

The Gospel of John

Leon L. Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

Chapter Eighteen

The Arrest in Gethsemane

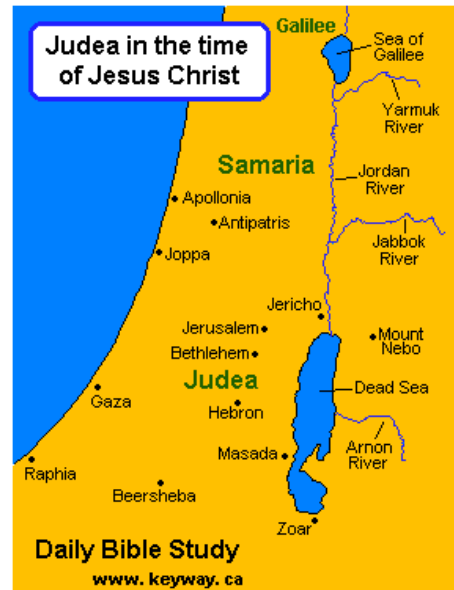
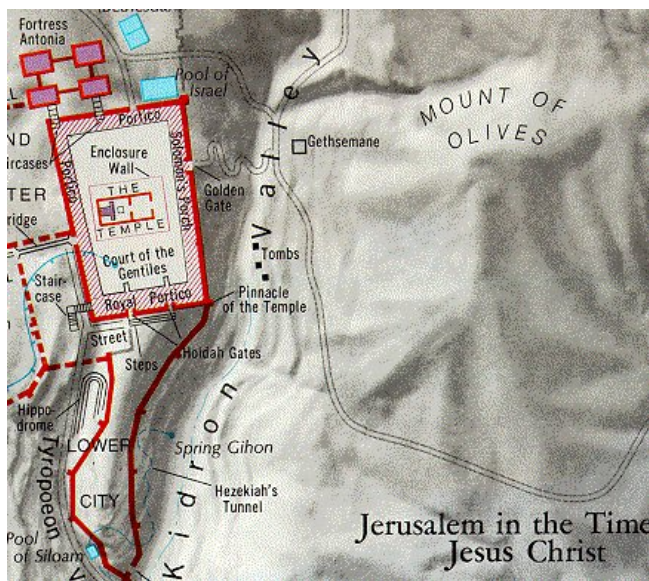
John 18:1-3

*When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. (2) Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. (3) Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, *came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.*

The Kidron Valley is a very sacred location because of its location between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. This is a map showing its general location and another of the Temple Mount:



Here is an overview of the location: (see reference for Judea at bottom of picture):



It is a valley on the eastern side of Old Jerusalem and continues east through the Judean desert toward the Dead Sea. It descends about 4000 feet during its length of 20 miles. It is also called the Valley of Jehoshaphat where Joel recorded that God would judge the nations of the world (Joel 3:12). It has also been called the Vale of the King and was at one time highly cultivated for revenues going to the king. Jews have long sought to be buried on the Mount of Olives since one writing states the resurrection will begin at the return of the Messiah (Zech 14:4).

Jesus and His disciples left the room, descended from the city, crossed the Kidron Valley, and then went to the lower slope of the Mount of Olives. Gethsemane is the name given to the olive grove on the side of the mountain. The name means "oil press". Jesus often used the Garden of Gethsemane as a meeting place with His disciples (Luke 22:39) and would have been one of the first places Judas would have looked to find Him. A cohort is one tenth of a legion or about 600 men. Since John calls the cohort to be Roman means that it was an official set of soldiers, probably from the Roman barracks in Jerusalem. The Synoptic Gospels state that the arrest was by a crowd that would imply an armed mob rather than an official military guard (Matt 26:47; Mark 14:43) but Luke uses the phrase "officers of the temple guard" (Luke 22:52). It is likely that the hysterical pleas of the Pharisees would have caused Pilot to grant their request and so these soldiers could have augmented the mob. The arrest took place at night so the lanterns and torches would have been needed. This group would have been rather ominous to the disciples.

John 18:4-9

*So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and *said to them, "Whom do you seek?" (5) They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He *said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. (6) So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. (7) Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." (8) Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," (9) to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one."*

John has repeatedly stated the understanding of Jesus that He was heading toward a destiny that had been arranged before the foundation of the world (John 6:64; 13:1, 3, 11, 18). He could have escaped whenever He wished but He was determined to finish His Father's plan. On at least two occasions He had left the danger zone because the time had not arrived (John 10:40; 11:54). But now the time had come (17:1). It was dark so the crowd could not clearly see the identity of the people so Jesus asked them the identity of whom they were seeking. Of course Jesus knew they were seeking Him and Judas was standing with the crowd so he would have known also. Jesus replied similarly to His reply of "I am" (8:24, 28, 58). His reply and His commanding presence caused the crowd to draw away and even fall to the ground. Jesus asked them again apparently in an attempt to shield His disciples and they replied again that they were seeking Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus then replied with an allusion to the substitutionary atonement that fills this gospel (1:29; 3:14-16; 10:11, 15-18; 12:32; 18:19).

