

The Life and Times of Jesus Christ

9

The Last Night of the Messiah

The last day of Jesus' life moved at lightning speed. Never in the history of mankind has one day been more scrutinized by historians and scholars. The common man is more familiar with the events that took place in these brief hours than with any other similar period in ancient history. These events have been portrayed in movies and enacted in countless Easter plays.

In this lesson, we too will sift through the available evidence in order to identify the sequence of events that led up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. These events were set in motion not by the enemies of Jesus, but by Jesus himself, when he instructed his disciples in **Matthew 26:18**:

“...Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: *My appointed time is near*. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’”

Within 24 hours of issuing this instruction, Jesus would be betrayed, tried before the Sanhedrin, tried before Pilate, scourged and then crucified. Yet from the Gospel record emerges one inescapable fact. Jesus was not the victim of forces beyond his control. Up until this point, his enemies had been unable to kill him, since “his time had not yet come” (**John 7:30**). But now everything changes.

Take a look at these statements made by Jesus during his last 24 hours:

A Portrait of the Messiah

The Divinity of the Messiah

The Birth of the Messiah

The Childhood of the Messiah

The People of the Messiah

The Inauguration of the Messiah

The Opposition to the Messiah

The Last Week of the Messiah

▶ **The Last Night of the Messiah** ◀

The Death of the Messiah

The Resurrection of the Messiah

The Ascendancy of the Messiah

- **Matthew 26:18** – “My appointed time is near.”
- **Matthew 26:45** – “Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”
- **Matthew 26:53** – “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal twelve legions of angels?”
- **Luke 22:22** – “The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.”
- **John 12:31** – “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.”
- **John 14:30-31** – “I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”
- **John 18:11** – “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”
- **John 19:11** – “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

From the moment of his entry into Jerusalem, there is the clear sense that Jesus is the master of his own destiny. He is calling the shots. At each stage of Jesus’ arrest and trial there are clear hints that this has been orchestrated by God. Jesus’ time had now come. As **Revelation 13:8** describes him, Jesus was “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” This sense of destiny is perhaps best underlined by Jesus’ own words in **John 12:27** when he said:

“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”

When we realize who Jesus was, his arrest, trial and execution is seen in a brand new light. This is the one who created the universe with his word (**John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2**), yet he stood unresisting before the accusations of his enemies. As Oswald Chambers writes:

“We marvel, not that he performed miracles, but rather that he performed so few. He who could have stormed the citadels of men with mighty battalions of angels, let men spit upon him and crucify him.”¹

Let’s start our investigation of Jesus’ last 24 hours with the event that triggered everything – the meal we call “the Lord’s Supper” (**1 Corinthians 11:20**).

The Preparations for the Lord’s Supper

Read Luke 22:7-13

Jesus sent Peter and John to make preparations for the Passover. All this was done secretly, not because Jesus had anything to hide, but because prior to the festival the religious leaders “had given orders that if anyone found out where

Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him” (**John 11:57**). It is obvious that even Judas did not know where they would meet that night, otherwise he would have gone to the chief priests earlier with the information.

Jesus’ instructions are specifically recorded for us. As Peter and John entered Jerusalem, a man carrying a jar of water would meet them. While this may have been a miraculous arrangement, it is also quite plausible that this meeting had been pre-organized by Jesus. This meal held great significance for him. It was not merely going to be his last meal. This meal would be the starting point for the kingdom of God coming in its fullness, the institution of a brand new covenant between God and Israel. This is why he said in **Matthew 26:18**: “My appointed time is near.”

There was little chance that this rendezvous would backfire. A man carrying a water jar was a rare occurrence, for this was an exclusively female duty. But just to be on the safe side, the two disciples were instructed to ask: “The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”

Read Mark 14:12-16

In Mark’s account, the disciples are not told to speak to the man with the water jar himself, but to follow him. It is to “the owner of the house he enters” that they to say: “The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples.”

