



The Gospel of John - Chapter Eighteen

III John 13:1-20:31 - The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eighteen

Jesus and his disciples leave Jerusalem and cross the Kidron Valley into a garden on the Mount of Olives. Judas leads a group of Roman soldiers and Jewish police in order to arrest Jesus and take him to the authorities.

Throughout John's story, the world has been judged by the presence of Jesus, and the world has in turn judged him. The whole Gospel is thus a description of a trial, a theme that reaches a climax as Jesus is brought before the authorities. As he is put on trial both his own identity as King and his confident trust in his Father are revealed.

The force that came out to arrest Jesus was composed of both Jews and Romans, and Jesus will now be arraigned before both Jewish and Roman officials. In the Synoptics Jesus is brought first before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and then before Pilate. Luke adds a further appearance before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12). John begins with Jesus' earlier appearance before Annas, an interrogation not mentioned in the Synoptics. John will then move on to the interrogation by Pilate, leaving out a description of the appearances before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and before King Herod. It is clear that he knows of the trial before Caiaphas (v.24), but has chosen not to include it in his account.

John weaves together the confrontation between Jesus and Annas and the confrontation going on at the same time between Peter and the people in the courtyard. This textured scene, which shifts between what is going on inside with Jesus and what is going on outside with Peter, is paralleled in the scene that follows by Pilate's encounter with Jesus inside the governor's palace and his dealings with the Jewish opponents outside. Such juxtaposition enables John to make comparisons between Jesus and the other characters in the story. The inner and outer scenes in the story also reflect John's purpose to show here, as throughout his Gospel, the inner and outer dimensions of the

events themselves – the eternal reality being manifested in the midst of the world as the Word comes to his own and the eternal significance of the events that unfold.

III.b John 18:1-19:42 - Jesus' arrest, trials, death, and burial

The familiar sequence of events starts with Jesus' betrayal by Judas (18:1-11), his informal hearing before Annas (18:12-27), his Roman trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16a), and his crucifixion and burial (19:16b-42). Only John features Jesus' appearance before Annas, and the Roman trial is covered in more detail. John does not provide an account of Jesus' formal Jewish trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. John particularly highlights that everything in the passion fulfils Scripture and occurs in accordance with God's plan.

III.b.i John 18:1-11 - The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

Jesus and his disciples cross the Kidron Valley and enter a garden, most likely Gethsemane, where he encounters a group of soldiers and temple police guided by Judas Iscariot. Jesus identifies himself as the one they are after. There is a brief skirmish in which Peter injures one of the servants, but Jesus soon puts a stop to the trouble and is arrested.

¹ After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.

John 18:1

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples. This indicates that Jesus' prayer recorded in Chapter 17 is different from his prayers in Gethsemane, which John does not record.

The Kidron valley is mentioned frequently in the Septuagint as the brook or wadi Kidron, although in the Gospels it only appears in John. The Greek text indicates a wadi or sporadic brook, named Kidron: <<*The whole country wept aloud as all the people passed by; the king crossed the Wadi Kidron, and all the people moved on towards the wilderness*>> (2 Samuel 15:23), <<*For on the day you go out, and cross the Wadi Kidron, know for certain that you shall die; your blood shall be on your own head*>> (1 Kings 2:37), and: <<*He brought out the image of Asherah from the house of the Lord, outside Jerusalem, to the Wadi Kidron, burned it at the Wadi Kidron, beat it to dust and threw the dust of it upon the graves of the common people*>> (2 Kings 23:6), which occasionally runs during the rainy season in the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem between the city and the Mount of Olives.

In the quotation from 2 Samuel 15, the same word is used of the Wadi Kidron in the Septuagint account of David's flight from Absalom, and John may well be alluding to that story. David was betrayed by his counsellor Ahithophel, who later hanged himself (2 Samuel 17:23), the only person in Scripture apart from Judas to do so. Thus David's sorrow and humiliation may be echoed in that of Jesus, although in Jesus' case he is actually in control, and this humiliation is part of his great victory.

The garden is likely to be identified with the orchard of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, which is how it is identified in the Synoptics: <<*Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray’*>> (Matthew 26:36), and: <<*They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray’*>> (Mark 14:32).

