



TITLE: WHO ARRESTED WHOM?

TEXT: JOHN 18:1-11

DATE: MARCH 6, 2022

MAIN IDEA: JESUS DEMONSTRATES HIS COMPLETE CONTROL OVER HIS ARREST AND UPCOMING DEATH.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXT: JOHN 18:1-11

¹When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who

betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.” ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What does Jesus say to the people that came with Judas?
2. What is Jesus' response to Peter's actions?
3. Do you notice any familiar themes, phrases, or ideas that you've read in John before?
4. What do these verses tell us about Jesus and what he came to do? Write down as many things that you notice about him in these verses.

Explain – What does this mean?

It's helpful to keep John's purpose statement in view as you move into the Explain, Apply, and Respond sections:

“These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God, and by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

After Jesus’ teaching to his disciples in the previous chapters, “he went out” and set into motion “all that would happen to him.” Jesus led his disciples to a garden that was remote and that his betrayer, Judas, was familiar with. While everything seems uncertain and out of control, let’s look at why this is the exact opposite.

1. Read verses 1-4. In verse 4, John inserts a commentary saying that Jesus knew all that would happen to him. How do verses 1-4 prove that point?
2. Is Jesus straightforward or deceptive with the Jewish and Roman authorities in Verses 4-9? How would you explain your point?
3. What can we learn about Jesus’ words, “I am he,” from the reaction of the listeners – “they drew back and fell to the ground?” (See the following verses for reference – 6:20; 7:45-46; 8:24,28,48-59; 13:19)
4. What does Jesus mean in 7-9 when he says “I have not lost one of those you gave me?” (See the following verses for reference – 6:39; 10:28; 17:12)
5. In Verse 11, Jesus asks Peter, “shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” What does Jesus mean by this question, given the context of his prayer in Gethsemane recorded in Matt 26:26-46?

Apply – How does this change me?

1. The soldiers and officers were not able to stand as Jesus revealed himself to them with his answer “I am he.” We see examples from scripture that when man is confronted by the presence of God he is not able to stand. Why does the presence of God humble us in this way?

2. Jesus trades himself for his disciples to prevent their arrest, fulfilling his words that he has not lost one that was given to him by the Father. The same is true today? Can you think of a time in your life where the fact that Jesus couldn't lose you sustained your faith in difficulty?

3. What do we learn from Peter's actions and Jesus' response? Although Peter has been with Jesus and heard his teaching, he demonstrates his lack of understanding of Jesus' plan by drawing his sword. In that moment Jesus presents the gospel again to Peter saying he will take the cup—there was no other way forward except for Jesus to suffer and die. How does Jesus remind us of the gospel when we demonstrate a lack of understanding?

Respond – What is my next step?

1. As we find ourselves in tough situations, like Peter, how do we train ourselves to respond “in-step” with God’s larger plan for our lives and for the world?

2. We know that the one that said “I am He” is the one that takes away the sins of the world. Based on our salvation through Jesus Christ in the future judgement, what ability does that give us to stand in the present?

COMMENTARY

TAKEN FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN BY D.A. CARSON

1. *Jesus arrested (18:1–11)*

18:1. *Tauta eipōn* (lit. ‘having said these things’) may refer to the prayer of ch. 17 (hence NIV’s ‘When he had finished praying’), but more probably it refers to all of chs. 14–17. Jesus now sets in motion the departure of which he has been speaking (14:2, *etc.*); he exemplifies the self-consecration that has been the burden of his prayer (17:19). *Jesus left* may mean that he and *his disciples* left the upper room; alternatively, it means they left the city (*cf.* notes on 13:31ff.; 14:31). Heading east, they crossed the *Kidron Valley*, the *Wadi en-Nar*, the bottom of which at this point falls two hundred feet below the base of the outer court of the temple. This wadi courses roughly south or south-east until it meets the Dead Sea (*cf.* Ezk. 47:1ff.; Zc. 14:8; *cf.* notes on Jn. 7:37–38). The Greek literally reads *ho cheimarros tou Kedrōn*: a *cheimarros* is an intermittent stream, one that is dry most of the year but that becomes a torrent during seasonal rains. NIV’s ‘Kidron’ preserves Hebrew spelling; following the LXX, this passage (in the Greek) adopts *Kedrōn*, which some later copyists of the New Testament confused with the Greek word *kedros* (‘cedar’), changing the form of the article before the word to generate the

meaning 'valley of the cedars'. Rising to the east of the Kidron is the Mount of Olives. On its slopes *there was an olive grove* (*kēpos*, lit. 'garden'); Matthew (26:36) and Mark (14:32) call it 'Gethsemane' (= 'oil-press'). John says that Jesus and his disciples *went into it*; later he says that Jesus *went out*: the verbs suggest a walled enclosure.