All this happened as Jesus had arranged. The man with the water jar led Peter and John to a house with “a large upper room” which was “fully furnished” and available for them to make the preparations for the Passover. This in itself is an unusual occurrence, since the city by this time was packed with pilgrims and every available room had been rented out. If we read between the lines, we can safely assume that the owner of the house was a secret sympathizer and had visited Jesus sometime earlier in his ministry. Theories abound as to the identity of the owner of this house. Some have identified him with the “a certain ruler” of **Luke 18:18-25**.

There is another theory worth considering. This “large upper room” appears to play a prominent role in the Gospel record. Jesus probably appeared twice to his disciples in this upper room after his resurrection (**John 20:19-29**), for it is likely that this was “the room where they were staying” (**Acts 1:13**). And it was probably in this “upstairs” room that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 1:13; 2:1-2**), and may have even been the same house shaken in **Acts 4:31**. Now if all these rooms are indeed identical, then it is possible that the “large upper room” belonged to Mary, the mother of John Mark, for her home is described in **Acts 12:12** as a house large enough to assemble a crowd of people.

The Foot Washing

Read Luke 22:24-38

The disciples had heard Jesus utter the long-awaited words “appointed time”

(**Matthew 26:18**) and had naturally assumed that this meant the appointed time of his revelation to Israel. And so the jockeying for positions of status and power had begun once again. The likely time for this argument would be when seating arrangements around the table were being assigned. The Essenes sat at their meal table “each in order of his dignity.”² And it appears from **Luke 14:1-11** that this was common practice among the Pharisees too. The places of honor were near the host or the highest dignitary, so it would be easy to imagine that the disciples would be vying for who would sit at the right hand and left hand of Jesus (read again **Mark 10:35-44**).

We know that John (called “the beloved disciple” in **John 13:23**, KJV) ended up reclining next to Jesus during the meal,* so it is likely that the argument was started by Simon, who would have still been angry at the earlier request made by James and John to be the ones who would sit at his right hand and left hand. In fact, Jesus singles Simon out for special counsel at this time (**Luke 22:31-34**).

All this happened hours before his betrayal. And yet knowing that his time of suffering was fast approaching, Jesus took time to teach his disciples the greatest lesson they would ever learn. **Luke 22:25-27** records his words:

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

Jesus had previously indicated that he, as master, would serve them (**Luke 12:35-37; Mark 10:45**). But now Jesus put his words into action. **John 13:1** tells us:

“...Having loved his own who were in the world, he now *showed them* the full extent of his love.”

Read John 13:2-17

Never before had this happened. Never had the guest of honor – the highest dignitary at the table – taken a bowl of water and begun to wash the feet of those “lower in status” than him. The task of foot-washing was considered the most degrading of jobs and was given to the lowest of servants. In fact, the guests at a meal would immediately identify any servant who washed their feet as the lowest in the rank of servants. Yet the disciples watched in bewilderment as Jesus got up from the meal, removed his outer clothing (leaving only his undergarment) and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then they watched in shock as he “poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

* If John was on one side of Jesus, who was on the other side? Amazingly, the indication is that it was Judas! Because Jesus and his disciples reclined at the table (**Matthew 26:20**), which was the normal Jewish practice (**Matthew 26:7; Luke 7:39; 11:37; John 12:2**), Judas would need to be next to Jesus in order to dip his bread into the sop with Jesus (**Matthew 26:23**), and close enough for Jesus to tell him softly: “What you are about to do, do quickly” (**John 13:27**).

No wonder Simon reacted so strongly. He watched as Jesus began washing the feet of his disciples, probably starting at those close to him (John and Judas). By the time it got to him, Simon had already worked out what he was going to say:

“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

Knowing what was going through Simon Peter’s mind, Jesus said: “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” But Simon refused point blank: “No, you shall never wash my feet.”

Simon probably thought it was a test of some kind, designed to select who would take the rightful place as First Disciple of Jesus. Even though the other disciples had allowed their master to demean himself in this way, he would not. But he didn’t expect Jesus’ answer: “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

Simon’s reaction was a complete pendulum swing. “Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Even now, Peter’s pride kept him firmly in the limelight. Rather than understand what Jesus was doing, all he could see was that he wanted to have the full measure of any honor that Jesus could bestow. He did not yet understand that this was not just something Jesus was doing to his disciples, but that Jesus was setting an example for his disciples to follow (**John 13:12-17**). And so Jesus answered Peter:

“A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.* And you are clean, though not every one of you.”

