

Matthew 26:55-56

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Jesus's Surrender

Jesus boldly submits to arrest. As He does, He confronts the armed crowd sent to arrest Him by the secret of night. He points out that by arresting Him at night and not by day that they are violating the law, and that everything has happened this way to full the Messianic prophecies. The disciples abandon Jesus.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 14:48-50, Luke 22:52-53, and John 18:12.

- Note: Throughout this portion of commentary, each time a Jewish law was broken by the chief priests and elders as they prosecuted *Jesus*, we identify that rule by means of brackets—i.e. [Rule 2: Neutrality]. The numbering of these rules is according to The Bible Says series about the Religious Prosecution of *Jesus*.

For a complete listing of the broken rules see [The Bible Says Article: Jesus's Trial: Part 1. The Laws Broken by the Religious Leaders](#)

Matthew continues his narrative of *Jesus's* final night before His crucifixion.

Jesus's surrender and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane most likely took place on the night of Nisan 15 (sometime after midnight on Friday by Roman reckoning).

See "[The Final 24 Hours of the Life of Jesus](#)" to learn more about the timing and sequencing of this event.

Jesus's hour was at hand (Matthew 26:45). After praying fervently alone as His soul was deeply troubled in the Garden of Gethsemane to His Father for hours (Matthew 26:36-44, Mark 14:35-39, Luke 22:41-44) the pace quickened.

- *Jesus* awoke His *disciples* as a large crowd armed with swords and clubs led by Judas entered the garden (Matthew 26:45-47, Mark 14:41-43, Luke 22:45-47).
- *Jesus* miraculously confronted them and told them He was the one they sought (John 18:4-8).
- Then Judas betrayed his Rabbi with a kiss as his sign to identify *Jesus* to the crowd (Matthew 26:49, Mark 14:45, Luke 22:47-48).

- *Jesus's* disciple Peter then took out his sword and lopped off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's slave, as they laid their hands on *Jesus* (Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:46-47, Luke 22:50, John 18:10).
- *Jesus* then ordered Peter to stop, and healed the servant's ear (Luke 22:51).
- *Jesus* then explained to Peter why He did not want Him to fight (Matthew 26:52-54, John 18:11).

After reminding Peter that He must suffer according to *the Scriptures* (Matthew 26:54) and drink the cup His Father has given to Him (John 18:11) *Jesus* confronted *the crowds* a second time. (The first time was recorded in John 18:4-8).

The crowds were armed and were sent by the chief priests and elders of the people to arrest *Jesus* (Matthew 26:47). It included a Roman cohort (100 troops) (John 18:3, 12).

Jesus asked *the temple* officers in the crowd (Luke 22:52a) a rhetorical question: *Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber* (vs 55)?

The expected answer to His rhetorical question was: *Yes, you have come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber.*

What *Jesus* meant by *robber* was a highway bandit—an armed fighter who hid out and attacked travelers on the road to murder and steal from them. The kind of *robber* that *Jesus* was talking about was more like an armed gangster or cartel boss than a petty thief or cat burglar.

The questions behind His question were: “Why are *you* using so much force *to arrest Me*? Isn't it excessive to *come out with swords and clubs* (and a Roman cohort)? Am *I* so dangerous that you need *crowds* of armed men *to seize Me*?”

Then *Jesus* remarked how much simpler and convenient it would have been for them if they had arrested *Him* earlier:

Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me (vs 55).

If *the temple* priests and elders wanted *to arrest Jesus*, they could have easily done so when He *sat teaching in the temple every day* for the past several days (Luke 19:47, Matthew 21:23-23:39). There was no legitimate need for them to gather an armed escort, hire Judas to guide them, and go search for *Him* outside the city walls in the dead of night, when He was with them daily on *the temple* grounds.

There was an illegitimate need for them to go to these extreme measures. And it was this: the Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes feared the people who considered *Jesus* to be a prophet (Matthew 21:46). The religious leaders *did not* want to lose their control over the people, and thereby endanger their position over them. They also *did not* want to instigate a riot which would

bring unwanted scrutiny from Rome (Matthew 26:4-5). Therefore, they *did not arrest Him in the temple*, but went to great lengths to *seize Jesus* without drawing public attention to their actions.

Jesus also may have been inferring the illegitimacy and illegality of the priests' and elders' actions when He highlighted the juxtaposition between the straightforward opportunity to *arrest Him in the temple* versus their stealthy, excessive, plot to *seize Him* in Gethsemane.

According to the Laws of the Jewish oral traditions, called "The Mishnah" (codified in 200 A.D. but in practice for many centuries before *Jesus's* day), no action of the criminal legal proceeding was to take place at night [Rule 5: Illegal Timing]. The chief priests' and elders' decision to arrest *Jesus* as they did in the secret of the night violated their own laws and it went against Moses's edict to "Keep far from a false charge" (Exodus 23:7a). (This was one of many laws they broke during *Jesus's* arrest and trial).