Gethsemane means oil press indicating a garden area among the olive groves on the Mount of Olives where olive oil was produced. The traditional location of Gethsemane is now marked by the modern Church of All Nations, which was built over a 4th Century Byzantine church.



Church of All Nations



The Garden of Gethsemane

The verse mentions that Jesus and his disciples entered, which may suggest Gethsemane was a walled garden.

John makes several mentions to a garden in his passion and resurrection accounts that have led some commentators to link the significance of what Jesus achieved in this environment, reversing the effects of what happened with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

John 18:2-3

That Judas also knew the place is an indication that Jesus was aware that he was walking into a trap. He could have found other places to go to that Judas would not have known about but, in order to do the Father's bidding, he went to the garden, where the Synoptics record his fervent prayer: <<*In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground*>> (Luke 22:44).

Jesus often met there with his disciples. Apart from during his childhood, the Synoptics only record Jesus being in Jerusalem during his final week, whereas John makes many references to Jesus being in the city and this statement further confirms this. This was clearly a place where they could be alone for Jesus to teach his disciples.

So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers. John does not make a mention of Judas' kiss of betrayal, which would have occurred at this point, but does clearly indicate that he was the one leading the captors to their prey. It is clear that the scene of such a betrayal was etched into the memory of John as he recalls that night. Peter also refers to Judas as the guide for those arresting Jesus: <<***Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus***>> (Acts 1:16).

The detachment of soldiers was dispatched to prevent a riot during the festival. These were probably a detachment of Roman soldiers, part of a cohort of 600 soldiers in Jerusalem, some of whom were assigned by Pilate to the temple for security. Only Roman soldiers were permitted to openly carry swords. They were accompanied by the Levitical temple police, and the personal security guards of the chief priests and the Pharisees, who were the ones carrying the clubs, for Jews were not permitted to bear swords. This band of Jewish and Gentile men is confirmed elsewhere: <<***Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?'***>> (Luke 22:52).

The Gospel accounts, especially John, make it clear that the culpability for Jesus' death lies with both the Gentiles and the Jews. Yet Jesus would die so willingly for both groups in order that some of them might be reconciled back to his Father.

The police from the chief priests and the Pharisees were the primary arresting officers who were previously sent to apprehend Jesus as recorded in Chapter 7.

Lanterns and torches were needed to track down Jesus because the garden would have been unlit and extremely dark at night.

Weapons were needed to overcome any armed resistance offered by Jesus or his followers, which would initially be the case.

⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?'

John 18:4

Knowing all that was to happen to him. This statement is further indication of John's understanding of Jesus' omniscience and therefore his deity.

For whom are you looking? This is not a question from ignorance, seeking an answer. Rather, it is like other questions asked by God that are intended to reveal a situation and bring people to action. Jesus, confident of God's sovereign control, takes the initiative by stepping forward and hands himself over to his captors, knowing all that was to happen to him.

⁵ They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

John 18:5

They say they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus responds, I am he, Greek *ego eimi*. Here the most humble and human of Jesus' names is juxtaposed with the most exalted and divine. The two together are the cross hairs that target Jesus' identity: he is the human being from an insignificant, small town in Galilee who is also God. Jesus' self-identification, I am he, has connotations of deity as commented on in Chapters 6 and 8. This is suggested by the soldiers' reaction in the following verse.

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. Having led the officers to Jesus it might be thought that he would want to disappear quietly but he remains behind to witness the enormity of his crime.

⁶ When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground.

John 18:6

That the guards fell to the ground is a common reaction to divine revelation: <<Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendour all round. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking>> (Ezekiel 1:28), <<Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground>> (Daniel 10:9), <<He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'>> (Acts 9:4), <<And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever>> (Revelation 4:9-10a).

That Jesus can illicit such a reaction from his opponents is a reflection of Jesus' majesty and a foretaste of what is yet to come: <<Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth>> (Philippians 2:9-10), from both those who will worship him from their hearts and those who do not own allegiance to him and thus for whom this submission is hell.

⁷ Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.'⁸ Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.'⁹ This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.'