What was Jesus teaching his disciples? The lesson was simple. As leaders, he expected them to take the attitude of a servant and serve those under their care. This was exemplified in the washing of feet, but Jesus meant more than just performing a ceremonial act. The washing of feet was to be extended to every expression of leadership in the coming kingdom of God. Today, the washing of feet does not have the same meaning as in the first century. But the principle of feet washing – taking the most menial servant’s position in our attitude and behavior to one another – still applies.

The Institution of the New Covenant

After Jesus washing his disciples’ feet, the meal begins. Jesus begins to bless the bread and the wine according to first century Jewish custom, but he does this in a brand new way.

* What did Jesus mean by this? He was obviously speaking of a spiritual rather than a physical cleanliness, for he goes on to say: “And you are clean, though not every one of you.” The Jews had no difficulty in connecting physical and spiritual cleanliness, for even the act of washing before a meal had more to do with spiritual cleanliness than physical (**Matthew 15:1-2,10-11**). In **John 15:3**, Jesus declared: “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” As Christians, we have been made clean by the word of Christ (**Ephesians 5:27**). We have already had a spiritual bath, and do not need to be constantly cleansed from the effects of the old life. However, we are not immune to the ongoing effects of this world. In Scripture, dust represents life without the Spirit of God. Dust symbolizes death, mourning and subjugation – all the effects of the Fall (**Genesis 3:19; 1 Samuel 4:12; 1 Kings 16:2; Psalm 119:25; Isaiah 52:2**) – and as we walk in this world, spiritual dust clings to our feet. But as believers, we have the duty and privilege of washing one another’s spiritual feet. Thus we see in **John 13:3-17** two levels of application – a practical application and a spiritual application. On both these levels, Jesus says: “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

It is not certain from the Gospel record that the meal we call the Lord's Supper was the actual Passover meal (see the supplementary study **SP112-09** for further details). But whether this was the main Passover meal, or the meal of preparation before the Passover, an understanding of the Passover ceremony helps us to appreciate what Jesus is doing during the course of the Lord's Supper.

As part of the preparation for the Passover meal, three cakes of unleavened bread had been placed on the table. During the course of the meal, the host would take the middle slice, break it in two, and declare: "This is the bread of affliction, which we ate in Egypt." This bread would then be dipped into a sop of bitter herbs (which represented their suffering) and passed along to all those at the table.

Following Passover custom, Jesus took the middle slice of unleavened bread.* But instead of saying, "This is the bread of affliction," he declared, "This is *my body*, given for you" (**Luke 22:19**). Instead of the affliction being borne by the nation of Israel, Jesus now declared that the affliction would be borne by him (see **Isaiah 53:3-11**).

After this, Jesus took the cup and declared: "This cup is the new covenant *in my blood*, which is poured out for you."† But the Passover meal had more than one cup (note **Luke 22:17**). In fact, there were four cups, each representing something different in the Passover ceremony. Which was the one that Jesus took when he declared, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood"? The third cup of the Passover ceremony was called the Cup of the Covenant, representing the covenant that God made with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. But when Jesus took this Cup of the Covenant, he declared that a new covenant was now being made – this time a covenant not instituted through the sacrifice of an animal, but a covenant "in my blood."

The Close of the Meal

During the latter part of this meal – the meal he had "eagerly desired to eat" with his disciples (**Luke 22:15**) – Jesus speaks of his impending departure. He had already told them that one of the Twelve would betray him (**John 13:21**). He had revealed the identify of this betrayer to John and Simon (**John 13:26**), and Judas had already departed (**John 13:27-30**). Jesus had also told Simon that he would disown his Lord three times (**Luke 22:31-34**) and that the rest of the disciples would all run away (**Mark 14:27-31**). Now Jesus begins to comfort his disciples.

