accord (Jn. 10:11, 15, 17-18).

18:7 Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene."

18:8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way,"

18:9 to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one."

Jesus states clearly who He is in order to draw attention away from the disciples; the Good Shepherd cares for the sheep.

The words, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one," harken back to 17:12, 6:39, and 10:28. By fulfilling His word, Jesus gave the assurance that He would not fail - not only for those that were now with him, but for all that should believe on him through their word. Though the primary meaning is that Jesus would preserve their natural lives, in a deeper sense it also reveals that He can also keep their souls from sin and apostasy. As Carson says, their physical salvation is a symbol of their spiritual salvation (Carson, 579).

18:10 Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus.

18:11 So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

According to Luke 22:38, the group had two swords. The word used here refers either to a long knife or short sword. It may have simply been a dagger concealed by Peter until this time.

John does not mention that Jesus healed the servant's ear, for he assumes the story is well enough known by the reader (Lk. 22:51). "We must acknowledge God's over-ruling providence in directing the stroke. . . , as also in giving Christ an opportunity to manifest his power and goodness in healing the hurt, Luke 22:51. Thus, what was in danger of turning to Christ's reproach proved an occasion of that which redounded much to his honor, even among his adversaries" (Henry, Commentary).

Matthew 26:52-54 adds a detail that also stresses Jesus' control over His arrest. In rebuking Peter for cutting off the slave's ear Jesus said, "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"

"If Christ be determined to suffer and die, it is a presumption for Peter in word or deed to oppose it" (Henry, Commentary).

In the OT "cup" primarily refers to God's "cup of wrath" which evildoers must drink (Psa. 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15; Ezek. 23:31-33; and see Rev. 14:10; 16:19). The expression may be related to Jesus, in that He, the sinless one, bears our sins and faces the wrath of God as our substitutionary offering. We deserve the cup of God's wrath, but Jesus drank that cup instead of us. For our sake God poured out His judgment upon His supreme object of delight --- His precious Son. This is one of the treasures of the gospel.

Jesus' drinking the cup of God's wrath is called "propitiation" in the Bible. Propitiation means that the wrath that was once directed at us was poured out on Christ in full measure. He exhausted the wrath of God and took the full punishment for our sins. The cup of God's wrath is now empty.

Sin demands justice; holiness demands wrath; men need mercy. The cross perfectly meets all these requirements. When Christ bore our sin, the penalty of our transgression was paid. Justice was not ignored or overlooked by God for the wrath of God was satisfied since it was poured out in full measure. Through the cross we experience the love and mercy of God. All this came to pass by the actions of Christ as He purposefully moved toward the cross.

2. The first stage of the Jewish trial: Jesus is questioned by Annas

The gospel accounts portray two trials of Jesus, one Jewish and one Roman. The Jewish trial begins with the informal hearing before Annas. This was followed by a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish body led by Caiaphas. Next, formal charges were brought to Pilate who sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who was then the tetrarch (a subordinate ruler) over Galilee and Peraea.

According to Jewish law, someone could not be tried and sentenced on the same day (Morris, 747). Though the Jewish legal practices had numerous stipulations for trials, many of these could be bypassed if the situation was deemed urgent (including the possibility of mob violence). Furthermore, Jesus' situation was complicated by the fact that execution could not take place on the Sabbath. This meant that Jesus had to be executed before Friday at sundown. If the events in John 18 occurred before sunrise on Friday morning, things needed to move along rapidly if He was to be crucified before dusk of that same day.

18:12 So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him,

18:13 and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

18:14 Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. He had held the position of High Priest from 6 AD -15 AD. He was deposed by Gratus, Pilate's predecessor. Jesus was probably brought to him first out of deference for he wielded considerable power and was greatly respected. In fact, many considered him to be the real High Priest since, according to Mosaic law, the position was supposed to be a lifetime appointment (Num. 35:25). By referring to him as the High Priest, there may be an element of defiance from those who opposed Gentile intervention in their affairs.

Caiaphas, who was the acting High Priest, was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people (see notes on John 11:49-52) – a prophecy he was unaware of speaking.

18:15 Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest,

18:16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.

18:17 Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

18:18 Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

The High Priest presumably lived in the Hasmonean palace on the west hill of the city. It is very possible that both Annas and Caiaphas lived in different wings of the same building and their homes shared the same courtyard. It is clear that Annas is the one spoken of as the High Priest through verse 24.

Peter was following Jesus, as was another disciple, one who had a very close relationship to the High Priestly family (John? Nicodemus? Joseph of Arimathea? - Morris, 753, n. 30). The other disciples had fled. Because the other disciple was known to the high priest, it was possible for him to enter into the court with Jesus. Peter was not allowed in, but since the other disciple was known, he was able to speak to the doorkeeper (a female slave) and bring Peter in.

After they had both entered the courtyard, Peter went over to a charcoal fire where people were warming themselves. Peter was trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, but it was dangerous to be among this group of people at the fire.

