

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## *John 18:1-12* – Jesus' Arrest in the Garden

by Dan Trygg

**“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth...”** (18:1) -- The language indicates that He finished the prayer of chapter seventeen immediately before leaving the city. He probably exited through the East Gate (sometimes called the Golden Gate), which was in the NE corner of the temple. **“...with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden...”** -- From the East Gate, a roadway immediately descends into the Kidron valley, which runs north to south next to the city. Part of this road continues to the NE toward Jericho, while another roadway breaks off toward the E and makes its way over the Mount of Olives to Bethany, where Jesus had been staying. The Garden of Gethsemane was located just a short distance up the Bethany roadway, still on the lower western slope of the Mount of Olives. **Matthew and Mark tell us it was a “place” known as “Gethsemane”, which is Hebrew for “olive press”** (Matt. 26:36; Mk. 14:32). The word translated as “place” referred to “property, farm, or country estate”. This was someone’s land, their private olive orchard. Since Jesus frequented there, the owner probably was a friend of His, and had given his permission to roam the grounds. The site was distinguished by the fact that there was an olive press there amid the trees, and, as **John alone informs us, there was also “a garden” there.** It was near the roadway, and lay almost directly across the valley from the East Gate of the temple. From that vantage point, had they been looking, it would have been easy to see anyone approaching them from the city, especially a large crowd with torches. The garden itself, however, would have been further among the trees, and away from the roadway a bit. It may also have been enclosed by a wall, which would have offered more privacy. **“...into which He Himself entered, and His disciples.”** -- Note that Jesus posted no guards. Could it be that by bringing the disciples into the garden with Him, He purposely kept them from noticing the crowd until it was almost upon them?

**“Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place; for Jesus had often met there with His disciples.”** (vs. 2) -- This was a customary gathering place for Jesus and the twelve. Again, being a private estate, it would have offered Jesus some refuge from the crowds that pressed in around Him in the city, as well as a safe, quiet place to be refreshed in a beautiful natural setting. Judas knew the Master’s customary movements, as well as the layout of the property. **The privacy offered by the setting also provided the enemies of Jesus the perfect location for His arrest** (Matt. 26:3-5).

**“Judas then, having received the Roman cohort...”** (vs. 3) -- Although the word “Roman” is not specifically mentioned in the text, **“the cohort” could only refer to the Roman soldiers stationed in the fortress of Antonia,** immediately next to the temple. At Passover time, the Romans made these soldiers available to the Sanhedrin, or Jewish high council, for the purpose of maintaining order. **A cohort was a tenth part of a legion, or equivalent to 600 men.** Obviously, the Jewish leaders were very concerned about the potential explosiveness involved in taking such a popular figure as Jesus into custody. **“...and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees...”** -- **The Roman soldiers joined the temple guard,** ...men trained as soldiers..., **and other servants** of both of these rival factions of Jewish leadership. The word translated as “officers” can also mean “servants”, or “attendants”. It was properly used to describe the temple guard, which would have been under the control of the chief priests. The mention of the Pharisees, however, indicates that they also sent a delegation of men to make certain there would be no slip ups. The presence of Malchus in vs. 10, a personal slave of the high priest, may be indicative of still other “non-professionals” recruited to strengthen the size and determination of the force sent to capture Jesus. **Why such precautions? Aside from the potential for a popular uprising, probably these steps were taken to assure that the mission was accomplished.** The temple guard had been sent to arrest Jesus once before, and came back empty-handed (7:32,45,46). They had been swayed by Jesus’ words. To prevent a similar fiasco, the force assembled to take Him now was comprised of professional, “no-nonsense” Romans, who had no interest in Jewish religion or politics, as well as by others who were hand-picked from the “hard-core”, loyal followers of both the priests and the Pharisees to be more reliable for accomplishing this task than the temple guard was perceived to be after their failed attempt. **“...came with lanterns and torches and weapons.”** -- There were no street lights, to illuminate the way. Enclosed lanterns, as well as open torches were issued to the posse in order to assist them in finding their man. Jesus’ comment in Lk. 22:52 reveals that **there were swords and even clubs among the weapons which He saw.** In addition to the weapons which the professional soldiers would have carried, ...swords and spears, battle axes or maces..., many were armed with only big wooden sticks. This again reveals their determination, and their expectation of resistance or a possible mob uprising.