➤ **The promise of the bridegroom (John 14:1-4)** – In these four verses, Jesus echoed the words spoken by the Jewish bridegroom at the betrothal of his wife. When a Jewish man became engaged to his bride, there was a

* What is the significance of taking the middle slice of unleavened bread? Here we see the picture of the Son of God (the second, or "middle," person of the triune God) as "the living bread that came down from heaven" (**John 6:51**).

† Jesus had already prepared the way for his two New Covenant declarations – "This is my body" and "This is my blood" – when he declared in **John 6:49-58**: "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

period of time before he would return to take his bride as his wife. During that time, he would be preparing a place for her to live with him, usually on his father's property. He would tell her, "I am going to my father's house to prepare a room for you, and then I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you will be where I am." And at this final hour, before he faced the death and humiliation of the Cross, Jesus spoke tenderly to his disciples with the voice of the bridegroom (note [John 3:29](#); [Matthew 9:15](#)). He said, in effect, "I am the bridegroom and you are my betrothed. But the wedding is not yet. I am going away, but do not be troubled by this. As your bridegroom, I am going to prepare a place for you, and then I will return to take you to be where I am."

- **The way to the Father ([John 14:5-6](#))** – The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant when he said: "I am going away." They probably thought that he was going on ahead of them to another place. Even the common people had misinterpreted similar words spoken by Jesus, thinking he meant he might be traveling away ([John 7:33-36](#)) or that he planned to kill himself ([John 8:21-22](#)). And so Thomas' replied: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus responded to this by making an incredible statement: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
- **Revealing the Father ([John 14:7-14](#))** – Philip now tells Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." In answer to this request, Jesus declared that "I am in the Father and the Father is in me."
- **The promise of "another Counselor" ([John 14:15-26](#))** – Jesus told his disciples that although he is going away, he would not leave them as orphans ([14:18](#)). Instead, he said, "I will come to you." But he would come to them in the form of "another Counselor to be with you forever" ([14:16](#)), whom he identified as "the Spirit of truth" ([14:17](#)).
- **The promise of peace ([John 14:27-29](#))** – It is obvious that the disciple were "troubled" and "afraid" at Jesus' words, for he now said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (see also [16:33](#)).

It is at this point that Jesus declared in [John 14:30-31](#):

"I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Come now; let us leave."

It was now late evening and Judas had probably been gone over an hour. Jesus knew that Judas would first bring the arresting party to the upper room where they were eating, but this was still not the exact hour for his arrest. Everything had been timed down to the last minute by his Father, and Jesus was clear that he was doing "exactly what my Father has commanded me." This night had been foreordained from the very creation of the world ([Matthew 26:18](#); [Luke 22:22](#);

Revelation 13:8). **John 14:31** marks, therefore, the point when Jesus and his remaining disciples prepare to leave for Gethsemane. But Jesus had not finished teaching his disciples, and so as they prepare to leave, he continued to speak:

- **The true vine (John 15:1-8)** – The Bible often refers to Israel as a vine (**Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 3:14; 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1**), but here Jesus declares himself to be the *true* vine, the beginning of a new Israel, a vine that would genuinely bear fruit for God. But in order for his disciples to bear this fruit, they must remain attached to the vine.
- **The new commandment (John 15:9-17)** – Jesus now gives them what he calls “a new commandment” (KJV). At Sinai, the Old Covenant had been instituted with the Ten Commandments, which provided the basis for that covenant. Now Jesus institutes the New Covenant, not with ten commandments, but with a single commandment: “Love each other *as I have loved you*” (see also **John 13:34-35**).
- **The reaction of the world (John 15:18-25; 16:1-4)** – Jesus now warns his disciples that even though the world would recognize them as his disciples if they love one another (**13:35**), this does not mean that the world would like them. In fact, just as the world hated Jesus, so it would hate his disciples (see also **17:14**).
- **The work of the coming Counselor (John 15:26-27; 16:5-15)** – Jesus continues to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. He even goes as far as saying that it is a good thing that he is leaving them, for if he did not go, he could not send the promised Counselor. The Greek word *parakletos*, translated as Counselor (NIV) and Comforter (KJV), literally means “one who comes alongside.” Just as Jesus had come alongside his disciples, teaching them the principles of the kingdom of God, so the Spirit of truth would now come alongside them to “guide you into all truth.” Just as Jesus had been present in the world to “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (note **John 15:22**), so the Holy Spirit would now fulfil this role “because I am going to the Father.”