John 18:7-9

Again he asked them. Jesus puts the question to them again. The impression given by this passage is that they have been completely neutralised and that he must allow the events to proceed and give them permission to take him. Amazingly,

they answer the same as before: Jesus of Nazareth. They have just experienced the numinous, and it has not spoken to them at all. They are just doing their job, like those sent to investigate John the Baptist at the beginning of the Gospel (1:19-27). This repetition of the question: For whom are you looking? emphasises its importance, for it focuses on Jesus. It is also a question that searches the soul. The very first thing Jesus said in this Gospel was, literally, 'What are you seeking?' (1:38), his question to the two disciples of John the Baptist, and their reply indicated they wanted to be with him. Now there are people seeking Jesus, but they do so not for their soul's sake. They have their own agenda, as many people do today. There are ways of seeking Jesus that do not bring life.

Jesus' statement I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me summarises 17:12, which in turn refers back to 6:39 and 10:28. Jesus is portrayed as the good shepherd who voluntarily chooses death to save the life of his sheep: I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go. Jesus uses the Greek word *aphete*, in the imperative. Jesus is issuing an order to those sent to arrest him! The physical preservation of the disciples symbolises their spiritual preservation. Here is Jesus as the Good Shepherd caring for his flock, a glimpse of the grace that is at work throughout the Passion as it has been throughout the ministry.

This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken. John is making it clear that the words of Jesus are equal in validity to OT prophecy.

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus.

John 18:10

Peter's sword was likely the Roman short sword or *gladius* that could be hidden under a person's garment. This is one of two swords in the possession of the disciples: <<**They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.'** He replied, '**It is enough**'>> (Luke 22:38). Jesus had just demonstrated his power over his adversaries with his word of command, yet Peter still felt it necessary to intercede with violence.



A Roman Gladius

That Peter struck the high priest's slave might be seen as an act of cowardice rather than taking

on one of the armed Roman guards but this information is not available and it seems more likely that Malchus was simply the one in the way.

Cut off his right ear. The short sword was for stabbing, not slicing, thus Peter probably intended to kill the slave with a lethal blow to the head, but he was able to evade the sword, suffering only the loss of his ear. Luke adds that Jesus immediately healed the wound: <<**But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him**>> (Luke 22:51), a miracle that probably prevented Peter from at least being immediately arrested. Yet even this miracle did not deter his captors from arresting Jesus.

The slave's name was Malchus. The name of this slave is recorded only in John's Gospel. However, the name Malchus is known in Josephus from an earlier period, and appears in Nabataean and Palmyrene inscriptions. These occurrences make it likely that it was an Arab name.

¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

John 18:11

Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me serves as a metaphor for death and symbolises God's wrath: <<*For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed; he will pour a draught from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs*>> (Psalm 75:8), <<*Thus says your Sovereign, the Lord, your God who pleads the cause of his people: See, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath*>> (Isaiah 51:22), <<*For thus says the Lord: If those who do not deserve to drink the cup still have to drink it, shall you be the one to go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished; you must drink it*>> (Jeremiah 49:12), and: <<*You will be sated with contempt instead of glory. Drink, you yourself, and stagger! The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and shame will come upon your glory!*>> (Habakkuk 2:16).

Jesus no longer contemplates the cup being withdrawn: <<*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done*>> (Luke 22:42). Note that the cup given to Jesus is from the Father, and hence Jesus is prepared to drink it. In addition to the physical suffering of the Cross, Jesus suffered the agony of bearing God's wrath, which was poured out on him as a substitutionary sacrifice and in payment for sins. Refer also to the comments made on Romans 3:25, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

The apostles John and James, who wanted to be positioned on either side of Jesus in his Kingdom: <<*But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?'*>> (Mark 10:38). They confirmed that they were prepared to. James became the first martyred apostle shortly after Jesus' own death: <<*About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword*>> (Acts 12:1-2). John also suffered persecution and exile in his service to Jesus: <<*I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*>> (Revelation 1:9).

III.b.ii John 18:12-14 - Jesus before the High Priest

John describes Jesus' arrest and binding as the activity of the whole party that has come out against him, both Gentile and Jew. John will make it clear that the Jewish authorities have special responsibility for Jesus' death (19:11), but the Gentiles have a share in it as well. John reveals the shocking sight of the one who brings freedom to mankind (8:31-36) being bound by representatives of the whole human race.

¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

John 18:12-14

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. Jesus, God incarnate, was being treated like a common criminal.

First they took him to Annas. John only records what happened to Jesus when he was first questioned by Annas and then Pilate, where as the Synoptics focus on Jesus' appearance before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, which John only alludes to.

