

John Chapter 18

Verses 18:1-19:42: The passion (suffering), narrative was probably the first portion of Christ's life and ministry to be recorded. It circulated orally for several years before it was put into writing. It was developed because an understanding of Jesus' death was so vital to the preaching of the early church. The early disciples were forced by the nature of the case to explain why the innocent Savior was crucified as a criminal. The story they told revealed not only the blameless passion of Jesus, but also the evil passions of the men who caused His death.

John 18:1 "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples."

The brook Kedron (as it is spelled now). It is at the foot of the garden of Gethsemane. It is a ravine on the east side of Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives.

This garden is full of olive trees (some believe they were there when Jesus prayed there). This garden was a favorite place of Jesus' to go and pray.

When in Israel, you can see a giant, hewn out rock, with a large round stone rolling around inside. Guides will tell you it is a gethsemane (which means oil press). This was used to crush olives and make olive oil. This olive oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit of God.

"He went forth": Jesus' supreme courage is seen in His determination to go to the cross, where His purity and sinlessness would be violated as He bore the wrath of God for the sins of the world. The time of "the power of darkness" had come (Luke 22:53).

In (verses 2-4 Judas), brought the band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees (the Sanhedrin), with lanterns and torches. Band of men is a Roman cohort (three hundred to six hundred Roman soldiers). John's account of the betrayal and arrest does not mention Judas's kiss. It does however, supply many other interesting details not given in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus knew the future; He knew they sought Him.

John 18:2 "And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples."

Judas would have no problem knowing where Jesus would be. When Jesus was ministering in Jerusalem, He would go to Gethsemane to spend the night. Many times, He prayed all night here. This was especially a favorite place for Peter, James, and John to go with Him.

John 18:3 "Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons."

Roman auxiliary troops were usually stationed at Caesarea, but during feast days they were garrisoned in the Antonia Fortress, on the northwest perimeter of the temple complex. To ensure against mob violence or rebellion because of the large population that filled Jerusalem.

The second group designated as “officers” refers to temple police who were the primary arresting officers since Jesus’ destination after the arrest was to be brought before the High Priest (verses 12-14). They came ready for resistance from Jesus and His followers (“weapons”).

John here, has skipped some of the details about how Judas has gone and made a deal for thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus to the authorities. Notice that they came to get Jesus under the cover of darkness. They were prepared to use force if necessary, because they had brought weapons.

Had Jesus not wanted to go with them, these weapons would have been of no use. He knew it was the appointed time, so He put up no fight at all.

John 18:4 “Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?”

John, in a matter of fact way, states that Jesus was omniscient, thus God.

Notice here again, that Jesus was not trying to avoid them. Jesus knew why they were here. He, also knew that this was His appointed time. John does not go into detail about Judas kissing Jesus in betrayal. I believe this is because John emphasizes the fact that Jesus has everything under control.

John 18:5 “They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them.”

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says “I Am” seven times while revealing Himself as the Bread of Life (6:35); the Light of the World (8:12); the Door (10:9); the Good Shepherd (10-11); the Resurrection and the Life (11:25); the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6); and the Vine (15:5).

His use of “I Am” without a predicate complement (4:26; 8:24; 18:5, 6, 8), demonstrates His identity with Yahweh in the Old Testament, who was first revealed to Moses as “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14).

Here again, we see that John, more than any other of the writers, shows that Jesus is in total control of this situation at all times. Notice that Jesus answers them immediately.

We see here a mention of Judas, but again John does not mention that Judas kissed Jesus to reveal to the mob which one was Jesus. This Jesus of Nazareth means Jesus who lived in Nazareth, not that Jesus was under a Nazarite vow.

John 18:6 “As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.”

When He spoke "I am He", a designation He had used before to declare Himself God (8:28, 58); 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 11:14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1-5), they were jolted backward and to the ground. This power display and the authoritative demand not to take the disciples were of immense significance, as the next verse indicates.

These men fell from the power of the Spirit of God. When Jesus said "I am He", the power of this statement made them go backwards. They were momentarily felled by the power of the Spirit in these words. You can easily see from this, that they could not have taken Jesus, had He not been willing to go.