At this point, Jesus makes the enigmatic statement: “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me” (**John 16:16**). With our perfect hindsight, we can understand clearly what Jesus was meaning, but the disciples were confused by this statement (**16:17-18**). Jesus therefore begins to speak clearly of his coming departure:

- **A time of grief is coming but this grief will turn to joy (John 16:19-22)** – He had just told them that in a little while “you will see me no more.” He tells them that this will result in weeping and mourning. But he likens it to a woman giving birth to a child. At the time of labor, a woman experiences great pain, but the pain is all but forgotten when she gives birth to her child. In the same way, the joy that will result would overwhelm the original grief at his departure, for “after a little while you will see me.”

- **The day of joy will be characterized by full authority in Jesus' name (John 16:23-24)** – In “that day,” says Jesus, the disciples will no longer ask him directly for anything. They will have the full authority of his name to ask the Father themselves. This would make their joy complete.

Jesus had already told his disciples on a number of occasions throughout the night that he was going back to the Father:

- **John 13:33** – “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come” (note **8:21**).
- **John 13:36** – “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”
- **John 14:2-3** – “In my Father’s house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”
- **John 14:12** – “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”
- **John 14:19** – “Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me...”
- **John 14:28** – “...I am going away and I am coming back to you...”
- **John 14:28** – “...If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”
- **John 16:5** – “Now I am going to him who sent me...”
- **John 16:7** – “...It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”
- **John 16:10** – “...I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.”

You may think that this should be clear enough for the disciples to understand, but at the time, Jesus’ words confused the disciples, since it totally contradicted their understanding of what it meant for Jesus to be Messiah. So, in **John 16:28**, Jesus finally speaks “without figures of speech” to his disciples:

“I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

The Prayer of Jesus

Read John 17

We often call **Matthew 6:9-13** the “Lord’s Prayer,” but that prayer should be called the “Disciples’ Prayer,” for it is the model prayer Jesus used to teach his

disciples how to pray (**Luke 11:1-4**). The real “Lord’s Prayer” is **John 17**. This is the prayer that John records Jesus himself praying to his Father. In this prayer we discover what really mattered to Jesus. This prayer set the pace for the events that would transpire later that night and into the next day. The work he had been given to do was now complete (**17:4**) and he now looked forward to experiencing again “the glory I had with you before the world began” (**17:5**).

At this point, Jesus makes two requests to his Father:

- **John 17:6-19** – Jesus asks that his disciples be protected during the time of his departure, and that they be sanctified (or “set apart for holy use”) by the word of truth.
- **John 17:20-26** – Jesus prays also for “those who will believe in me through [the disciples’] message.” That’s you! You have believed in Jesus because of the message of those early disciples! Even in the final hours of his life, Jesus had you on his mind. He saw beyond his weak and faithless disciples to a time when his Church would be energized by the message of the risen Lord.

What was the core of Jesus’ prayer just before the Cross? **John 17:21-23** tells us:

“...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me...”

That’s what mattered so much to Jesus. That’s what he died on the Cross to achieve.

Read Ephesians 5:25-27

And so, with you on his mind, Jesus prepared to leave the upper room on his way to Gethsemane.

The Road to Gethsemane

Read Matthew 26:30-35

Matthew records that the last thing Jesus and his disciples did before leaving the upper room was to sing “a hymn.” The hymn was probably **Psalms 115-118**, traditionally sung to conclude the Passover meal. Let’s take a look at the significance of these four psalms as Jesus prepared to face his greatest test at Gethsemane.