The slave-girl who kept the door asked if Peter was one of Jesus' disciples. The question in Greek expects a negative answer, but may be used to express a cautious assertion (Carson, 588). The NAS translates it well: "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

18:19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

18:20 Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.

18:21 "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said."

Annas is again called the High Priest.

In Jewish trials of the first century the accused were not questioned, rather, testimony was presented that would prove either their innocence or guilt. The absence of witnesses suggests that this was an informal hearing. The questions focused on Jesus' disciples and Jesus' teachings, demonstrating that the concern was primarily theological not political, despite the rationale presented to Pilate later (Lk. 23:2). Probably the hope behind this questioning was that Jesus would incriminate Himself as a false prophet.

Jesus does not answer Annas' question, but instead appeals to the public nature of His ministry. The implication is that the Jewish leaders had heard Jesus speak on numerous occasions so it would have

been easy to for them to secure witnesses to testify about what Jesus had said. This answer also sidesteps the question of the disciples; by drawing attention to Himself, He protects them.

His words, "I have spoken openly," echo the words of God in Isaiah. Isaiah 45:18-19 says, "For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens . . . 'I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.'" Likewise, in Isaiah 48:16 the pre-incarnate Son declares, "Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit."

Jesus' challenge, "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said," is not an act of contempt toward the High Priest, but was a legitimate comment considering that questioning the prisoner was an improper procedure in that day. In John 5:31 Jesus had made the comment, "If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true" as a principle He knew His opponents would agree with. Although the accused could raise objections (Jn. 7:50-51), a conviction was dependent upon the witness of others. Jesus' comment exposes that the High Priest is not proceeding legally.

18:22 When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"

18:23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

18:24 So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

The law in Exodus 22:28 states that you shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people. So when Jesus' responded as He did, one of the officers standing nearby struck Him. This was also illegal, but it was not the only ill treatment that Jesus had to endure during the Jewish proceedings. According to Matthew 26:67, "they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him." The term "struck" found in John 18:22 "denotes a sharp blow with the flat of one's hand" (Kostenberger, 518; cf. Acts 23:1-5); often it was a slap to the face (Morris, 756).

Jesus does not back down; instead of apologizing He denies that His comments were disrespectful or in violation of the law, and challenges the action of the officer. The NEB brings out the nuance: "If I spoke amiss, state it in evidence." Jesus' logic is that if they cannot bear to witness any evil, why then do they allow this assault? In short, Jesus is asking for a fair trial (Carson, 584).

Annas did not respond. He simply sent Jesus to Caiaphas who may have been in another room in the same building complex (Morris, 758). See also Luke 22:54.

Caiaphas held the official position of High Priest and was the head of the Sanhedrin. Under Roman occupation, the High Priest had the dominant political role among the Jews, and so Caiaphas had to be

the one to bring the case before Pilate. The formal trial before the Sanhedrin is not expanded upon in the Gospel of John, but it takes place at about dawn (Matt. 27:1-2).

18:25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not."

The scene switches back to Peter. Peter had already denied Jesus once (18:17), and now he is confronted with more of the same questions.

When comparing the gospels it becomes apparent that not just one person asked the question (see Matt 26:71; Mk. 14:69; Lk. 22:58). As Morris remarks, "With a group of servants talking informally round a fire in the courtyard when one asked whether Peter were a disciple it is almost certain that others would take the question up, especially if there were any hesitation about the answer" (Morris, 759). This is implied by Mark (Mk. 14:68 ff.).

This question, like the one in verse 17, is phrased in Greek in a way that expects a "no" answer: "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" Peter replies as expected, "I am not."

18:26 One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

18:27 Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

The third question heightens Peter's discomfort. This question is different as it expects a positive answer; that is, it was a question that anticipated Peter's response to be "Yes, I am a disciple." It was especially threatening since Peter had earlier drawn his sword and attacked a man whose relative was now standing right in front of him. During Jesus' arrest the lanterns cast odd shadows and things happened quickly. As Peter was warming himself perhaps the fire flared and the man saw Peter's face a bit more clearly. Peter instinctively began to look to his own self-preservation. Matthew 26:74 adds that he began to curse and swear, making it all the more convincing that he was not a follower of Christ.

The scene contrasts Jesus' and Peter's response to their accusers. Jesus stands up to His questioners and denies nothing. Peter cowers before he denies everything (Brown, II, 842). Jesus knows that by identifying Himself it will lead to His death; Peter knows that by denying his relationship to Christ he will avoid suffering. Peter is most interested in saving himself; Jesus is most interested in saving others. He would rather die than lose one (18:9).

At once a rooster crowed "and Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said, 'Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75; see Jn. 13:38 for the prediction).

The second stage of the Jewish trial, the formal trial itself, is before Caiaphas and is recorded in Matthew 27:56-58 and Mark 14:53-65. There the Sanhedrin also gathered. Without fleshing out the proceedings with Caiaphas, John moves to Jesus' encounter with Pilate.