John 18:10-11

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. (11) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Peter displayed the loyalty and compulsive nature he repeatedly demonstrated as he seems to have missed the mark and cut off the right ear of the high priest's slave. He probably was trying to show his devotion to Jesus and to refute the statement of Jesus that he would deny Him (John 13:38). The fact that someone remembered the name of this slave accentuates the eyewitness testimony that was recorded by John. If Jesus had desired a defense He could have summoned the aid of angels (Matt 26:52-53). Jesus told Peter to put away his sword for He must endure the suffering that He faced. The use of the word "cup" connects this account with that of the Synoptics (Matt 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). John would have known about the struggle of Jesus but he only recorded His acceptance of the task.

John 18:12-14

So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, (13) and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. (14) Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

This description of the people involved supports the impression that the Romans supported the action of the Jewish leaders. The commander was the officer in charge of the cohort. They took Jesus first to Annas who had been the high priest from A.D. 6 to 15. Four of his sons took his place and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, served in that office from A.D. 18 to 36. Annas had a lot of power still and was referred to as High Priest Emeritus. The synoptic gospels do not record this interaction with Annas although Luke gives enough time for the interview by stating that the interaction with Caiaphas and the council occurred at daybreak (Luke 22:66). Luke speaks of the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas so it may be that Caiaphas was recognized as the high priest by the Romans but Annas still had a lot of power. John reminds the readers that Caiaphas had advised the Jews to let one man die so that they could remain in power (John 11:49-50).

John 18:15-16

Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, (16) but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.

John does not identify the other disciple and he does not state that he is the disciple whom Jesus loved so we cannot know if this is a reference to himself. This other disciple was known to the high priest and since John's mother was Simone who was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, she would have also been related to Elizabeth, whose husband was Zechariah, a priest (Luke 1:36). Then we can understand how John could have been known among the priesthood and so would have been allowed to enter the court with Jesus. Peter was not known and so would not have been immediately allowed in the courtyard without the other disciple vouching for him.

John 18:17-18

*Then the slave-girl who kept the door *said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He *said, "I am not." (18) Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.*

The Greek wording implies that the slave-girl recognized Peter and the other disciple as followers of Jesus so she expected the answer to be “yes”. However this is the first denial of Jesus by Peter. There are minor differences among the reporting of this event by all the gospels but there are broad agreements. Matthew and Mark agree that the questioner was a servant girl (Matt 26:69; Mark 14:66) but without a direct connection of the girl with the courtyard entrance. Luke agrees that the first accuser was a servant girl who thought Peter was one of the disciples of Jesus (Luke 22:56). Jerusalem was located at about 2600 feet above sea level so it could be quite cool at night explaining the need for a fire for warming themselves.

John 18:19-21

The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. (20) Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. (21) "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said."

John identifies Annas as the high priest and shifts the focus to his questioning of Jesus. Since there was a great crowd gathering for this Passover celebration, the Romans would have been very suspicious of possible rebellions so it is natural that Annas would have wanted to know how many disciples Jesus had as well as His teachings. Jesus replied that His teachings had not been done in secret so the best route to take for asking about His teachings would be to question those to whom He had spoken. It is not likely that He meant any disrespect by this answer but He was just referring Annas to other witnesses.

John 18:22-24

When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" (23) Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" (24) So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

However one of the officers took the answer by Jesus to be disrespectful and he struck him. This act of the officer was illegal for Jesus had not been charged of any crime. We cannot know exactly where this interrogation took place and John does not relate the interaction with Caiaphas so we cannot know how much time took place for this transfer. The synoptic gospels state that the interview with Caiaphas took place in the presence of the council of elders and they would have had to be brought to the location also (Matt 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:66-71).

John 18:25-27

*Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not." (26) One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, *said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" (27) Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.*

The second question to Peter about his allegiance to Jesus is not identified although Matthew and Mark state the this was a girl but Luke does not identify the gender either (Matt 26:71; Mark

14:69; Luke 22:58). This question is stated such that a negative response was expected and Peter indeed did deny being a disciple of Jesus. The third question to Peter was by a slave of the high priest and a relative of the person whose ear Peter cut off. This person's question expected a positive response but Peter denied such a relationship again. After this third denial, a rooster crowed and Peter must have been devastated as he remembered the prophecy of Jesus (John 13:38).

John 18:28

*Then they *led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.*

Evidently John was not present for the interview with Caiaphas since he does not report it but jumps ahead to the encounter of Jesus with Pilate at the Praetorium. John gives the longest account of the interview with Pilate than the other gospels. The Praetorium is the palace of the Roman governor. We read in the account by Mark (14:60-64) that Caiaphas put Jesus under oath to declare that He was the Son of God, which would have condemned Him of blasphemy with a Jewish penalty of death. However the Jews had no authority to execute anyone so the case had to be transferred to a Roman court. The precise location of Pilate's home could have been the palace of Herod or the Tower of Antonia that is the traditional location. The Ecce Homo arch here is the place where the Via Dolorosa begins and ends in the church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Roman officials preferred to take care of their business before eleven am and it was illegal to pass a death sentence at night so the time of this interview was probably seven or eight o'clock in the morning. The Jews would have had to be cleansed for seven days after entering a gentile home or business and they would not have had that time before Passover so they did not enter the home. The devilment may have been because of the presence of leaven (Exodus 12:19; 13:7). The disciples did not eat the Passover with Jesus as clearly indicated here that it had not yet happened. The lambs would be sacrificed at the same time as was Jesus that had to be before the Passover. Pontius Pilate received his appointment as governor of Judaea in AD 26, about four years previously. He remained in that position until AD 37.