Under the Roman procurators three wealthy priestly families largely controlled the extremely important position of high priest. Annas, also known as Ananus, was the patriarch of one of these powerful families of high priests (Acts 4:6). He served as high priest during AD6-15, and the high priesthood was subsequently held by five of his sons, including his son-in-law Caiaphas (v.24).

Annas' past stature merited his continued designation as high priest, and even after his deposition he retained significant control over his family's exercise of this position, so that Luke 3:2 can speak of <<*the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas*>>. Josephus mentions a monument of Annas in Jewish War 5.506, which has been plausibly identified with a highly decorated tomb found near the Kidron Valley.

Caiaphas was high priest for 18 years (AD18-36), longer than any other high priest in the 1st Century. The reference to his advice to the Jews was actually a prophecy about Jesus' death for the whole nation in John 11:50-52, which John refers to directly here: Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

III.b.iii John 18:15-18 - Peter Denies Jesus

Peter and John follow as Jesus is brought before Annas. John's familiarity with the high priest, or at least with his household, enables him to enter with Jesus and to get Peter admitted also. The one who reclined next to Jesus a few hours earlier at the meal (13:23) continues to be close to him. However, his going back out to bring Peter in shows that he, like his master, is also concerned for others, in particular this fellow believer. The love evident in this gesture reveals John's character as a true disciple and as one to whose care Jesus can entrust other disciples, indeed even his own mother (19:27).

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in.

John 18:15-16

Another disciple is generally accepted as being a reference to John himself, ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ (20:2). How he was known to the high priest can only be a matter of speculation but it was sufficient for him to gain access past the gate and for his word to be accepted to allow Peter in as well.

The courtyard, Greek *aulē*, was an enclosed space open to the sky. That he went with Jesus most likely means that he and Peter were tailing the procession of soldiers and guards that were taking Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.

Brought Peter in. The Synoptics report only Peter as entering the courtyard in Matthew 26:58, Mark 14:54 and Luke 22:54. However, this does not mean that John’s account is less factual, for the other accounts mention this to set the scene for Peter’s denial and John’s presence serves only to confirm Peter’s account of what occurred.

¹⁷ The woman 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 police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

John 18:17-18

You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you? The language used by the woman in the courtyard seems to indicate a level of disdain for Jesus in the way she addressed him simply as this man. The use of not also seems also to imply that she knew John to be a disciple, for she knew him well enough to permit him entry into the courtyard.

While Peter’s attack with the sword (v.10) may have made him fearful of being recognised, he is not in a position of legal difficulty, since there is no warrant for his arrest. Nor is there any indication that he was physically threatened by this woman or the others in the courtyard. He has no such excuses for his denial. He who a few hours earlier had said he would die for Jesus (13:37) now denies any association with him purely out of fear of what people would think.

I am not. Peter’s first denial of Christ is brief but emphatic.

John, like Luke, is gentle in his account of Peter’s denials, leaving out the oaths he used (Matthew 26:74 and Mark 14:71); and John will give prominence to Peter’s restoration (21:15-19). However, this does not mean that John takes the denial less seriously than Matthew or Mark do. The very terms of the restoration in Chapter 21 show the enormity of the denials and also stand in contrast to the love that John shows in this scene as he sticks close to Jesus even in his disgrace.

The significance of the charcoal fire becomes clear in Chapter 21. A charcoal fire gives off warmth but little light. This dim fire, along with the darkness in the courtyard, helps account for why Peter was not recognised immediately by the relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off (v.26). The darkness of the

courtyard may also have a symbolic significance, for it means Peter is outside in the half-light while John is inside with the Light of the World. Peter is not denigrated in this Gospel, but he does serve as a foil for the behaviour of another disciple who is never deflected from his following of Jesus. In the half-light, separated from Jesus, Peter encounters temptation for which he does not have the resources to resist. The only hope for anyone in the time of temptation is to remain close to Jesus.

III.b.iv John 18:19-24 - The High Priest Questions Jesus

This passage is not to be confused with the Jewish trials of Jesus but is more of an interrogation by the head of a powerful Jewish family. He asks about Jesus' disciples because there was concern over Jesus' popularity and also about his teaching, clearly hoping that Jesus might incriminate himself with some false statement on Scriptural doctrine.