John 18:7-8 "Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth." "Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way:"

Jesus was forcing them to acknowledge that they had no authority to take His disciples. In fact, He demanded that they let the disciples go. The force of His demand was established by the power of His words.

Jesus was trying to protect His followers even to the end. Jesus is saying, I am ready to go, leave all of them alone. He had shown them just a few moments ago, that they could not take them, if He didn't want them to.

John 18:9 "That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none."

Jesus was saying that He protected the disciples from being arrested, so He could not lose any of them, thus fulfilling the promises He made earlier (6:39, 40, 44; 10:28; 17:12). He knew that being arrested and perhaps imprisoned or executed was more than they could bear, and it could shatter their faith. So, He made sure it did not happen.

All believers are weak and vulnerable if not protected by the Lord. But He will never let them be tempted beyond what they can bear (1 Cor. 10:13), as evidenced here. Believers are eternally secure, not in their own strength, but by the gracious and constant protection of the Savior (Rom. 8:35-39).

Jesus was protecting His own. No one can take anyone away from Jesus. Even when we Christians belong to Jesus; we cannot be taken away from Jesus. The devil can attack a Christian, but he cannot overcome him, because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.

1 John 4:4 "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

John 18:10 "Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus."

He surely aimed for Malchus' head, ready to start the battle in defense of His Lord, but his was an ignorant love and courage. Christ healed Malchus' ear (Luke 22:51).

You can see from this, that Simon Peter was ready to fight to the death for Jesus. He was against great odds and struck out at the high priest's servant. Peter just didn't understand Jesus giving in to these worldly people. Peter felt that Jesus would take over as king of Israel right then.

Peter, being a strong man, could not understand not fighting back. Of course, this cutting off Malchus' ear was to show even these soldiers who Jesus really was.

John 18:11 “Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

Peter's impetuous bravery (in verse 10), was not only misguided, but exhibited failure to understand the centrality of the death that Jesus came to die. The “cup” in the Old Testament is associated with suffering and especially judgment, i.e., the cup of God's wrath.

It is interesting that John did not mention the fact that Jesus healed Malchus' ear. This is found in Luke 22.

Luke 22:51 “And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.”

Jesus tells Peter here, that they are not to fight. This is Jesus' time to be taken, and He is willing to suffer for all of humanity, as He and His Father had planned.

Verses 12-27 give three stages of this Jewish trial:

1. A preliminary arraignment before Annas, given only by John here;
2. An informal trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin before dawn (verse 24), reported fully (in Matthew 26:57-68 and Mark 14:53-65);
3. A formal trial by the Sanhedrin after dawn, reported fully (in Luke 22:66-71), and briefly mentioned (in Matthew 27:1 and Mark 15:11).

John 18:12-13 “Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him,” “And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.”

Annas held the High Priesthood office from 6-15 A.D. when Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor, removed him from office. Despite this, Annas continued to wield influence over the office, most likely because he was still regarded as the true High Priest and because no fewer than 5 of his sons, and his son in law Caiaphas, held the office at one time or another.

Two trials occurred: one Jewish and one Roman. The Jewish phase began with the informal examination by Annas (verses 12-14 and 19-23), probably giving time for the members of the Sanhedrin to hurriedly gather together.

A session before the Sanhedrin was next (Matt. 26:57-68), at which consensus was reached to send Jesus to Pilate (Matt. 27:1-2).

The Roman phase began with a first examination before Pilate (verses 28-38a; Matt. 27:11-14), and then Herod Antipas “that fox” (Luke 13:32), interrogated Him (Luke 23:6-12). Lastly, Jesus appeared again before Pilate (verses 38b-19:16; Matt. 27:15-31).

Jesus made no resistance at all, and so they bound Him and took Him away. Annas was the lesser court, and Jesus was carried there first. It seems Annas was inquired of to see if any charges should be made.

Really, it was the priests, scribes, and Pharisees who were accusing Jesus. This was not civil laws that Jesus was being charged of breaking.

John 18:14 “Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.”