- **Psalms 115:17-18** – “It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down in silence; it is we who extol the Lord, both now and forevermore...”
- **Psalms 116:1-4** – “I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, save me!’”

- **Psalm 116:8-11** – “For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed; therefore I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted.’ And in my dismay I said, ‘All men are liars.’”
- **Psalm 116:13-14** – “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.”
- **Psalm 116:15** – “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”
- **Psalm 118:5-7** – “In my anguish I cried to the Lord, and he answered by setting me free. The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.”
- **Psalm 118:14** – “The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”
- **Psalm 118:17-18** – “I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.”
- **Psalm 118:22-24** – “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”
- **Psalm 118:26-27** – “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.”
- **Psalm 118:28-29** – “You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Upon leaving the upper room, Jesus and his disciples walked through the darkened streets of Jerusalem and out the Golden Gate toward the Mount of Olives. Jesus was now walking in reverse the path of the triumphal entry. But now there were no cries of “Hosanna.” Now there were no palm leaves laid before his path.

John 18:1 records that Jesus “crossed the Kidron Valley” that lay between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. As they traveled in the light of the full Pascal moon, Jesus told his disciples, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me...but after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee” (**Matthew 26:31-32**).

The Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus led his disciples up the slope of the Mount of Olives and into a garden called Gethsemane, which **John 18:1** describes as “an olive grove.” The name Gethsemane itself means “olive press,” and so there is no question that there was an olive grove with an oil press within the garden. Even today there are olive trees on the western flank of the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, that are al-

most 2000 years old. These trees, or their immediate ancestors, were present when Jesus entered Gethsamene the night before his crucifixion.

This was not the first time, however, that Jesus had been to this garden. **Luke 22:39** informs us that Jesus went out “as usual” to the Mount of Olives. This garden was obviously a favorite place of prayer during his last week. It was probably in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus spoke to his disciples about the signs of the end (**Matthew 24:3**), and Gethsemane may well have been the place where he stayed each night after his triumphal entry (**Luke 21:37-38**).

As far as the disciples were concerned, there was nothing special about this trip to Gethsemane. Upon arriving in the garden, the disciples immediately settle down to sleep. And so Jesus left the main group of disciples, took Peter, James and John to a secluded spot a little deeper into the garden, and there began praying.

At this point Jesus “began to be sorrowful and troubled” (**Matthew 26:37**), and for good reason. He knew that in just a few hours he would be tried, convicted and executed by crucifixion, one of the most torturous deaths ever invented by man. And so he said to his three closest disciples: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

When Jesus said his soul was “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he was not exaggerating. In fact, his anguish was so intense that **Luke 22:44** records that “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

There is a rare medical condition known as *hermatidrosis*, a symptom of severe psychological distress.³ Severe anxiety “causes the release of chemicals that break down the capillaries in the sweat glands. As a result, there’s a small amount of bleeding into these glands, and the sweat comes out tinged with blood. We’re not talking about a lot of blood; it’s just a very, very small amount.”⁴ But the effect makes a person’s sweat look like “drops of blood falling to the ground.”*

His prayer reveals the anguish he was going through. “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me...” His flesh cried out for an alternative path, another way to reach his goal. As a young man, he had probably seen victims of crucifixion, hanging upon the cross, their bodies racked in pain. Everything within him screamed out that he avoid this torture. But his faith in his Father never wavered, for he immediately answered his own cry: “...yet not my will, but yours be done.”

Jesus longed for his disciples to “keep watch” with him during this time of anguish (**Matthew 26:40**), but he ended up keeping vigil on his own. The disciples themselves were “asleep, exhausted from sorrow” (**Luke 22:45**). But Jesus had already predicted this in **John 16:32**:

“You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.”

* This condition would have had a secondary effect upon Jesus. Anybody who has experienced *hermatidrosis* has very sensitive skin in the hours following these symptoms. Jesus’ skin would have been extremely sensitive to the flogging by the Roman soldiers the next day.