Jesus neither incriminates himself as a false teacher nor does he satisfy Annas' anxiety by explaining his teaching. Instead, he simply states that he has spoken openly and publically, a fact that can be verified by speaking with those who had heard him and accepted what he has taught. For this challenge Jesus is struck by one of the officials but Jesus challenges the authority of the one who struck him. Jesus is then led off to be tried before Caiaphas.

¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

John 18:19

The high priest here refers to Annas and not Caiaphas. That he questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching suggests that the primary concern is theological, although political charges were later lodged as well (19:7 and 19:12).

²⁰ Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.'

John 18:20-21

I have spoken openly to the world, I have said nothing in secret. Jesus' reply echoes God's words in the book of Isaiah, e.g. <<*I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in chaos.'* I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right>> (Isaiah 45:19), and the prophet's own claims: <<*Draw near to me, hear this! From the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there. And now the Lord God has sent me and his spirit*>> (Isaiah 48:16). Jesus' point is not that he never spoke in private with his disciples but that his message was the same in private as in public; he was not guilty of a sinister conspiracy. John records instances of Jesus' teaching both in synagogues (6:59), and in the temple area, Greek *hieron*.

Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said. Jesus' appeal to the witness of those who had heard him is essentially a demand for a fair trial, since in Jewish law the witnesses are questioned, not the accused. Jesus has completed his witness by word. There remains only the climax of his entire ministry as he witnesses to his Father through his death, resurrection and ascension. It is now up to those who have heard him to bear witness to him. Such remains the case today. His abiding presence remains with believers, but those who abide in him are to bear witness to him before the world.

²² When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?'

John 18:22

One of the police standing nearby was probably one of those who took part in Jesus' arrest.

Struck Jesus on the face. The striking was likely a sharp blow with the flat of the man's hand, similar to: <<***Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him***>> (Matthew 26:67). Jesus was still bound and could not defend himself. However, the blow was intended more as an insult than as an intention to injure Jesus.

Is that how you answer the high priest? The rebuke may echo: <<***You shall not revile God, or curse a leader of your people***>> (Exodus 22:28), which is quoted by Paul when he faced the Sanhedrin after his arrest by the Romans: <<***While Paul was looking intently at the council he said, 'Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God.' Then the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near him to strike him on the mouth. At this Paul said to him, 'God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting there to judge me according to the law, and yet in violation of the law you order me to be struck?' Those standing nearby said, 'Do you dare to insult God's high priest?' And Paul said, 'I did not realise, brothers, that he was high priest; for it is written, "You shall not speak evil of a leader of your people"'***>> (Acts 23:1-5).

²³ Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?'

John 18:23

If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me? When challenged regarding his response to the high priest, Jesus alludes to the law of Exodus 22:28 and denies having violated it. Truthful self-defence is not sinful but righteous.

²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

John 18:24

Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Before Jesus could be brought to the Roman governor, charges must be confirmed by the official high priest, Caiaphas, who presided over the Sanhedrin.

Caiaphas managed to retain control of the high priesthood for nearly 18 years (AD18-36) – longer than anyone else in the 1st Century (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 18.35, 95). He was certainly the high priest during Jesus' ministry, although he also consulted frequently with his father-in-law Annas.

Josephus' depiction of a high priestly house in the upper city of Jerusalem (Jewish War 2.426) has suggested to some scholars the possibility of identifying Caiaphas' house with some residence amid the wealthy Roman-era houses excavated atop Mount Zion. Others contend for the traditional site of Caiaphas' house beneath Saint Peter of the Cockcrow Church toward the base of Mount Zion.



According to the Armenians, this was the house of Caiaphas, where Jesus was brought for trial. See the image.

An archaeological find in 1990 raised the possibility that an elaborately decorated ossuary, a box for reburial of the bones of the dead, which has the name Joseph Caiaphas crudely etched into its side, once contained Caiaphas' bones. This ossuary was found in a relatively modest tomb complex south of Jerusalem.

III.b.v John 18:25-27 - Peter Denies Jesus Again

Peter, still in the outer courtyard, is tested twice more, a test which he fails and thus he fulfils Jesus' prediction that he would deny his Lord three times that night. The structure of John's account is a clear contrast between the way Jesus had just stood his ground before one of the most powerful men in the land and the way Peter capitulates before the household servants and a few police officers.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked 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, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?'²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

John 18:25-27

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. It was the middle of the night in springtime and it would have been cold. Therefore, Peter's action is quite normal. This is, no doubt, what he hoped for as he clearly wished to keep a low profile following the earlier challenge by the woman at the gate.