John 18:29-30

*Therefore Pilate went out to them and *said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" (30) They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you."*

Pilate went out to them since they would not enter his place. He probably had his portable bema brought out so that he could judge the case from the outer colonnade of the courtyard. He then started the case as was appropriate by asking about the charge although he probably had already received an outline of the case. A Roman governor had complete discretion on how he managed a trial and the accusing side had to accept his opinion. Their reply did not show much respect for they considered their opinions of the charge against Jesus to be paramount. They had probably hoped that Pilate would just accept their charge and then issue the sentence of death. They thus began a bit of fencing with Pilate that would continue until he was convinced that he could make a decision.

John 18:31-32

So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," (32) to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

Pilate threw the case back to them since they did not seem to want to abide by his rules. If Jesus was guilty by their law then he told them to just judge Him according to that law. They replied that their law required a punishment of death but Rome had taken away their ability to inflict such punishment. Judaea became a Roman province in AD 6 and the only case in which the Jews were allowed to punish by death was if someone had violated the sanctity of the temple, even if the violator was Roman. Perhaps this is why Mark reported an abortive attempt made before the Sanhedrin to charge Jesus with insults against the temple:

Mark 14:55-59 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. (56) For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. (57) Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, (58) "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" (59) Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent.

Later a similar charge was made against Stephen (Acts 6:13). By going before Pilate to ask for crucifixion they would be helpful in fulfilling the word of Jesus concerning how He was to die (John 12:32).

John 18:33-35

Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorian, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" (34) Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" (35) Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?"

Pilate decided to further investigate this case himself by getting Jesus away from the Jewish accusers. He specifically asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews. If He answered that He was the Messiah, the King of the Jews, then He was putting Himself above the rule of Caesar and thus guilty of sedition. Of course many, or most, of the followers of Jesus were expecting Jesus to actually be the promised Messiah to bring them back into political power. Since John does not record the interaction of Jesus with Caiaphas, he does not record how Jesus answered the question as recorded in Mark 14:61. However the report of John certainly implies that Jesus had answered as recorded by Mark. Jesus began to probe the mind of Pilate rather than to defend Himself. He wanted Pilate to understand himself better by asking him to examine the reason for his question. If Jesus was only the King of the Jews at this point in history it would not have been of lasting importance. Pilate told Jesus that His own people and priests brought these charges against Him so he wanted Jesus to explicitly tell him what he had done to bring such charges against Himself.

John 18:36-38

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is,

*My kingdom is not of this realm." (37) Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (38) Pilate *said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and *said to them, "I find no guilt in Him.*

Jesus then began to explain to Pilate the truth behind His mission on earth. He told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this portion of reality over which he ruled. It would have been easy for Him to claim a kingship and develop the devotion of people to follow Him and then there would have been a fight when He was arrested. If He had not come to fulfill the plan of His Father then He could have summoned angels from His realm to rescue Him. However, although He is the King of another kingdom in another realm, He had no intention of starting any kind of war here that would overcome Roman rule. Pilate was not interested in philosophical arguments and he obviously had not been given faith to perceive truth (1 Cor 2:14) so he just pushed Jesus with his question concerning His being a king. Jesus affirmed his question that He was a king and then stated His purpose that Pilate should have understood did not mean an act of sedition. The world 2000 years later still cannot generally grasp the truth to which Jesus refers. John opened his gospel with this truth:

John 1:9-13 NASB There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. (11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, (13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Today many people ask the same question in a probable sarcastic tone: "What is truth?" To them truth is relative, which means absolutely nothing. If truth is relative to each person then there is no such concept as absolute truth. This relativity concept is polluting our country and our churches and is the reason so many people are intolerant toward Christianity for it claims to echo Jesus Christ: "He has come into the world, to testify to the truth." There is only one truth and it is the reality as claimed by Him.

John 18:39-40

"But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" (40) So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

This claim by Pilate about a custom to release someone at Passover cannot be verified by any non-Biblical source, not even by the writings of Josephus. All four evangelists record this account regarding Barabbas. John and Matthew (Matt 27:27) intimate that Pilate took the initiative and Mark and Luke suggest that the request was first made by the accusers and bystanders (Mark 15:1; Luke 23:18). After the Christianization of the Empire, Roman law provided for amnesties at Eastertide but offered no reference to this much earlier event. Whatever the origin, the people demanded that the robber Barabbas be released rather than Jesus. Mark elaborates more concerning the crimes of Barabbas: "*The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection.*" (Mark 15:7) It was surely not lost on Pilate that Barabbas and Jesus were both accused of insurrection.