

John



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Attention then shifts to Judas and the entourage that he guides. The narrator introduces Judas with the epithet **the one handing him over** [*ho paradidous auton*] (18:2), used again in 18:5, drawing attention to the central action of the narrative. Knowing where Jesus would be, Judas then, taking the cohort [*speiran*] and the attendants [*hypēretas*] from the chief priests and Pharisees, comes there with torches and lamps and weapons (18:3). John uses the words *speiran*—the term usually denoting six hundred Roman soldiers—and *hypēretas*—a term often translated as “officers” or “police” but that denotes a servant or weapons bearer, one who does the physical labor, or in this case the dirty work, of others (Xenophon the Historian, *Cyr.* 2.1.31; Pollux, *Onom.* 6.31). That it is a term used to describe the role of Christian leaders (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:1) does not signify that it is an honorable role in Greco-Roman cultures. This collusion of three parties—Rome, the Jewish authorities, and Judas, who is both the residence of evil and Jesus’s own (6:70; 13:18)—signify the three constituencies that will, one after the other, hand Jesus over. This excessive show of force points only to the arrest party’s own impotence. Their efforts to illuminate the darkness with artificial light so that they can work evil (see 3:19) stands in counterpoint to the unfolding divine action of the true light, revealing its full glory. The verb *labōn* suggests that Judas guides the force, but when the moment comes for him to perform the critical action of identifying Jesus, he becomes redundant. John contains no kiss, no greeting. Jesus identifies himself.

Jesus, knowing all things coming upon him, stepping forward and assuming control of the arrest, said, “Whom do you seek?” (18:4). They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth” (18:5a). “Jesus of Nazareth” may simply be a way of distinguishing this Jesus from the many others of that name, but given the use of Nazareth as a signifier of derision elsewhere in the Gospel (1:46; 19:19), their choice of words may be a sign of contempt. Jesus’s response, “I am he [*egō eimi*],” serves both as a straightforward acknowledgment that he is Jesus and also as a theological statement. In Jesus’s day, uttering the name of God was prohibited (see Josephus, *Ant.* 2.275–76; 1QS 6.27–7.2). The Septuagint does not translate the name YHWH (a first-person form of the verb “to be”) but instead uses Lord (*Kyrios*). In Greek, Jesus’s words *egō eimi* alone do not necessarily signify the divine name YHWH, but the arrest party’s response points to their theological significance. Josephus (*J.W.* 5.438) describes the name as *to phrikton onoma*, something that causes one to shudder in religious awe. Judas, the one handing him over, was also with them (18:5b), and when he [Jesus] then told them, “I am,” they reared back, as though the words had a physical force, and fell to the ground (18:6), in a posture of submission to a divine being and an indication of their weakness.

Now that the troops are effectively neutralized, Jesus demonstrates his control of the action by repeating—“Whom do you seek?”—and calling the troops back to their task. They then said, “Jesus of Nazareth” (18:7). Jesus

[immediately] responded, "I told you that I am. So if you seek me, let these [toutous] retreat" (18:8). *Toutous* may refer to the soldiers, in which case he is indicating that they do not need to constrain him—or Jesus may refer to the disciples, in which case he is asking that they be free to go. If the latter, the specific location and timing of the arrest limit the violence to one man, as Caiaphas wishes and as Jesus intends. The narrator then substantiates that Jesus intends the latter interpretation in order that the word might be fulfilled, which said that "from those whom you gave me, I have not lost, not one" (18:9). This prophecy does not appear verbatim in the Gospel, but it seems to refer back to 17:12 or perhaps 6:39. Whatever the antecedent, Thomas's prediction (11:16) that they will go to Judea and die with Jesus is not realized.

It is now Peter's turn to play the *mōros*, the impulsive and naive fool. Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and lopped off his right ear (18:10a). In Mark 14:47 and Luke 22:50, Jesus is arrested and then an unidentified disciple attacks an unnamed servant. John identifies Simon Peter as the perpetrator who acts out his intention to lay down his life for Jesus (13:37). This seems like a quixotic act if one supposes that Peter intends to rescue Jesus. It makes better sense within a context that views death at the point of a sword as heroic and death on a cross ignoble. Martial calls "death inflicted by a sharp weapon" a "Roman death" (*Epig.* 1.78). To die during an arrest is much less shameful than to be convicted and executed. Valerius Maximus (*Fact.* 9.12.4-7) tells numerous tales to illustrate this point: one former Praetor throws himself from a balcony while votes at his trial are being counted, thereby preventing his property from being confiscated and his family from the reproach caused by a conviction for extortion (9.12.7). Peter seems to be provoking a lethal conflict to protect Jesus's honor.