This Caiaphas seemed to know that the Scriptures said one would die for all the rest, and yet, he does not recognize Jesus as Messiah.

John 18:15 “And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.”

This other disciple here, is probably John. John never speaks of himself by name in his gospel. We know that John's gospel sheds much light on the details of all of this, which further proves that this other disciple here, is John.

This palace of the high priest was probably occupied by Caiaphas, and Annas possibly had part of the building as well. It was not unusual for a son-in-law to live in the same place with a father-in-law.

John 18:16 “But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.”

Many writers believe that John was from a very well to do family. As we said before, many even believe that the spacious home where the Last Supper was eaten in the Upper Room, belonged to this family.

Apparently, John was more than just an acquaintance, because the term for “known” can mean a friend (Luke 2:44). The fact that he mentioned Nicodemus (3:1), and Joseph (19:38), may indicate his knowledge of other prominent Jews.

That upper room and this abode of Caiaphas' were not far apart. It would be very likely then, that is why he could come and bring Peter in. This is perhaps reading between the lines, but this is probably the case here.

John 18:17 “Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.”

Here is the record of the first of Peter’s predicted three denials.

This damsel was already aware of the other disciple (possibly John), and asks Peter if he is not a follower of Jesus. We see here, Peter's first denial. We spoke before that Peter was ready to fight, but not give in. Whatever the reasoning of Peter, he does deny Jesus.

John 18:18 “And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.”

Right before Easter, it would be cool. This is usually in April, which is a cold month. This is at night as well, and in April and May it is cold at night. Peter is staying close, but not defending the Lord for fear he too, will be captured.

John 18:19 “The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine.”

At the core of their concern was Jesus’ claim that He was the Son of God (19:7). In a formal Jewish hearing, to question the defendant may have been illegal because a case had to rest on the weight of the testimony of witnesses.

If this was an informal interrogation before the High Priest emeritus and not before the Sanhedrin, Annas may have thought that he was not bound by such rules. Jesus however, knew the law and demanded that witnesses be called (verses 20-21). An official knew Jesus was rebuking Annas and retaliated (verse 22).

You know the high priest had heard about the 5,000 men who were fed at one of Jesus' meetings. The high priest is perhaps, trying to find out what they would have to fight, if an uprising of Jesus' followers takes place.

He should already know Jesus' doctrine. Jesus had not hidden to teach. He had taught in Jerusalem many times. There was no secret about Jesus' activity. They just wanted to trap Jesus, so they might have something to accuse Him of.

John 18:20-21 “Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing.” “Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.”

Jesus is right. There had been temple spies at all the meetings, trying to come up with something they could accuse Him of. They could not find anything worthy to try Him of. He only did good; how could they try Him for that?

Jesus had not hidden from them. He had spoken boldly before them, even in the temple. He is saying, ask your spies what I said. The truth of the matter is that they have no punishable offense.

John Chapter 18 Questions

1. What was the name of the brook Jesus crossed?
2. Where did Jesus go to pray and rest often?
3. What, besides this garden, is called a gethsemane in Israel?
4. Who, besides Jesus, knew that He went there often?
5. Which disciple had betrayed Jesus and brought officers to arrest Jesus?
6. What tells us this was at night?
7. Why did Jesus come forth and ask, Whom seek ye?
8. Why did John not go into detail about Judas kissing Jesus to betray Him?
9. What name did they call Jesus?
10. How did Jesus answer the people with Judas?
11. What happened to them when Jesus said, I am he?
12. When Jesus told them who He was, what did He say for them to do with the disciples?
13. Who drew his sword?
14. Whose ear did he cut off?
15. What miracle did Jesus do in front of these who came to get Him?
16. What did Jesus say to Peter?
17. Where did they take Jesus?
18. Who was Annas' father-in-law?
19. What had Caiaphas said to the counsel?
20. Who was the other disciple who followed, probably?

21. Why could this other disciple get in?
22. Who asked Peter, art thou Jesus' disciple?
23. What did Peter answer?
24. What two things did the high priest ask Jesus of?
25. Where did Jesus remind them that He had spoken openly?
26. Who should they be asking these questions?