And so, during this time of intense prayer, when we see the fragile humanity of Jesus exposed, his Father sent an angel who “appeared to him and strengthened him” (**Luke 22:43**). From that moment on, Jesus faced his destiny with a calm resolution. For upon the path that led to Gethsemane he could already see the torches carried by the arresting party. In **Matthew 26:45-46**, he announces to his sleeping disciples:

“Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

The Betrayal of the Messiah

The “chief priests and the elders of the people” had already determined that they should “arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him” for they feared a riot if the pilgrim crowd got news of Jesus’ arrest (**Matthew 26:3-5**). And so **Matthew 26:16** tells us that “[f]rom then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”

This opportunity came on the night before Passover Day. Jesus and his disciples had gathered in an upper room, and likely to remain there most of the evening. And so Judas slipped away to inform the chief priests, who quickly gathered an arresting party made up of temple guards, servants of the high priest and “officials from the chief priests and Pharisees” (**John 18:3**), probably seconded by a Roman chiliarch and his soldiers, there to ensure that Rome’s interests were safeguarded. The arresting party had been thrown together quickly, as evidenced by the fact that the “large crowd” came “armed with swords and clubs” (**Matthew 26:47**) or, as **John 18:3** describes it, “carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.”

Judas would have led them first to the upper room, but upon finding that Jesus had already left, he took them to Gethsemane, for he “knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples” (**John 18:2**). The disciples would have been roused from sleep by the noise of the approaching crowd, their torches casting flickering shadows against the olive trees. As one by one the disciples began to rise in alarm, they saw the lone figure of Jesus walking up to the mob. A man separated himself from the group and walked up to Jesus and exclaimed, “Greetings, Rabbi!” followed by a kiss. At that point they heard Jesus say: “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*

Read John 18:3-11

Even at the lowest ebb of his humanity, when he was physically and psychologically most vulnerable, the spiritual authority of Jesus commands the situation. In **John 18:3-11**, we see two events take place:

- At the simple declaration, “I am he,” the arresting mob “drew back and fell to the ground.” If Jesus spoke in Hebrew/Aramaic at this time, he would

* **Matthew 26:50** tells us that Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.” The original Greek can also be translated, “Friend, why have you come?” Remembering that the original Aramaic was later translated into the Greek of the New Testament, Jesus’ statement may have been: “Friend, why have you come? Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

have used the verb *ehyeh* from which the covenant name of God – YHWH – is derived. Alternatively, he may have used the Greek form exactly as quoted in the original manuscripts of John (since many in the arresting party may have been Greek speakers), and thus would have said, *Ego eimi*, which is a shortened version of the Septuagint’s translation of **Exodus 3:14**: *Ego eimi ho wn* – “I am who I am.” No wonder the arresting part “drew back and fell to the ground.” Even at the time of his arrest, Jesus was declaring that he was God in the flesh and that there was no way anyone could arrest him without his permission.

- ☞ When Peter drew his sword and sliced off the right ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest, Jesus immediately “touched the man’s ear and healed him” (**Luke 22:51**). This was the last miracle Jesus was to perform before his death, and it was an act of mercy to one of the ones arresting him.

Read Mark 14:46-52

At this point, all the disciples fled. Mark, however, is alone in recording an unusual incident.

“A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.”

Many believe that this “young man” was Mark himself, the author of this Gospel account. In ancient times, the author often would not name himself, but leave a clue such as this within his narrative (note **John 21:24**). It is possible that Mark had been awakened by the arresting party arriving at his house, and raced ahead in an attempt to warn Jesus of the approaching mob. At the time of Jesus’ arrest someone in the crowd had tried to seize him, but he escaped by pulling out of his linen nightclothes and ran away naked into the night.

And so Jesus was abandoned by every one of his disciples. Although he clearly let his arresters know that he would submit voluntarily to their power, they “seized Jesus and arrested him” (**Mark 16:46**) and led him down the Mount of Olives “like a lamb to the slaughter” (**Isaiah 53:7**). Within nine hours, he would be nailed to the Cross of Calvary.

¹ Oswald Chambers, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, extracted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

² Yigal Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, Vol.1, p.140.

³ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.260.

³ Alexander Metherell, quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.260.

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