

Lesson 19
John 18:1-27

GUILT AND GRACE IN THE GARDEN

Memory verse: “This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: ‘I have not lost one of those you gave me.’” (John 18:9 NIV).

There are several features that distinguish John's account of Jesus' passion from the ones in the Synoptic Gospels. First, the Romans feature slightly more prominently in John's Gospel, but they do not constitute such a large presence that they overpower the other characters who opposed Jesus. Second, John pictured Jesus as more obviously in control of His destiny. For example, John did not record Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. This is in harmony with His emphasis on Jesus as God's divine Son. Third, John included material that the Synoptics omitted. This, too, reflects emphases that John wanted to make in view of his purposes for writing. What these emphases were will become clearer as we consider what he included.

The Kidron Valley formed the eastern boundary of Jerusalem. "The Kidron" ("Cedars") was also a *wadi*, or dry streambed, that contained water only when it rained hard. The Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane lay across the Kidron to the east. John simply mentioned Gethsemane as being the site of Jesus' arrest. He did not record Jesus' praying there (cf. Matt. 26:30, 36-46; Mark 14:26, 32-42; Luke 22:39-46). The verbs that John used to describe Jesus entering and leaving Gethsemane suggest that it may have been a walled garden (cf. v. 13).

Only John mentioned the presence of Roman soldiers. A Roman "cohort" (Lat. *cohors*) normally consisted of 600 soldiers. John did not use a precise term to describe the number of soldiers that Judas brought, and it is possible that less than 200 soldiers were present. The Romans stationed troops in the Fortress of Antonia during the Jewish feasts. It stood just north of the temple. Normally these troops resided in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, the Roman provincial capital.

John noted that when Jesus approached the leaders of the soldiers, He knew their intentions (cf. 10:14, 17-18). He consistently presented Jesus' death as a voluntary self-sacrifice. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had withdrawn from conflict with officials because His hour had not yet come (10:40; 11:54), but now His hour had arrived (17:1).

Perhaps John chose not to record the fact that Judas identified Jesus by kissing Him, in order to strengthen the force of Jesus' question: "Whom do you seek?" He mentioned Judas' presence, nonetheless, since he was a primary figure in Jesus' arrest. John stressed Jesus' complete control of the situation. He identified Himself as the person they sought, rather than being identified by his betrayer.

The private ministry of our Lord with His disciples has now ended, and the public drama of redemption is about to begin. Man will do his worst, and God will respond with His very best. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

Perhaps the best way to see the truths in John 18:1–27, and grasp the lessons they convey, is to pay attention to the symbolism that is involved. John's gospel is saturated with symbols, some more obvious than others, and these symbols convey some important spiritual truths. There are five such symbols in this section.

Scripture Reading: John 18: 1-27

To learn in this lesson: 1) Obedience and treachery 2) Rebellion and submission
3) Denial.

Discussion Questions:

1) What was symbolic of the Garden and Judas' kiss (recorded in Matt. 26:48–49) in the passage (verses 1 to 9)?

2) In the whole episode (verse 10 to 14), Peter drew his sword and Jesus commanded him to put it away because he had drink from His Father's cup. What are the significance of the "sword" and the "cup"?

3) The "fire" whilst provides warmth for Peter yet speaks of denial (in verses 15 to 27). What can we learn from Peter's actions and the challenges that we can face too?