

Exegesis

Vs. 3 – “Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns, torches, and weapons.” This was a mixed group. The Greek word translated as “band of men” is **σπεῖρα** (*spi'-ra*), and it refers to a platoon of *Roman* soldiers (cf. Mat. 27:27; Ac. 10:1; 27:1). Such soldiers were present everywhere in Jerusalem during festivals to keep the influx of people from rioting or becoming rebellious. This is probably why they accompanied the "officers from the chief priest." Apprehending someone as famous as Jesus had the potential to become dangerous, maybe even violent.¹ A little Roman muscle would ensure the peace. And given the fact the Jews had no authority over the Romans, Pilate likely knew of Jesus' arrest beforehand.² Otherwise, the presence of the soldiers is hard to explain.

As the name implies, the "officers from the chief priests" was a *Jewish* patrol unit that policed the Temple ground. These may have even been the same ones who were first dispatched to capture Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. 7:32). Thus, rather than restating that Judas greeted Jesus with a kiss (cf. Matt. 26:48-49), John emphasized how the Betrayer came with a mixed military unit, made up of Jew and Gentile alike. And this troop was heavily armed with "lanterns," "torches," and "weapons."³ They were prepared for a conflict.

Vs. 4 – Their ambush would fail since the Lord was aware of their plot. Being omniscient, he knew "all things that should come upon him." As such, even their devilish scheme had always been a part of the plan (cf. 13:27; Gen. 50:20). And so, rather than disappear, using the boughs and branches of Gethsemane to make his escape (cf. 5:13; 10:39), Jesus "went forth" and met his captors, greeting them with a question: "Whom seek ye?" The lamps and weaponry were unnecessary and starkly contrasted with Jesus' peaceful disposition.⁴

Vs. 5-6 – The answer to this question is not surprising. These troops were looking for “Jesus of Nazareth.” But what would've been a surprise to the rest of the disciples was that amongst this armed guard was a *familiar face*: "Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them." Jesus had said that one of the twelve would betray him (cf. 13:21). What was once a mysteriously disturbing revelation a couple hours ago is now made miserably explicit. The Betrayer's identity is no longer a secret; he's unmasked himself by the glow of torchlight. Rather than standing

¹ Carson (1991), p. 577.

² Carson (1991), p. 577.

³ Matt. 26:47, 55 mentions they were also armed with "staves" (i.e., clubs).

⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 505

shoulder to shoulder with his brothers, Judas has obviously joined hands with men of dark imaginations and even darker intentions. It seems the Betrayer found a like-minded community where he could finally be himself (cf. 12:6).

Since John does not mention Judas' later remorse and subsequent suicide (cf. Matt. 27:3-10), this is the last mention of him in this account.⁵ Little regard is given for any of his more redeemable qualities or acts. And rightfully so. There are some things so egregious that there is little hope for redemption, and betraying the Son of God is one of them (cf. Mar. 3:29). Though, if Jesus forgave Peter for betraying him three times and Paul for massacring Christians, we must assume he would've forgiven the titular Betrayer as well. But such a point is mute. Judas died as an unrepentant monster, choosing to be forever defined by this most deplorable act. So much so that his name would become synonymous with double-dealing and treachery. All sin is terrible. But betrayal is particularly heinous because it uses trust to harm a loved one. And it is even more reprehensible when a double cross leads to the death of an innocent; even Judas himself understood this (cf. Matt. 27:4).

But Judas' betrayal wasn't the only surprise. John tells us, "As soon then as [Jesus] had said unto them, I am *he*, they went backward, and fell to the ground." What should we make of this?

On the one hand, "I am *he*" is more literally, "I am," hence, as it has before (cf. 8:58), such specific phraseology designates deity.⁶ The reader of John's account is now sensitive to such utterances. Furthermore, falling to the ground is a typical response in the presence of God throughout the Scriptures (cf. Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 2:46; Ac. 9:4; Rev. 1:17; etc.). Though this army band came armed to the teeth, even employing one of Jesus' own disciples against him, they were still no match for God incarnate. "Jesus of Nazareth" and the Great "I am" are one and the same. And anyone who comes thinking they can take Yahweh by force will be laid low. The Lord comes willingly, or else he does not come at all.

On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that, after being knocked down by the divine name, the same group would then proceed to arrest Jesus. Even when Jesus explicitly equated himself with the "I AM" in 8:58, no one fell; quite the opposite. They tried stoning Jesus. Thus, a less supernatural interpretation of this moment sees the group's reaction as little more than the reaction of a group that's been surprised in the middle of the night.⁷ Think about it. This band of soldiers was ready to defend themselves and was more than prepared to search through a

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 505.

