The Process of Arresting Jesus
Matthew 26:47-50
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The arrest of Jesus begins another episode in the final days of Jesus' life. This seizing of Him has been sought by various leaders of the different sects of Jews over the previous three years of His public ministry. The times when the Gospels record this desire are listed below.

- After Jesus taught in Nazareth that God's grace is also for the Gentiles, *"And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff"* (Luke 4:28-29).
- When Jesus healed a man with a withered arm in a synagogue, *"The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him"* (Mark 3:6; cf. Matthew 12:14).
- After He healed a paralyzed man on the Sabbath, "*For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God"* (John 5:18).
- After teaching that He was from God and many believed in Him, *"The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him"* (John 7:32).
- After saying "before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58), the Jews *"picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple"* (John 8:59).
- After declaring Himself equal with God, "*The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him"* (John 10:30-31).
- When the chief priests and Pharisees were concerned, saying *"If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him"* (John 11:48), they gathered and *"from that day on they planned together to kill Him"* (John 11:53).
- Once Jesus came to Jerusalem for His final visit, *"the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said"* (Matthew 22:15).
- Two days before the Passover, *"the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him"* (Matthew 26:3-4).

This series of events led up to this moment where Judas acted upon his agreement to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16). This was the destiny of our Savior from the beginning, as stated by Peter in Acts 4:27-28, *"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."* This was God's plan from the beginning (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:19-20).

The interruption (26:47)

It was "while He was still speaking" that Judas arrived, *"accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs."* This large crowd *"came from the chief priests and elders of the people."* John 18:3 provides more detail, *"Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons"* (cf. John 18:12).

Therefore, we know that this large crowd consisted of Roman soldiers and Jewish temple guards. Luke 22:52 tells us that in addition to the soldiers and officers of the temple, there were some elders and chief priests among the crowd. We also learn that the Pharisees and Sadducees, represented by the chief priests, collaborated together to bring this about. This likely was a bipartisan group of the Sanhedrin, or Jewish ruling council, that arranged for this mob to arrest Jesus at night, which explains why they "*came there with lanterns and torches."*

This was not a spontaneous mob, but a selected group of men assigned to this task. The Romans were necessary since the temple guard had been sent to arrest Jesus earlier, *"The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him"* (John 7:32). This earlier mission had failed, *"The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, 'Why did you not bring Him?' The officers answered, 'Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks'"* (John 7:45-46).

The leaders did not want to repeat this failure, and they requested the Romans to assist them. The reference to *"the Roman cohort"* (John 18:3) gives us a glimpse of the size of the large crowd since a cohort consisted of 600 men. This cohort of soldiers included their commander who led such a cohort, *"So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him"* (John 18:12). Add the officers from the temple guard and there is indeed a very large crowd of people coming for Jesus. With their torches in the night, this large crowd's approach could not have been a surprise to Jesus or His disciples.

Reading this in retrospect, it would seem unnecessary for such a large crowd of Roman soldiers and temple officers to come to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. We know that Jesus had no intention of arranging an opposition to this crowd. But the religious leaders obviously feared what the response of people with Him might be (cf. Matthew 26:5). Perhaps, through Judas and others, they were aware of Jesus' miraculous powers over nature and sought to make sure they had sufficient manpower for the task of seizing Jesus.

Their goal was not only to arrest Jesus, but to quell any disturbance from the populace, and to potentially have to overcome any opposition from the disciples of Jesus. The religious leaders wanted to secure the arrest but the Romans wanted to ensure there was no Jewish uprising. This is likely why the Romans would have been willing to deploy so many troops from their fortress next to the temple in the middle of the night.

Judas is described as *"one of the twelve"* eight times in the Gospels, each time in reference to the betrayal of Christ. Only one other person, Thomas in John 20:24, is referred to in this way. The clear emphasis of all four of the Gospels is that Judas defected from his privileged place among Christ's inner circle of disciples to turn against Jesus. This great betrayal was prophesied in Psalm 41:9, *"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."*

When we take all the words about the arrest and crucifixion together we learn that Judas, along with the Roman soldiers and the temple officers, was the instrumentality used to arrest Jesus. The human course was the will of the religious leaders, from the chief priests, to the scribes and Pharisees, to the Herodians. But ultimately it was the will of Christ in subjection to His Father's decree (Matthew 26:42, 53-54).

The identification (26:48)

Matthew 26:48 is something of a parenthetical statement in the midst of the unfolding narrative, looking back at the prearrangement of the sign of the kiss by Judas, *"Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."* This reveals the role that Judas played in the arrest of Jesus. Judas was necessary to bring the large crowd to where Jesus would be, since *"Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples"* (John 18:2). Judas was also necessary to specifically identify Jesus to the soldiers and temple guard, and he did so by kissing Jesus.

This identification was necessary due to the darkness, for their *"lanterns and torches"* were insufficient to see that clearly. Also, while Jesus had been in the temple area all week, He had been addressing a large crowd. So while many knew of Jesus, far fewer had actually seen Him up close and would be able to identify Him in a dark, unfamiliar place.

John 18:4-5 gives us more evidence of the difficulty the crowd had in identifying Jesus, *"So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' He said to them, 'I am He.' And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them."* This does not contradict Matthew's account, for what John described followed Judas' initial identification of Jesus. Once Judas identified Him, Jesus stepped forward to affirm His identity and to courageously confront the crowd with His true nature, saying *"I am He,"* a reference to His deity.