They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' The same challenge from a different source again sees an unambiguous denial from Peter.

The man whose ear Peter had cut off was the servant Malchus (v.10).

Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed. This was Peter's third denial fulfilling the predication by Jesus after supper: <<*Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times*>> (John 13:38).

III.b.vi John 18:28-38a - Jesus before Pilate

John has not recorded the Jewish trials of Jesus but switches straight to Jesus being taken before the Roman prefect Pilate on a capital charge of insurrection and not blasphemy, the charge for which they had supposedly tried him.

The following scene switches continuously from outside Pilate's headquarters, with Pilate's arguments with the Jews, to events that happened inside, particularly his dialogue with Jesus, including four key questions in the whole discourse: 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (18:33), 'So you are a king?' (18:37), 'Where are you from?' (19:9), and 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' (19:10). The Jews would not enter the building because they believed it would make them ceremonially unclean. This was not taken from the law but from a later tradition. It is ironic that these men wanted to remain clean in order to participate in a festival and yet were intent of having the Lamb of God slaughtered.

²⁸ Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover.

John 18:28

Pilate's headquarters. The location of this prætorium, the residence of a Roman governor, has long been identified with the Antonia Fortress on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount; this large fortress allowed immediate access to the temple in order to suppress any disturbance. Only portions of the walls of the original Antonia Fortress remain. However, many commentators argue that the Palace of Herod, once the Jerusalem home of Herod the Great, but later in Roman hands (Philo, Embassy to Gaius 299), was more lavish and afforded better accommodations for the Roman governor. It was used later by the governor Florus (Josephus, Jewish War 2.301). This palace fortress, today called the Citadel, which was located at the prominent Jaffa Gate at the western entrance to the old city, has since Jesus' day been through many rounds of destruction and rebuilding, beginning with the capture of Jerusalem in AD70 and continuing until after the Crusader period (11th-13th centuries). However, some original Herodian portions of the palace do still exist.



The Antonia Fortress



The Citadel

Early in the morning probably means shortly after sunrise, when the Sanhedrin met in formal session and pronounced its verdict on Jesus: <<***When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death***>> (Matthew 27:1).

To avoid ritual defilement. Jews could go inside a Gentile courtyard open to the sky (v.15), but they could not go into a Gentile building or home with a roof on it without becoming ceremonially unclean.

The reference to the Passover may be to the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted seven days immediately after Passover, and so to eat the Passover probably means continue to celebrate the ongoing festival. The other Gospels state that Jesus had already eaten the Passover meal with his disciples (Matthew 26:17-29 and Luke 22:1-23), but the current verse seems to refer to the Jewish leaders' desire to continue in the ongoing celebrations.

²⁹ So Pilate went out to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this man?’ ³⁰ They answered, ‘If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.’

John 18:29-30

Pilate was appointed as the prefect over Judæa by the emperor Tiberius and served there between AD26-36.

Normally the seat of the Roman government in Judæa was Cæsarea, not Jerusalem. Pilate was in Jerusalem at Passover to prevent rebellious activities. Pilate had certainly witnessed disturbances in Jerusalem, some of his own making, and he ultimately lost his position by mishandling a disturbance in Samaria. Pilate’s willingness to execute Jesus is credited in the Gospels to his desire to maintain public calm rather than to follow the dictates of justice. Jewish sources considered Pilate’s reign to have been quite harsh, charging him with greed and cruelty. As examples of his disregard for Jewish religion, Josephus mentions Pilate bringing pagan Roman legionary standards into Jerusalem and appropriating temple funds to build an aqueduct (Jewish Antiquities 18.55-62, which is confirmed by Philo, Embassy to Gaius 299-306). An inscription found at Cæsarea indicates that Pilate dedicated a structure there to the imperial cult of Tiberius. The famous Pilate inscription, found in Cæsarea in 1961, identifies Pilate as prefect, a senior Roman governmental official, of Judæa.