18:2. That *Jesus had often met there with his disciples*, especially in the week leading up to Passover, is attested by Luke 21:37; 22:39 (which must not be taken to mean that Jesus did not on most nights eventually withdraw all the way to Bethany). On the night of Passover itself, Jewish law required that observing Jews remain within an extended city limit that included Gethsemane but excluded Bethany. Probably this walled olive grove was set aside by some wealthy supporter for the use of Jesus and his disciples. They resorted there sufficiently regularly that Judas *knew the place*. The time (at night) and location (away from the city itself, removed from crowds that could become mobs) provided the betrayer with an ideal venue in which to bring the arresting officers right up to Jesus (*cf.* Lk. 22:6). Having 'sanctified himself' for the sacrificial death immediately ahead, Jesus does not seek to escape his opponents by changing his habits: he goes to the place where Judas Iscariot could count on finding him.

18:3. Only John specifies that, in addition to bringing the Jewish officials, Judas Iscariot also guided *a detachment of soldiers*. The Greek (*tēn speiran*) makes it clear that these were not Jews, but '*the cohort* (of Roman auxiliaries)'. A full auxiliary cohort had a paper strength of 1,000 men, *i.e.* 760 foot soldiers and 240 cavalry, and was led by a 'chiliarch' (lit. 'leader of a thousand', often translated 'tribune'; v. 12, 'commander'). In practice a cohort normally numbered 600 men; but in any case the noun *speira* can refer to a 'maniple' of only 200 men, and it is not necessary to assume that an entire maniple was present. Roman auxiliary troops were usually stationed at Caesarea, but during the feast days they were garrisoned in the fortress of Antonia to the north-west of the temple complex. This move to Jerusalem not only ensured more efficient policing of the huge throngs that swelled the population of Jerusalem during the high feasts, but guaranteed that any mob violence or incipient rebellion, bred by the crowding and the religious fervour, would be efficiently crushed. That is probably the reason why they were called out to support the temple officials: the risk of mob response was doubtless rather high in the case of an arrest of someone with Jesus' popularity.

It is mere pedantry that understands the participle *labōn* to mean that Judas was 'taking' the troops to Jesus, as if he had the authority to command them. He merely 'took' them through the darkness to the place where he thought it would be possible to arrest Jesus in relative privacy—*i.e.* he was *guiding* them. The *officials from the chief priests and Pharisees* were doubtless temple police, the primary arresting officers (if we may judge by Jesus' destination after his arrest). *Chief priests and Pharisees* are often linked (7:32, 45; 11:47, 57). The former expression refers to the priestly aristocracy that largely controlled the Sanhedrin; the latter are not mentioned again after this point (*cf.* notes on 1:19, 24). The combination of Jewish and Roman authorities in this arrest indicts the whole world. At the historical level, it reminds us that common foes generate strange friendships (*cf.* Lk. 23:6–12), and suggests that Pilate may well have been tipped off to the imminence of the arrest before Jesus was actually brought into his court.

The *torches, lanterns and weapons* are not anomalous, even though there was a full moon (since it was Passover): doubtless Judas had told them where they were going,

and the prospect of scrambling around a mountainside in pursuit of one man prompted more than one official to bring a light.

18:4. All four Gospels present Jesus as knowing what would happen: *e.g.* in the Synoptics the passion predictions, the agonized praying in Gethsemane and the calm insistence that he could call on legions of angels for help are otherwise meaningless. But the theme is especially strong in John (*cf.* 10:18): Jesus offers up his life in obedience to his Father, not as a pathetic martyr buffeted by the ill winds of a cruel fate. In full knowledge of what was to befall him, Jesus *went out* (of the enclosed olive grove, apparently) and asked his question.

18:5–6. Perhaps it was at this point that Judas kissed Jesus: John does not record the detail. The Evangelist's parenthetical remark *And Judas the traitor was standing there with them* shows that he is not thereby exonerating the betrayer. Considering Judas' role in leading the arresting officials to the garden (v. 2) it seems arbitrary to argue that the kiss is omitted to de-emphasize Judas' significance and underline Jesus' control of events. More likely the Evangelist, omitting details, is simply driving toward the Christological centre: 'Who is it you want?'