Judas prearranged a sign regarding how he would identify Jesus to those sent from the chief priests and elders, and his chosen method was a kiss, *"Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."* Out of all the ways he could have chosen, he pointed out Jesus in the most hypocritical means of betraying the Lord. A kiss was a sign of friendship and affection, specifically between those with a close, personal relationship. His flagrant display of dishonest love in the practice of his treachery is a remarkable example of evil.

This motivation of Judas was fueled by more than his disappointment in Jesus not being the kind of Messiah that he hoped for or the thirty pieces of silver he would be paid for his betrayal (cf. Matthew 26:15). It was because *"Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them"* (Luke 22:3-4). Such obvious deceitfulness was truly the method of *"the father of lies"* (cf. John 8:44).

The imposter (26:49)

Judas proceeded to act upon his treacherous plan by approaching Jesus with the words, *"Hail, Rabbi!"* and kissed Him. This second reference to the kiss is intensified by a preposition that was added to the verb *"kiss."* It literally means "to kiss fervently." It was used to describe the actions of the woman who kissed Jesus' feet in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7:38, 45). It may mean a repeated kissing, and its fervency is both another aspect of the hypocrisy of Judas and made the identifying sign obvious to the crowd, which would be helpful in the nighttime.

The term *"rabbi"* was reserved for a teacher and was a sign of respect and honor. The disciples used this term for the Lord (Mark 9:5; 11:21; John 4:25; 6:21; 9:2; 11:8). This is also hypocritical since Judas certainly did not honor Jesus at this moment.

Judas acted *"immediately."* He *"went to Jesus"* without hesitation. He was in front of the crowd, *"preceding them"* (Luke 22:47), knowing the exact location where Jesus and His disciples were accustomed to being. This premeditated betrayal was quickly accomplished by Judas.

Jesus responded to Judas by addressing him with the title *"friend."* This is not the usual word for *"friend"* but rather Jesus used a term conveying a less affectionate, more distant friendship. It could be translated as in our modern vernacular as "dude." It was more gracious than it was intimate, and possibly a response to Judas disingenuously calling Him *"rabbi."*

Jesus followed this with *"do what you have come for."* Some translations turn this statement into a question, *"Friend, why have you come?"* (KJV, NKJV, CSB). This difference between translations is due to the ambiguous literal reading of the Greek text, *"friend, what you come for."* In order to make this a coherent translation, either the word *"do"* must be supplied, which is the choice that most English translators make, or this must be turned into a rhetorical question. Nevertheless, each option makes the same point in rebuke of Judas.

Luke 22:48 records more of what Jesus said, *"But Jesus said to him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'"* Luke's account makes it clear that the kiss of Judas was a direct contrast to the betrayal that was unfolding. The Messiah of Israel, the Son of Man, was being betrayed by His friend with a duplicitous kiss.

Judas had come to betray Jesus. Jesus knew this for He predicted this at the last supper (Matthew 26:23). This rhetorical question from Jesus' supposed *"friend"* highlights the treachery involved. This betrayal was arranged by Judas with the fiercest opponents of Jesus, who were truly enemies of God. The greatest act of wretchedness in human history was unfolding.

<u>The impoundment (26:50)</u>

The result of what Judas had come for was *"they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him."* Those who came to seize Him were temple guards, with the help of the enemies of the Jews, their Roman occupiers. The chief priests had already joined with their religious opponents, the Pharisees, to stop Jesus, and now they were so against Jesus that they used the Romans to support them.

This had been the desire of the chief priests from when He had been teaching in Jerusalem (Matthew 22:45-46; 26:3-4). They supposed that by seizing Jesus they could end the influence He enjoyed through His words and His works. However, they were mistaken, for His greatest miracle, His resurrection, lay ahead. Seizing Jesus stopped nothing, as Jesus said in Matthew 26:53, *"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?"*

Furthermore, He would continue to teach, during His trial, during His crucifixion, and through His followers who delivered His teaching to us in the New Testament, up until today. The religious leaders did not solve their problem of Jesus, for it continued in the book of Acts, as seen in the words of the high priest to Peter and the apostles, *"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us"* (Acts 5:28). The words and works of the Lord will endure, as we see from the words of Paul when he was under arrest in 2 Timothy 2:9, *"the word of God is not imprisoned."*

Conclusion

The betrayal of Jesus by Judas was the means by which the Jewish leaders could seize Jesus. But this act was part of God's sovereign plan, *"For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"* (Luke 22:22). Judas was *"my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me,"* as prophesied in Psalm 41:9. He would bear the guilt of his deed, but God had a greater plan for the redemption of the world through the sacrificial death of His Son.

Judas is the quintessential false disciple. All counterfeit disciples throughout time follow his same self-interest. He lacked true faith, failed to trust God's plan in Christ and in his disappointment, he chose to sell out the Savior for money. Judas also packaged his betrayal in hypocritical deceitfulness. He pretended to be something he was not. He followed Jesus, but only for a while, as long as it served his own interest. He was the tare among the wheat.

Just as the disciples did not see Judas for who he was, false disciples exist in our day, only to fall away when afflictions, the deceitfulness of riches or the worries of this world arise (cf. Matthew 13:20-22). *"They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us"* (1 John 2:19).