John is the only evangelist to name the sword's victim: **Malchus** (18:10b). While we cannot know John's purpose, the inclusion of the name reminds us that we cannot reduce the people in this story to symbols. Someone is really hurt. Luke narrates how Jesus restores the servant's ear. John provides no such resolution. The wound is left open. Perhaps Thornton Wilder, in his one-act play *Now the Servant's Name Was Malchus*, provides appropriate insight. The setting is heaven. Malchus asks Jesus to delete the Johannine addition because whenever his name is read, the reader thinks him ridiculous, and Malchus is distracted from whatever game he is playing. Jesus responds with the invitation, "Come, be ridiculous with me." In the ancient world, deformities were the stuff of humor (Aristotle, *Poet.* 1449a.33-38; Cicero, *De or.* 2.236-39; Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.3.8). In the context of the Gospel, those who serve as the men at arms either for Jesus or the priests are rendered laughable. What may be more puzzling is that Peter suffers no consequences for his aggression. It seems that Jesus's words continue to exert control over those who arrest him. The petition that Jesus puts to God in prayer in the synoptic tradition, "take away this cup" (Mark 14:36; par. Matt. 26:39; Luke 22:42), becomes a

the rhetorical question. Jesus then said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath; the cup that the Father has given me, should I not drink it?" (18:11). The association of the cup with immortality belongs to later holy-grail legends. In the biblical tradition, the cup like the sword signifies judgment and death (Jer. 25:15–27; cf., Deut. 32:32–35; Pss. 11:6; 75:8; Lam. 4:21; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 51:7; Ezek. 23:31–33; Obad. 16; Hab. 2:15–16; Zech. 12:2, 9; Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6). John uses Peter's vain attempt to defend Jesus as an opportunity to underscore that Jesus's resolve is unwavering.

The narrator proceeds to the main action, which now seems like a scene out of a slapstick silent film in which a band of incompetent police officers act as though the harmless hero is a dangerous criminal (e.g., Buster Keaton in *Cops*, First National Pictures, 1922). Then the cohort and the commanding officer [*chiliarchos*], who stands out at this point for having done no commanding, and the attendants of the Jews together seized Jesus and bound him (18:12).

Jesus Is Handed Over to the High Priest (18:13–27)

The action proceeds on an unexpected course. They led him away first not to Caiaphas, the only authority to be named so far, but to Annas. The narrator suggests that this makes sense, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year (18:13). Annas appears at this point as a power to whom Caiaphas is answerable, but nevertheless one obliged to Roman authorities. Quirinius, governor of Syria, appointed Annas as high priest in AD 6, and then Procurator Gratus dismissed him in AD 15. Although Caiaphas is the acting high priest at this time, Num. 35:25–28 suggests that high priests served for life, and therefore Annas, who still lives, seems to legitimately retain the title. Moreover, Annas continued to wield influence at least over the candidates: five of the next high priests who serve until AD 63 were his sons, and Joseph Caiaphas, who served from AD 18–36, was his son-in-law (Josephus, *Ant* 18.34; 20.198). Rabbinic literature characterizes the family as extremely wealthy and powerful and as a target of the zealots (*b. Pesah.* 57a; *t. Menah.* 13.21–22). The Gospel seems to presuppose that the reader knows about the tense alliance between the house of Annas and Rome and their mutual anxiety about opposition to their authority.

The narrator reminds the reader that Caiaphas was the one who advised the Jews that it is expedient for one man to be slain on behalf of the people (18:14). From the onset, even though the Jewish authorities appeal to the law, Jewish law plays no role in the action. John contains no Jewish trial.

The scene is divided between two settings: the interior of the high priest Annas's house, where Jesus questions his interrogator, and the courtyard of the house, where Peter is questioned by the high priest's servants. In Matthew and Mark's account, the Sanhedrin examines Jesus, and the action comes to the accusation of blasphemy and the sentence of death (Matt. 26:63–68). Peter's denial follows as a discrete action (Matt. 26:69–75).