Jesus of Nazareth (lit. 'Jesus the Nazarene', an uncommon way of saying the same thing), they reply. Jesus' answer, *I am he* (on the variant, *cf.* the Additional Note), evokes a startling response: *they drew back and fell to the ground*. The Greek form of Jesus' answer is ambiguous: *egō eimi* (lit. 'I am') is often to be read as mere self-identification ('It is I'), or as if the appropriate complement were inserted from the context (*i.e.* 'I am Jesus'), but can bear far richer overtones (*cf.* notes on 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19). In Isaiah 40–55, it is God himself who repeatedly takes these words on his lips. But precisely because the expression is indeed ambiguous, and the context provides a perfectly adequate complement, we must not conjecture that Jesus' interlocutors fell back for no other reason than that Jesus uttered an expression that ought to be reserved for the Almighty alone. For those with eyes to see as they read this book, that hint, that overtone, is undoubtedly present; but if those who first heard Jesus speak had so understood him, it is far more likely that their reaction would have mirrored that recorded in 8:58–59, where Jesus utters the same words without the covering ambiguity.

Others (*e.g.* Lindars, p. 541) have suggested this is a Johannine creation of a theophany, in which the normal experience is to fall prostrate (Ezk. 1:28; Dn. 10:9; Acts 9:4; Rev. 1:17). Yet such theophanies do not depict the worshipper *drawing back* and falling to the ground. More important, if John is creating a theophany, he is painfully clumsy: in this view, the arresting officials experience a theophany as they gaze on Jesus and hear his words, and then proceed to arrest him anyway! Once again, the reader, after the fact, knows that the incarnate Word manifested his glory in the veil of his flesh (*cf.* notes on 1:14), but John does not need to resort to formally incomprehensible narrative in order to score theological points. The Evangelist has already testified to the effect of Jesus' words on temple officials sent to arrest him (7:45–46); indeed, it is not at all unlikely that some of the same personnel are again involved. If they have been awed by Jesus before, if they have been dumbfounded by his teaching, his authority, his directness in the full light of day in the precincts of the temple where they most feel at home, it is not hard to believe that they are staggered by his open self-disclosure on a sloping mountainside in the middle of the night—the

more so if some of them hear the overtones of God's self-disclosure in the prophecy of Isaiah. It may take them a few seconds to pull themselves together and regroup; in the Evangelist's eyes, their physical ineptitude was another instance of people responding better than they knew (*cf.* notes on 11:49–52).

18:7–9. The scene is repeated, but before Jesus is taken away he ensures that his followers are not harmed. Just as events fulfil the authoritative and prophetic words of Scripture, so this event fulfills Jesus' own words, which cannot be less authoritative (*cf.* Mk. 13:31). The utterance that is here fulfilled, *I have not lost one of those you gave me*, is a summary of 17:12, itself based on 6:39; 10:28. The exception of Judas Iscariot, verbalized in these verses, is understood and not here repeated. Some have objected that the verbal claims of these verses relate to the eternal salvation of Jesus' followers, while this 'fulfillment' depicts nothing more than escape from arrest and (perhaps) physical death. Dodd (*IFG*, pp. 432–433) rightly rejects the criticism. In one sense, the disciples' safety is secured by Jesus' arrest and death. But this is not simply the substitution of physical safety for eternal salvation. Rather, it is the symbol of it, an illustration of it—more, it is the first step in securing the eschatological reality.

18:10–11. Although this incident is reported in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 26:51–52; Mk. 14:47; Lk. 22:49–51), only John names Simon Peter and Malchus (*cf.* notes introducing this chapter). The sword (*machaira*) may have been not much more than a dagger. The blow was as clumsy as Peter's courage was great; the tactic was as pointless as Peter's misunderstanding was total. John agrees with Luke in noting that it was Malchus' right ear that was severed, and with Matthew in recording Jesus' command to put away the sword (*cf.* also Je. 47:6). But in Matthew this command is followed by a paraenetic conclusion: 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword'. Here John's report focuses all the attention on Jesus Christ himself: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* Peter's bravery is not only useless, it is a denial of the work to which Jesus has just consecrated himself—and entirely in line with the Synoptic evidence as to the failure of the disciples to comprehend the passion when it was announced to them (Mk. 8:31–33 par.; *cf.* Jn. 13:6–10). Jesus' commitment to 'drink the cup' prepared for him by his Father calls to mind Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39, 42; *cf.* also Mk. 14:36; Jn. 12:27–28), though the emphasis here—firm resolution to accept what the Father gives him—better reflects the *outcome* of the prayer in Gethsemane ('not my will, but yours be done') than the agonizing supplication that secured it.¹

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 576–579). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.