Pilate went out, respecting the religious sensitivities of the Jews. This sets up a dramatic sequence in which Pilate goes outside to face the Jews and the crowds, then goes inside to speak to Jesus (v.33), then goes outside to the Jews again (v.38), then goes back inside to Jesus (19:1), then goes outside again to the Jews and the crowds, bringing Jesus with him (19:4-5). He then goes back inside with Jesus to speak to him privately (19:9-11), then comes back outside once again with Jesus (19:13), then finally yields to the Jews and gives Jesus to them to be crucified (19:16). Therefore many of Jesus’ statements about himself in this section are uttered backstage, out of the hearing of his Jewish opponents.

What accusation do you bring against this man? Pilate’s question is quite reasonable and should have been expected if justice was to be served. However, the Jews did not seek justice but simply wanted Pilate to accept their word and pass a sentence of death on Jesus. This is clear from their response to his question: If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.

³¹ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.’ The Jews replied, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death.’

John 18:31

Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law. Like Gallio after him, who was the proconsul of Achaia based in Corinth and before whom the Jews brought Paul (Acts 18:12-17), Pilate would have no interest in judging internal Jewish disputes. Thus he has not accepted the charge of insurrection.

We are not permitted to put anyone to death. Prior to Jesus' execution, the Romans reportedly revoked the Sanhedrin's right to impose capital punishment (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 1.1 and 7.2, and Palestinian Talmud, Sanhedrin 41a). Known exceptions to this judicial restraint on the Sanhedrin are explicable either as unofficial mob actions, as with the stoning of Stephen in Acts Chapter 7 and the many previous attempts to stone Jesus, or as official Jewish actions when Roman oversight was weak (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.200). Aside from these events, the one other execution in Palestine reported in the NT, that of James the apostle, was based on regal authority rather than on the authority of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin clearly desired that Jesus' execution be done officially in keeping with Roman law. Therefore the Jewish leaders had to get approval from Pilate. But this presented a problem for them, since Pilate would not be interested in condemning someone for a religious crime such as blasphemy or claiming to be God. This meant they needed to bring a political charge against Jesus, so they essentially accused him of treason by saying that he claimed to be a king in opposition to Cæsar.

³² (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

John 18:32

The kind of death he was to die is reminiscent of the wording in 12:33 regarding the death of Jesus, and is later echoed in 21:19 regarding the death of Peter. Crucifixion was viewed with horror by the Jews. It was considered the same as hanging: <<*The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree*>> (Acts 5:30), for which Mosaic law enunciated the principle: <<*anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse*>> (Deuteronomy 21:23b). If Jesus had been put to death by the Sanhedrin, he would have been stoned, the OT sanction for blasphemy: <<*One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death*>> (Leviticus 24:16). However, later tradition that was in effect in the 1st Century would have permitted death by burning, beheading or strangulation (Sanhedrin 7.1).

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ³⁴ Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'

John 18:33-34

The king of the Jews has clear political overtones. Pilate's question aims to determine whether Jesus constitutes a threat to Rome's imperial power. Pilate might have expected either a denial of the charge and a plea for clemency, or a passionate denunciation of Rome by a committed insurrectionist. He got neither for Jesus simply said: Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me? In other words, do you have anything against me or are you simply listening to gossip from others? This would have been a question to test Pilate's heart.

It was known from the time of David that there would be a very special king of the Jews as reflected by foreign visitors who knew of his arrival and had come to pay homage: <<*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage’*>> (Matthew 2:1-2).

³⁵ Pilate replied, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’ ³⁶ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’

John 18:35-36

What have you done? Pilate goes on to confirm that the charges are not his but those of Jesus’ own people. Jesus does not admit or deny any crime, not does he affirm or deny his kingship but he does go on to speak like a king, referring to his heavenly Kingdom.

My kingdom is not from this world. Jesus’ description of the nature of his Kingdom echoes similar passages in Daniel, such as: <<*And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever*>> (Daniel 2:44). In Jewish thinking, the Kingdom of God is not a territory but a reference to the fact that it is God who has dominion over all creation.

My kingdom is not from here. Jesus says that if his Kingdom were an earthly realm then his followers would fight to protect him, as Peter had mistakenly tried to do at the time of his arrest. However, Jesus’ Kingdom is not about possession or status it is all about self-sacrifice in accordance with his Father’s will. Those, like Pilate, who cannot see the purpose of Jesus, can never understand his true kingship and thus miss the opportunity of joining him for all eternity.

