

**MATTHEW 26 & JOHN 18 – JESUS AT THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE & HIS ARREST**



After Jesus finished speaking to His disciples on that Passover night, Matthew states, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Mt. 26:30-31). The traditional hymn would have been Psalm 136, known as the Great Hallel (Hallel means, praise of God). John adds, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered" (John 18:1).

We thus arrive at the moment of Jesus' arrest at this spot, called the Garden of Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives which overlooked Jerusalem.

Werner Keller describes the scene, "The Holy City emerges from behind the top of the Mount of Olives as if some wizard had conjured it out of the hills. The view that Jerusalem presented to Jesus and the disciples can be imagined from a contemporary description: 'Anyone who has not seen Jerusalem in all its beauty has never beheld a great and lovely city in all his life; and anyone who has not seen the structure of the second Temple has never seen an impressive building in his life.' This was the proud verdict of the Jewish rabbis of the time. Research into the appearance of old Jerusalem has been summed up by [archaeologist] Garstang in the following words, 'At no point in their history can the Temple and the city have presented a more wonderful picture. The rhythm and harmony of Greco-Roman art, which stood out so marvelously against the eastern sky, repressed the extravagant architectural tendencies of Herod, and brought order and good taste into the traditional chaos of the city.'

"The great walls towered 250 feet high above the valley. Behind their battlements rose the contours of mighty edifices from a constricted checker-board of houses, streets and alleys. Immediately opposite the Mount of Olives lay the Temple, right in the foreground, and outshining all other buildings in magnificence. Its façade was 150 feet high and of equal breadth, faced eastward and consisted entirely of light marble. Its decorations were of pure gold. Pillared colonnades hemmed in the spacious courts and vestibules. The crowning glory was, however, the Tabernacle in the center,

sparkling 'like a snow capped mountain,' to quote Josephus' words...."

Keller then adds about the biblical account of Jesus' final hours, "The descriptions of the trial, sentence and crucifixion in the four Gospels have been checked with scientific thoroughness by many scholars and have been found to be historically reliable accounts even to the last detail...With the arrest, the incomparable tragedy began to unfold. Jesus had gathered his disciples round him in the Garden of Gethsemane in the Mount of Olives. 'And immediately, while He yet spoke, came Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders' (Mark 14:43). A taunt-song in the Talmud reminds us of the 'clubs' and 'staves' of the Boethusian high priests who had been in control since Herod's day: 'A plague on the house of Boethus; a plague on their clubs! A plague on the house of Annas; a plague on their spying!' It ends, 'For they are high priests and their sons are in the Treasury, and their sons-in-law in the Government and their servants beat the people with staves'" (*The Bible as History*, 1980, pp. 382-384).

*The Archaeological Commentary of the Bible* mentions about Gethsemane, "References in the Gospels indicate that this memorable place was a garden or orchard across the Kidron Valley on the slope of the Mount of Olives. From the circumstances of Jesus' arrest one may infer that it was located at the foot of the mount. Its site was undoubtedly more or less in the area where the garden of this name may be seen today. The biblical references coincide with its location. The present garden contains large and very old olive trees, lawns, and flowerpots" (1980, p. 206).

Jesus then says, "'Sit here while I go and pray over there.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.' He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.' Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What! Could you not watch with Me

one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.' And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand'" (Mt. 26:36-46).

Luke adds some important details, "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.' Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow" (Luke 22:41-45).

Barclay comments, "The space within Jerusalem was so limited that there was no room for gardens. Many well-to-do people, therefore, had private gardens out on the Mount of Olives. Some wealthy friend had given Jesus the privilege of using such a garden, and it was there that Jesus went to fight his lonely battle. He was only thirty-three; and no one wants to die at thirty-three. He knew what crucifixion was like; he had seen it. He was in an agony; the Greek word is used of someone fighting a battle with sheer fear. There is no scene like this in all history. This was the very hinge and turning point in Jesus' life. He could have turned back even yet. He could have refused the cross. The salvation of the world hung in the balance as the Son of God literally sweated it out in Gethsemane; and He won...When Jesus went to Gethsemane there were two things He sorely desired. He wanted human fellowship and He wanted God's fellowship. 'It is not good that the man should be alone,' God said in the beginning. (Gen 2:18.) In time of trouble we want someone with us. We do not necessarily want him to do anything. We do not necessarily even want to talk to him or have him talk to us. We only

want him there. Jesus was like that. It was strange that men who so short a time before had been protesting that they would die for him, could not stay awake for him one single hour. But none can blame them, for the excitement and the tension had drained their strength and their resistance" (*Daily Study Bible*, notes on Luke 22:43 and Mark 14:33).

