

Harmonizing the accounts of the Betrayal and Arrest

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- 1) The crowd arrives—Matthew 26:47, Mark 14:43, Luke 22:47^a, John 18:3. The four accounts state the fact, while Luke emphasizes that Judas was leading them, also implied by John.
- 2) Jesus knocks them down—John 18:4-9. I take this to be a ‘cyst’ of supernatural intervention, to make clear that the Father has not lost control of the events. I say ‘cyst’ because then the crowd carries on as if nothing had happened. A person delivered from demonic control often does not remember what he did while under that control; this may have been similar, only on the other side.
- 3) The kiss—Matthew 26:48-50^a, Mark 14:44-45, Luke 22:47^b-48. Only three of the four accounts take up this pitiful episode. I offer the following harmonization:

Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, “Whomever I kiss, he it is; seize him and take him away securely”.¹ So upon arriving he went directly to Him. So Jesus said to him, “Friend, what brings you here?”² Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed Him. So Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of the Man with a kiss?”

- 4) They grab Jesus—Matthew 26:50^b, Mark 14:46. Judas served as guide, but I take it that Malchus was actually in charge of the operation. He may have taken the lead in grabbing Jesus, which was why Peter swung at him. This grabbing precipitated the reaction that followed.
- 5) Peter’s sword—Matthew 26:51-54, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:49-51, John 18:10-11. All four of the accounts take up this episode. I offer the following harmonization:

When those who were around Him saw what was about to happen, they said to Him, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)³ Then Jesus reacted by saying, “Allow at least this!” and touching the man’s ear He healed him.⁴ Then Jesus said to Peter: “Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will die by the sword. Do you actually suppose that I cannot call upon my Father right now and He will place beside me more than twelve legions of angels?⁵ But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it has to happen this way? The cup that the Father has given me, must I not drink it?”

¹ Why the ‘securely’? Judas had seen so many manifestations of Jesus’ power that he should have known better, but of course he was under Satan’s control at that time. However, it appears that they expected resistance.

² Jesus knew perfectly well why Judas was there, so why did He call him “friend”? Perhaps to show that He held no personal animosity against him. The Plan was being fulfilled.

³ The Text has ‘the servant’, so the high priest had probably put him in charge of the operation. John probably knew him personally. Obviously Peter was not used to wielding a sword.

⁴ Peter’s attack caused them to release Jesus, so His hands were free to do this. If the Lord had not healed that ear, things would probably have been nastier for Peter in the ‘courtyard’, if not already in the garden.

⁵ That would be a minimum of 36,000—probably enough to handle the situation, don’t you think?

6) Jesus addresses the crowd—Matthew 26:55-56^a, Mark 14:48-49, Luke 22:52-53. Only three of the four accounts take up this episode. I offer the following harmonization:

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, officers of the temple, and elders who had come against Him: “Have you come out with swords and clubs as against a bandit, to arrest me? I used to sit daily with you in the temple, teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has happened so that the Scriptures of the prophets should be fulfilled. This is your hour; even the authority of the darkness!”¹

7) The disciples run away—Matthew 26:56^b, Mark 14:50. The two accounts state the fact.

8) Jesus is taken away—Matthew 26:57, Mark 14:53^a, Luke 22:54^a, John 18:12-13^a. The four accounts state the fact. The first three are in essential agreement, but John offers some new information. First, there was a Roman detachment, with its commander, there in the garden. The word here (*chiliarch*) refers to a commander of a thousand men (or of a cohort = about 600); this could only be a Roman officer of high rank, and there would only be one of them in Jerusalem. So how did they get him to come along? Obviously Pilate had been informed and was participating. Second, they took Him to Annas first, because he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas,² who was high priest that year. A careful look at the parallel accounts makes clear that all of Peter’s denials took place at Caiaphas’ palace, as also all the recorded questionings, etc., so after showing Jesus to Annas they took Him on to Caiaphas. That interim was probably also used to gather the Council, who would not want to be dragged out of bed until Jesus was actually in hand—it was probably between 3 and 4 a.m.

¹ This was Satan’s hour, being part of the Father’s Plan; 'the darkness' refers to Satan's kingdom; 'your hour' means that they were part of that kingdom.

² The bigger reason was that Annas was the real high priest, according to the Law (the office of high priest was for life). He was the power behind the throne, so to say. Caiaphas was the political high priest (that year), for purposes of dealing with Rome.