**“Jesus therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth...”** (vs. 4) -- The Lord was neither surprised nor deceived concerning who this group of torchbearers were, nor what they had come for. He did not wait for them to take the initiative, nor did He attempt to escape. Instead, **He took charge of the situation and stepped forward to meet them.** Had He not done this, undoubtedly they would have attempted to take the entire group. **“...and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’”** -- If Jesus knew who they were and why they had come, why ask this question? Aside from formalities, it was to clarify in the thinking of this mob what their real purpose was, so that as He voluntarily surrendered to them, they would allow His disciples to go free, since their purpose did not include them. This is made plain by the later verses. **The form of the Greek word, translated as “whom”, is singular, “What person are you seeking?”**

**“They answered Him, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’”** (vs. 5). Ironically, the designation, “Nazarene”, had a two-fold meaning. On the one hand, what these people meant was a way of identifying Jesus by His home town, Nazareth. On the other hand, **the Hebrew word netzer means “sprout, shoot, or branch”.** It was used to prophetically describe the person that would someday arise from the cut-off Davidic line to once again become great king of Israel (Isa. 11:1). In that sense, it was a title of the Messiah, the Anointed One. Matthew made note of the prophetic fulfillment of this in Matt. 1:23. From this prophetic perspective, **the mob was unwittingly asking for Jesus the Branch, the Messiah. “He said to them, ‘I am.’”** -- In spite of the fact that many translations include the word “He” in their rendering of this response, there is nothing in the Greek to support this. **This is the seventh and final example in John’s gospel where Jesus expressed Himself in this construction known as the “I am’ absolute”.** I think it is significant that in John’s attempt to convince His readers that Jesus is the Christ (20:30,31), he used exactly seven miracle accounts (which he calls “signs”), seven “I am” claims with predicates (e.g., “I am the Bread of Life”), and that there are also exactly seven contexts where this unusual “I am” absolute construction appears (cf. 4:25; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19). In each instance, there is a significant display of power, or a significant claim made, in association with this expression. From the standpoint of numerological design, **a case made by three groups of seven components would be stylistically pleasing to the Jewish mind.** I cannot help but think that it was intentional. The seven “‘I am’ absolutes”, then, are critical to this stylistic overview, and their significance as corroborating witnesses should not be overlooked. **“And Judas also who was betraying Him, was standing with them.”** -- Apparently, having approached with the crowd, but not having yet kissed Him as the agreed-upon sign to identify Him (Matt. 47-50; Mk 14:43-46; Lk. 22:47,48).

**“When therefore He said to them, ‘I am’, they drew back, and fell to the ground.”** (vs. 6) -- This is the display of power associated with the “‘I am’ absolute” saying in this context. Obviously, these 600+ men had no intention of showing Jesus any sign of deference, nor were they of a frightened frame of mind whereby they might have been startled in some way. How they might have understood what happened, we do not know. It did not deter them, however, nor was it intended to do so. **This event is relayed to us by John not only as a final sign as to who He was, but also to indicate the complete voluntariness of His surrender.** Certainly, the power was available and present for Him to immobilize them and to simply walk away, had He so desired. Vss. 7-9 is a further explanation as to why this event took place. It brought the focus of the crowd to Jesus alone, and made possible the escape of the disciples.

**“Simon Peter therefore having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear...”** (vs. 10) -- From the other accounts, we can surmise that Judas had now kissed Jesus, and that the soldiers had laid hold of Him. **From John alone do we find out that this unnamed disciple in the other gospel accounts was Peter.** This is very characteristic of the impetuous fisherman, however, and comes as no surprise. He undoubtedly meant to cut off the man’s head, but succeeded only in snagging an ear. Luke’s account alone reports that Jesus healed the man (Lk. 22:51). **“...and the slave’s name was Malchus.”** -- **Again, information given to us only by John.** Vs. 15 reports that John (the “another disciple”) was known to the high priest, and gained access, therefore, into the courtyard of his house. Unquestioned access to the courtyard, and familiarity with the names of his servants, would suggest that there was some ongoing relationship between John and the high priest’s household.

Vs. 11 is Jesus’ rebuke of Peter. Lk. 22:51 and Matt. 26:52-54 offer a more complete composite picture. Certainly the experience of just having seen everyone retreat and fall to the ground would have added some reality and depth to Jesus’ comment recorded by Matthew: “Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” **“The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?”** -- The only reference in John to the “cup” that Jesus had agonized about in the other accounts (Matt. 26:36-43; Mk. 14:32-41; Lk. 22:41-44). By this time, the prayer struggle had been resolved, and He was ready to “drink the cup” which the Father had designated for Him.

**“So the Roman cohort and the commander, and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus, and bound Him.”** (vs. 12) -- The same players as before. Again, the word, “Roman”, does not appear in the Greek text. **The word translated as “commander” is chiliarch in Greek. This is an official Roman military title, often translated as “tribune”, an officer in command of 600-1000 men. Undoubtedly, the Roman troops were involved in the arrest.**