³⁷ Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ ^{38a} Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’

John 18:37-38a

You say that I am a king. This is not an affirmation of Jesus’ kingship but more a response to let Pilate know that his own question so you are a king? is a misunderstanding of the reality of who Jesus is. Pilate understands it purely in terms of political power, whereas Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, something that transcends anything in the human realm. Paul makes reference to this very scene: <<*Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all*>>

things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords>> (1 Timothy 6:12-15).

For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. The truth that Jesus spoke of was his revelation of the Father. Jesus' statement here is also in accord with his petition to his Father earlier: <<***Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth***>> (John 17:17). It should also be noted that Jesus' reference to his human birth, which is an accepted fact, in no way denies that Christ has existed for all eternity.

What is truth? Ironically, the one charged with determining the truth in the matter glibly dismisses the relevance of truth in the very presence of the one who is truth incarnate (14:6). Pilate apparently decides that Jesus is a teacher of abstract philosophical questions to which no one can find an answer, and thus decides that Jesus poses no threat to the Roman government. He seeks no answer from the only one who could give him the answer.

III.b.vii John 18:38b-19:16a - Jesus Sentenced to Death

Pilate finds Jesus to be innocent of the charges brought against him but, instead of releasing Jesus, gives the Jewish crowd the chance to accept Jesus' release under a tradition of freeing a prisoner at the time of Passover. The crowd, prompted by the authorities, call for the release of an insurrectionist instead.

Pilate then had Jesus flogged, during which time he was also abused and mocked by his captors. He was then brought out to the crowd for one last appeal for his release but the crowd bayed for him to be crucified for calling himself God's Son.

Pilate had Jesus taken once more inside for final questioning, trying to identify who Jesus really is as he was so troubled by these events. He wanted to release Jesus but was warned that doing so would make him disloyal to Cæsar, so Pilate took Jesus outside one last time to pass formal judgement on him, handing him over to be crucified.

^{38b} After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him.'

John 18:38b

He went out to the Jews again. Pilate came in and out of his headquarters on several occasions during this trial of Jesus as discussed in v.29.

I find no case against him. Pilate's exoneration of Jesus, repeated twice more (John 19:4 and 19:6), and confirmed in: <<***Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no basis for an accusation against this man'***>> (Luke 23:4), sharply contrasts with the death sentence later pronounced on Jesus due to extensive Jewish pressure (19:12-16), and is an example of John's skilful use of irony.

Although not recorded by John, the response to Pilate's declaration is that Jesus had been causing trouble ever since he came to prominence in Galilee, which was the domain of Herod. It was at this point that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod for trial, who also found him innocent, as recorded in Luke 23:6-12.

³⁹ But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?'

John 18:39

As in v.28, at the Passover probably refers to the entire festival of Unleavened Bread.

Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews? It seems that this was said with at least a hint of sarcasm, since Pilate has found Jesus to be of no political threat to Rome and therefore not a real king at all! It is a final appeal to the Jews to renounce their wish to have Jesus killed but it falls on deaf ears and blinded eyes. The Jewish opponents are rejecting Jesus precisely as their king, asking to receive a criminal instead, as Peter later confirms: <<***But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses***>> (Acts 3:14-15).

⁴⁰ They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

John 18:40

Barabbas means 'son of the father', Greek *bar-abbas*. Ironically, the people wanted Barabbas released rather than the true Son of the Father, Jesus.

The word translated bandit, Greek *lēstēs*, sometimes means insurrectionist, but the meaning thief or robber is much more common in the NT, e.g. <<***He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers'***>> (Matthew 21:13), <<***Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead'***>> (Luke 10:30), <<***Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit***>> (John 10:1), and: <<***on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters***>> (2 Corinthians 11:26). However, since Mark and Luke make specific references to Barabbas being involved in insurrection then that is probably how John uses it here as well. It was certainly used in this context during the Jewish uprising in AD66.

Each Gospel contributes something to the picture of Barabbas as a man who had committed multiple crimes, including robbery, insurrection and murder: <<***At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas***>> (Matthew 27:16), <<***Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection***>> (Mark 15:7), and: <<***Then they all***>>

shouted out together, 'Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!' (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder)>> (Luke 23:18-19).

All four Gospels clearly indicate Jesus' innocence of any crime, and the culpability of everyone involved in the death of Jesus. All of mankind should also reflect on the nature of their own sin which is the fundamental reason why Jesus had to come to earth and die at all!