

Gethsemane, arrest, trial, denial...

Matthew 26 v 36 to 75

Jesus prays in Gethsemane (Matthew 26 v 36 to 46)

Olive trees are grown for their oil. The olives would be put into a press, which would crush the olives to squeeze the oil out of them. The press was called a 'Gethsemane', and oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit...

- What did Jesus suffer during these long night hours in the garden?
- What was the root cause of his distress?
- What did he mean by "this cup" (v 39) and "the hour" (v 45)?
- What exactly was Jesus' petition? Was it answered, and if so, how? See Hebrews 5 v 7, 8 and Psalm 119 v 50.

What cup? The cup of God's wrath and indignation against sin (Jeremiah 25 v 15; Psalm 75 v 8); the cup of salvation (Psalm 116 v 13). Three times Jesus begged the Father, if there was *any* other way for man to be saved, *anything* but the cross. This proves that there is *no* other way for a person to be saved except through Christ's death on the cross, because if there was some other way, then his prayer was not answered and his death was in vain (Acts 4 v 12).

Betrayal and arrest of Jesus (Matthew 26 v 47 to 56)

- Why do you think Jesus was ready, in a way his disciples were not, for what had to be faced?

"Greetings, Rabbi!" (v 49) – Judas greeted Jesus, even giving him the customary kiss, which was used to identify Jesus to the authorities who came to arrest him. It is hard to find more hypocritical words in the Bible than these. The loving words of Jesus, calling Judas 'friend' (v 50), stand in sharp contrast.

With one sword, Peter (John 18 v 10) was willing to take on a small army of men; yet he could not pray with Jesus one hour. Had Jesus wanted help, there were more than 12 legions of angels ready to come to his aid! A Roman legion typically consisted of 4,000 to 5,000 men – this number is impressive, considering that one angel once killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (2 Kings 19 v 35).

Jesus before Caiaphas and the Council (Matthew 26 v 57 to 68)

The purpose of the Jewish Council was to find legal grounds for putting Jesus to death. It had been previously decided by the chief priests and elders that he must die (Matthew 26 v 3 to 5), but legal justification for their actions was needed, enabling them to secure Pilate's confirmation of their verdict...

- The one definite charge, on which the decision to have Jesus put to death was taken, was his claim to be the Christ (v 65). How did Jesus declare that his claim would be vindicated? See Acts 2 v 32 to 36.

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This night-time trial was illegal, as according to Jewish law, all criminal trials had to be conducted in daylight. There were many other illegalities:

- (i) criminal cases could not be tried during the Passover season;
- (ii) all evidence had to be guaranteed by two independent witnesses;
- (iii) a trial always began by presenting evidence for the innocence of the accused, before the evidence of guilt was offered.

Altogether Jesus would undergo six trials – three Jewish trials (during that night), followed by three Roman trials (the following day):

- (i) before Annas (John 18 v 12 to 14);
- (ii) before Caiaphas (Matthew 26 v 57 to 68);
- (iii) before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 27 v 1, 2);
- (iv) before Pilate (John 18 v 28 to 38);
- (v) before Herod (Luke 23 v 6 to 12); and
- (vi) before Pilate again (John 18 v 39 to 19 v 16).

Peter denies Jesus (Matthew 26 v 69 to 75)

- Observe the experiences through which Peter passed on that fateful night. What were the contributing factors that finally led to his denial of Jesus? What are the lessons for us?

Before we judge Peter too severely, we should examine ourselves.

How many times have we denied the Lord, and lost precious opportunities to share the Gospel with others?

Do we talk when we should listen?

Do we argue when we should obey?

Do we sleep when we should pray?

Do we fight when we should submit?

Peter repented (he “wept bitterly” v 75), and Jesus, after a private meeting with him (Luke 24 v 33, 34), forgave him publicly (see John 21)...