



Matthew 26:47-75

The Arrest of Jesus by the Sanhedrin

Two days before the Passover Jesus told His disciples that He would "be delivered up for crucifixion" (Matthew 26:2).

THE PLOT

The chief priests and the leaders of the Jewish people were meeting together in the court of the high priest named Joseph Caiaphas where "they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth, and kill Him" (vv. 3-4). As they developed their plot they said, "Not during the festival, lest a riot occur among the people" (v. 5). Jerusalem was very explosive at Passover time; therefore they would postpone the crucifixion of Jesus until after the large crowds left town. They were afraid of an uprising of the people because Jesus had many followers in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. Matthew's gospel clearly presents Jesus is in control of all the events regarding the timing of His betrayal and crucifixion. He is Lord even of the timing of His crucifixion and the events surrounding it.

At the same time Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, "'What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?' And they weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver. And from then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Him" (vv. 14-16). It is the sin of cold, calculated, callous deliberation as to how he can deliver Jesus up to the enemy. The evil of this offense is that Judas was one of the twelve disciples. This was not someone off the street in the general public who was offended by Jesus' teachings. This is one the closest companions who is participating in the Passover meal. As they commence with the meal Jesus confronted Judas who must have been stunned when he heard these words of Jesus. "Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, He said, 'Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.' Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, 'Surely not I, Lord?' And He answered, 'He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.' And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, 'Surely it is not I, Rabbi?' Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself'" (Matthew 26:20-25, NASB95). (All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible 1995 Update unless otherwise noted).

The other disciples were all startled, "deeply grieved" or "very much, exceedingly distressed." They were "sick at heart" to use the words of Rieu. "Is it I?" More exactly their question is asked in a form that expects a negative answer. "Surely not I, Lord?" Judas was pretty slick. J. C. Ryle observes, "When our Lord said, 'One of you shall betray Me,' no one said, 'Is it Judas?'"

The apostle John helps us understand what was going on. "Jesus then answered, 'That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.' So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.' Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him.... So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night" (John 13:26-28, 30). The disciples thought that since Judas was the treasurer Jesus was sending him out to make purchases for the Passover. It is as if Jesus issued a command and Judas went out and set into motion his dastardly deed with the high priest. Now they set their plan in motion to kill Jesus. Until now Jesus has often said, "My hour has not come," and now it has arrived (John 2:4; 12:23).

The death of Jesus Christ takes place in the will of God, and nothing has been done outside of God's eternal purpose. God used Judah's sin to bring about His goal. However, Judas was not compelled by God to betray Jesus. That was His volitional choice, and he suffered the eternal consequence of that decision.

JESUS ARRESTED

John tells us Judas knew the place where Jesus would probably be because He often went there with His disciples (John 18:2). It may have been that Judas went first to the upper room looking for Jesus and didn't find Him so he led the group of Temple police and Roman soldiers from the tower of Antonia to the Garden of Gethsemane. Alfred Eldersheim tells us this Temple-guard were neither regularly armed nor trained. Nor would the Romans have tolerated a regular armed Jewish force in Jerusalem" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 541). The Roman soldiers were "an emergency police force" to quell any uprising in Jerusalem. Since these were Roman soldiers the Sanhedrin and high priest got permission from the governor Pilate to use them. "The arrangement of this matter would account for the delay in the coming of Judas and the armed force to Gethsemane until after midnight. The temple police were under direct order as servant-officers from the chief priests and Pharisees" (John W. Shepherd, *The Christ of the Gospels*, p. 570).

Judas arrived with a large group of officers from the chief priests, Pharisees and Roman soldiers carrying "torches, lanterns and weapons" (John 18:3). Matthew tells us Judas was "accompanied by a great multitude with swords and clubs" (Matt. 26:47).

"So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?'" (John 18:4). They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Judas is standing with these religious leaders, and Jesus responded "I am." In English we say, "I am he." However, the original is simply, "I AM." The Jewish leaders would be struck by this affirmation of Deity. God was answering them. The great I AM THAT I AM.