Jesus's rhetorical questions and the inferences beneath them were subtle reminders to His captors that they were breaking the law by arresting *Him* as they did. He was showing them that they, the ministers of justice, were the ones violating justice. And perhaps, if they slowed down and followed the proper procedure they would discover the truth—that *Jesus* was the Messiah.

Luke's Gospel quoted *Jesus* at length: "But this hour and the power of darkness are yours" (Luke 22:53).

The term "this hour" is a reference to the defining period of *Jesus's* earthly ministry. It was the moment that He referring to throughout the night to His *disciples* and praying to His Father about (Matthew 26:45, Mark 14:35, John 13:31, 16:21, 32, 17:1).

Jesus told His captors that this hour was their opportunity to do to Him whatever they wished. God the Father would allow His Son to be humiliated, abused, tormented, and killed during this period of time between when *Jesus* is arrested until He is crucified. It seems this is what *Jesus* meant when He *said*: "...this hour and the power of darkness are yours" (Luke 22:53). *Jesus* was delivered into their hands during this hour and would suffer their worst. But He will take the "best shot" darkness can deliver, and be victorious.

Until "this hour," it seems as though God had protected His Son from death (Psalm 91:11-12, John 7:30). But this was the hour God would grant Satan power over *Jesus*, the promised Messiah/Savior, to strike His heel, as prophesied shortly after Adam fell, when God promised that a redeemer would come and save the world (Genesis 3:15).

In telling His captors "this hour and the power of darkness are yours" (Luke 22:53), *Jesus* was informing them that they sought to harm Him, God's Messiah, that they were acting on Satan's behalf. Ironically, they were partnering with the same evil they had long accused Him of working with (Matthew 12:24).

Jesus's statement "this hour and power of darkness are yours" is similar to what He later told Pilate: "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above, for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin" (John 19:11).

Jesus concluded His warning with a prophetic reminder,

But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets (vs 56).

The Scriptures *Jesus* may have been referencing likely included Isaiah 53,

“Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.
By oppression and judgment He was taken away.”
(Isaiah 53:7b-8a)

Jesus would be slaughtered like a sacrificial lamb according to the priests’ design. And as He was arrested at night in Gethsemane, He was unjustly taken away by oppression and judgment.

What happened in the garden that night was a fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah foretold about the Messiah seven centuries earlier.

Matthew concludes his narration of *Jesus*’s surrender to arrest in Gethsemane with *the disciples*,

Then all the disciples left Him and fled (vs 56).

This short remark is a fulfillment of *Jesus*’s prediction, just a few hours earlier: “You will all fall away because of Me this night” (Matthew 26:31).

At that time *all the disciples*, had promised they would never deny *Him*, but were ready to die for *Him* (Matthew 26:35). Their promise was based on a faulty perspective, which they apparently intended to follow in their own strength. And while *the disciples* were willing to die for *Jesus*, as evidenced by their readiness to attack and defend their Lord when the armed crowd first arrived (Luke 22:49), not to mention Peter’s actual attack (John 18:10), their commitment was conditional; none of them were prepared for *Jesus* to surrender Himself and submit to arrest at the hands of His enemies.

In other words, *the disciples* may have been ready to die for *Jesus* on their terms, but not on His terms. They would follow *Him* to the death if it meant going down with a fight. But they were not willing to follow *Him* to the cross and lay down their lives willingly. Again, their faith appeared to be in their own ability to control the outcome. And their understanding was based on their own wrong assumptions. As branches apart from Christ, the vine, they could do nothing (John 15:5). Their faith was not in God’s ability to control the outcome—including working Christ’s death for His glory and their good.

It is worth noting that *Jesus* did not recruit His *disciples* based on credentials, earthly prestige, or (apparently) intellectual acumen. His primary recruiting criteria appears to have been a willingness to fight and die for a cause. *Jesus* has been trying to reorient His *disciples*’ courage from an ambition focused on an earthly kingdom to an ambition focused on a spiritual kingdom.

It will take a complete failure on their part in chasing their earthly ambition for them to finally figure it out before they are ready to begin pursuing a much greater kingdom.

Jesus had in mind greatness for the twelve, promising they would sit on twelve thrones judging Israel (Matthew 19:28). However, *Jesus* had in mind a new kingdom that will be inaugurated upon His second return to the earth. In the meantime, *Jesus*'s ambition for them was, indeed, for them to die for the cause (Matthew 10:39).

Because they relied on their strength and understanding/perspective, they were floored and confused when *Jesus* submitted to arrest and obeyed His Father unto death on a cross (Matthew 26:39, Philippians 2:8). A wrong perspective and a trust based on a faulty view of God led to a logical action: flee. This was likely why *all the disciples left Him and fled*.

Biblical Text

⁵⁵ **At that time Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.” Then all the disciples left Him and fled.**