Hebrews explains more about Jesus' struggles, stating, "[Jesus,] who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (vss. 7-9).

So even if Christ was God in the flesh, there were certain things He had learned that enriched Him. This was the end result of God coming in the flesh to save mankind -- out of pure sacrificial love for them -- and despite their ingratitude.

Three times He prayed to the Father asking if there was any way He could avoid going through this excruciating ordeal and yet accomplish their great Plan of Salvation. There was no other way, so Jesus courageously faced up to the task—and without much help from His drowsy disciples.

The "cup" He desired to avoid consisted of three parts: 1) the type of death He faced—torture, crucifixion and death; 2) taking on Himself all the sins of mankind and thus becoming sin before the Father (2 Cor. 5:21); 3) having to be abandoned by the Father because of what He represented.

He asked, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mr. 14:36).

Regarding the term "Abba," Barclay points out, "There is a world of loveliness in this word Abba, which to our western ears is altogether hidden, unless we know the facts about it. Joachim Jeremias, in his book *The Parables of Jesus*, writes thus: 'Jesus' use of the word Abba in addressing God is unparalleled in the whole of Jewish literature. The explanation of this fact is to be found in the statement of the fathers Chrysostom, Theodore, and Theodoret that Abba, (as Jaba is still used today in Arabic) was the word used by a young child to its father; it was an everyday family word, which no one had ventured to use in

addressing God. Jesus did. He spoke to His heavenly Father in as childlike, trustful, and intimate a way as a little child to its father.' We know how our children speak to us and what they call us who are fathers. That is the way in which Jesus spoke to God. Even when he did not fully understand, even when his one conviction was that God was urging him to a cross, he called Abba, as might a little child. Here indeed is trust, a trust which we must also have in that God whom Jesus taught us to know as Father" (*Daily Study Bible*, notes on Mr. 14:36).

Now comes His arrest, "And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people" (Mt. 26:47). John adds, "Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons" (John 18:3).

Again, Barclay adds insightful notes, "There is something astonishing about the force which came out to arrest Jesus. John said that there was a company of soldiers, together with officers from the chief priests and Pharisees. The officers would be the Temple police. The Temple authorities had a kind of private police force to keep good order, and the Sanhedrin hid its police officers to carry out its decrees. The officers, therefore, were the Jewish police force. But there was a band of Roman soldiers there too. The word is *speira*. Now that word, if it is correctly used, can have three meanings. It is the Greek word for a Roman cohort and a cohort had 600 men. If it was a cohort of auxiliary soldiers, a *speira* had 1,000 men--240 cavalry and 760 infantry. Sometimes, much more rarely, the word is used for the detachment of men called a maniple which was made up of 200 men.

"Even if we take this word to mean the smallest force, the maniple, what an expedition to send out against an unarmed Galilean carpenter! At the Passover time there were always extra soldiers in Jerusalem, quartered in the Tower of Antonia which overlooked the Temple, and men would be available. But what a compliment to the power of Jesus! When the authorities decided to arrest him, they sent what was almost an army to do it" (*Daily Study Bible*, notes on John 18:3).

Apparently, they expected strong resistance, perhaps from many Galileans, but they were surprised when Jesus greeted them peacefully. John says, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?' They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am He.' And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, 'I am He' they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-6). Luke adds these ominous words spoken by Jesus, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." He was addressing Satan himself.

Bruce mentions, "His reply, 'I am He', (Gk. *ego eimi*), can be understood on two levels, and this is probably the Evangelist's intention. On one level, it simply means, 'I am he' in the ordinary sense...But in an appropriate setting *ergo eimi* is more than that; it is a word of power, the equivalent of the God of Israel's self-identifying affirmation 'I am He.' On the lips of Jesus it has already had something approaching this force in the Gospel of John (cf. 8:24, 28); and that it has this force here is plain from the retreat and prostration of those addressed. Twice they fall back, and when at last Jesus permits them to take him away, it is on the condition that they let His disciples depart unmolested" (*Gospel of John*, 1983, p. 341).

Christ knew who was guiding all of this, Satan himself, who had possessed Judas and was using him as his instrument to attack Jesus. That is why, when Christ pronounced the sacred name Yahweh, the "I am," the armed horde fell backwards. We see in the Bible that when people are guided by Satan and face God's presence, they fall backwards, but when someone spiritually healthy is before God, he or she falls forward to worship Him.

After this, Judas betrays Christ. We read, "Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.' Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come?' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him" (Mt. 26:48-50). This is where the phrase "the Judas kiss" comes from, of a friend appearing kindly but betraying another friend. As Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."