⁶ Köstenberger (2008), p. 507; Klink (2016), p. 735-736

⁷ Carson (1991), p. 578-579.

dark orchard. But instead of hurriedly running through the olive trees in pursuit of their target or being thrust into some nighttime battle, a man suddenly appears to them, asking who it is that they're looking for. When Jesus identified himself, the confession might've been such a shock that the entire group went into disarray. They were not expecting such a calm and peaceful response from the one they were about to arrest. Thus, while taking a step "backward," they end up tripping over one another, falling in the process.

Both views have much to commend. However, the former view seems preferable for two reasons. First, John directly connects the band's reaction to Jesus' pronouncement as the "I am" and not to some unattested surprise. Second, though it is difficult to imagine Jesus being arrested after such a moment, it is even stranger to suggest that the band was surprised by Jesus at all. We've already been told that Judas "knew the place" (vs. 2). They were in that very garden to find Jesus. That a bunch of soldiers who were being led straight to their target would be shocked to find their target is an interpretation that relies more on conjecture than evidence drawn from the text.

Vs. 7-9 – This exchange is almost identical to vs. 4-5. Jesus asked who the combatants were looking for, and, as before, they said, "Jesus of Nazareth," and, once again, using the divine name, the Lord tells them, "I have told you that I am *he*...." This interaction differs because, rather than falling to the ground, Jesus lets them keep standing this time and says, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." The Son of God made sure he was the only one captured that night.

But why? John explains, "That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none." This is a reference to 17:12, where the Lord prayed, "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." No lasting harm will come to those who've been given to the Son by the Father (cf. Rom. 8:35-39). If the Lord kept the eleven from being captured in the garden, a task that would've been all too easy given they were outgunned and outnumbered, then surely, no one can pluck a believer out of Jesus' hand (cf. 10:27-30).

Vs. 10 – While the Lord wanted to keep things from getting out of hand, not every disciple cared about keeping the peace.⁸ The last time we heard of "Simon Peter" was in 13:36-38, where the Lord predicted his betrayal, and now we see him drawing "a sword" and cutting off the "right ear" of "the high priest's servant." Was this overcompensation? Was Peter trying to prove his loyalty? Was he aiming for the servant's head and, instead, got the ear as his target

⁸ Klink (2016), p. 737, "Peter's response suggests that he was less than agreeable with the self-sacrifice of Jesus."

ducked? It is hard to say without delving into speculative territory. However, we can say that Peter did not, at least at this point, intend to abandon or deny Jesus.

Interestingly, while the Synoptics record this event (cf. Mat. 26:51; Mar. 14:57; Lu. 22:50), John is the only one who reveals that Roman soldiers were a part of this retinue, that it was Peter who cut a man's ear off, and that the name of his target was "Malchus." Three observations can be gleaned from these three facts. First, they demonstrate that the world, both Gentile and Jewish, ought to be implicated in Jesus' arrest.⁹ The Jews bear the greater condemnation, but we cannot forget they had help. Second, their inclusion in the narrative lends even more credibility to John's account. Only someone who cared deeply about the truth would reveal such an embarrassing revelation about the lead apostle of the church. And third, Peter's actions illustrate how tightly wound the disciples must've been. He was ready to die defending Jesus, and it is unlikely he was alone in this (cf. 11:16). After all, Peter wasn't the only apostle who was carrying a sword that night (cf. Lu. 22:38).

Vs. 11 – Jesus will not abide violent tendencies in his disciples. For he knows that a life of violence can only end in violence (cf. Mat. 26:52). So, the Lord says to Peter, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" What sort of cup was Jesus referring to? In a psalm about God's judgment upon the wicked, we read, "For in the hand of the Lord there is a *cup* [emphasis added], and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them" (Psa. 75:8). This means that a phrase like "the cup" could be used as a metaphor that signified God's wrath (cf. Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15-17; Ezek. 23:31-34; Hab. 2:16).¹⁰

So, for the Lord to say that he will not be prohibited from drinking "the cup which [his] Father hath given [him]," he's referring to how, on the cross, Jesus Christ was our *substitute*. Rather than humanity receiving God's judgment, his Son took that cup and drank deep until there was nothing left. He bore the penalty for our sins. Christ's work is one of reconciliation, not revolution. The Son of God came to save mankind from God's wrath, not overthrow the government, and neither did he come to assume some earthly crown. Had Peter truly understood the nature of Jesus' messianic mission, he would not have tried to stand in the Lord's way. His is the way of the cross, not the sword. So it has always been, and so may it ever be.

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 577, "At the historical level, it reminds us that common foes generate strange friendships" (cf. Lu. 23:6-12).

¹⁰ Klink (2016), p. 738.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 79 | John 18:3-11

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Tonight, we'll see the Lord courageous and in perfect control. He does not run or hide from the band of soldiers sent to take him but meets them head-on. And though they were armed with torches and swords, Jesus came unarmed and willingly offered himself. Even when one of his own tries to defend him, the Son of God rebukes him, commanding him to put away his sword.

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here:

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: info@GracePointeLife.com

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

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