"So when He said to them, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground. Therefore He again asked them, 'Whom do you seek?' And they said, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way,' to fulfill the word which He spoke, 'Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one'" (John 18:6-9). God spoke and they went backward and fell to the ground. Dwight Pentecost says, "The Greek verb for 'fell' used here may refer to 'one overcome in battle by a superior' (Luke 21:24), or mean 'to fall down before high ranking persons or divine beings' (Matt. 2:11); rev. 5:14). The verb itself does not tell us whether the soldiers fell down because Christ exerted power over them or whether they fell down out of respect for His royal person. But whether voluntarily or involuntarily, those who represented the power of Rome were bowing before the Lord" (*The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p. 458). It reminds of a coming day when all mankind will bow and worship Him (Phil. 2:9-11).

The Romans came prepared for conflict with their swords, but the Lamb of God humbly submitted as a lamb led to the slaughter. Jesus is absolutely in control of the situation. "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17-18).

At this point Judas proceeds to go up to Jesus and hypocritically greets Him according to the prearranged sign with repeated kisses (Mark 14:44). The kiss was a normal form of greeting between a host and a guest, or between rabbis and their disciples. There was no reason for the disciples to think it out of place at first when Judas greeted Jesus in the Garden. It would have appeared to be a greeting of friendship until the exaggerated, prolonged, overdone showy hug. Eldersheim says, "As the band reached the Garden, Judas went somewhat in advance of them, and reached Jesus just as he had roused the three and was preparing to go and meet His captors. He saluted Him, 'Hail, Rabbi,' so as to be heard by the rest, and not only kissed but covered Him with kisses, kissed Him repeatedly, loudly, effusively. The Savior submitted to the indignity . . ." (vol. 2, p. 543). The friendly oriental embrace was the signal for handing over the Master to His enemies. Obviously Judas was "overplaying his part."

"And Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you have come for.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him" (Matthew 26:50).

Judas stands sheltering himself in the background with the armed men as Jesus is led away. The only time we hear of him again is the sound of his body falling to the ground and bursting.

PETER'S ATTEMPT TO DEFEND JESUS

Peter is standing near Jesus and sees what is happening. With passion he is ready to deliver Jesus from this band of soldiers. He has a large knife or a short sword (*machaira*) he had probably used to prepare the Passover lamb. Obviously, he is not a skilled swordsman. He aims at the high priest's servant's head and hits his right ear. John writes, "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. So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?' So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him" (John 18:10-12). The Physician Luke says Jesus touched the ear of the high priest's servant and healed him (Luke 22:51). Leon Morris says, "Jesus promptly intervened. It may well be that this quick action prevented Peter from being arrested" (*Matthew*, p. 675).

Matthew includes these words of Jesus, "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?" (Matthew 26:53). Surely Peter knew from personal observation the divine power of Jesus over the forces of nature. Did he really think Jesus needed his feeble help? Or is this over compensation of Peter's low self-esteem?

Matthew and Mark stress that all of this is happening to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures. "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?" (v. 54). Matthew's gospel has successfully documented the fulfillment of many of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming of Christ and His death. What was taking place this night was the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God. It was a divine "must." William Hendriksen writes: "Had it not been for God's eternal decree with respect to man's salvation, a decree reflected in the prophets (Isa. 53:7, 10, 12; Jer. 23:6; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 11:12; 13:1, etc.), these captors could have accomplished nothing at all!" (*Matthew*, p. 926).

"At that time Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.' Then all the disciples left Him and fled" (Matthew 26:54-56). It would not have been difficult to have found

Jesus that entire week while He was teaching in the Temple precincts. They were not seeking the good of the public, but their own self-interests. Indeed, they could not arrest Him until He chose the time and place. No man can interfere with God's plan and execution.

Mark adds, "A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked" (Mark 14:51-52). Most scholars are in agreement that the young man is probably the author of the Gospel, John Mark. Eldersheim writes, "When the soldiers had come to seek Jesus in the Upper Chamber of his home, Mark, roused from sleep, had hastily cast about him the loose linen garment or wrapper that lay by his bedside, and followed the armed band to see what would come of it. He now lingered in the rear, and followed as they led away Jesus, never imagining that they would attempt to lay hold on him, since he had not been with the disciples nor yet in the Garden. But they, perhaps the Jewish servants of the High-Priest, had noticed him. They attempted to lay hold on him, when, disengaging himself from their grasps, he left this upper garments in their hands and fled" (vol. 2, p. 545).

Instead of calling down twelve legions of angels to deliver Him, Jesus chose to submit to the will of God (Matt 26:52).

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries from 1972 until 2005. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist missionary and teaches seminary extension courses and evangelism conferences in Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Ecuador.

