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THE ARREST OF JESUS: AN EXEGESIS
OF MATTHEW 26:47-56

A Seminar Paper presented to the Faculty
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Master of Sacred Theology.

by
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THE ARREST OF JESUS

This paper will examine Matthew 26:47-56, the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Only the larger context of Matthew and what Matthew had available to him (i.e., the Old Testament) will be drawn upon to understand this pericope. This paper has been divided into the following parts: I) Translation and Notes, II) Limits, Structure, and Themes, and III) Genre and Literary Setting, IV) Concluding Thoughts.

Part I: Translation and Notes

(47) And¹ while He was still speaking², behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came and with him a great crowd, with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. (48) Now³ the one who was

¹The following categories are listed for translation of kai: (1) Connective ("and; or; and in general; and the rest; and especially"). Kai can also be united in the form of a hendiadys. (2) To connect clauses and sentences ("that, when, and so, and then, and yet, and in spite of that, nevertheless, namely, that is"). Kai can also be translated as an adverb: "also, likewise, even." Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, revised and augmented, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 393.

²The predicate participle (pres. act. masc. sing. gen.) was translated as a genitive absolute, temporal circumstance.

³de is "used to connect one clause with another when it is felt that there is some contrast between them, though the contrast is often scarcely discernable." Four categories are described: (1) to emphasize a contrast ("rather"), (2) a transitional particle, without any contrast intended ("now,

giving him over⁴ gave to them a sign, saying, "Whomever I shall kiss⁵, He is [the one]. Arrest him!" (49) And immediately, after he approached⁶ Jesus, he said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and fervently kissed⁷ him. (50) Now Jesus said to him, "Friend, do that for which you came."⁸ Then, after they

then"), (3) resuming a discourse that has been interrupted, (4) use with other particles ("but also, but even"). In this pericope, de occurs in verses 48, 50, 56. Context will determine the translation. In verses 48 and 50, the translation "now" was preferred. In verse 56, the more contrasting "but" was used. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, 171.

⁴The attribute participle (pres. act. masc. sing. nom.) acts as a substantive; it is the subject of the sentence.

⁵os + an + the subjunctive is a *general* statement. James W. Voelz, Fundamental Greek Grammar (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 194.

⁶The predicate participle (aor. act. masc. sing. nom.) was translated temporally. "Immediately" is understood to modify this participle and the verb "kissed."

⁷"kataphilesen aor. kataphilew intensified by the prep. to kiss fervently." Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 79. They cite A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 6 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930).

⁸epi' o parei, literally "upon which you are present." A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 602. epi + accusative is sometimes used to express aim or purpose in which case this would be understood as an imperative, "Do that for which you are here." "It is not impossible for os" to be interrogative, thus translating it: "For what [why] are you here?" Robertson, 725. Blass-DeBrunner refers to epi o parei, and says, "hardly a direct question 'For what?'; the easiest solution is to take it as... 'Enjoy yourself! for that's why you are here.'" (F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament, Tr. and re. Robert W. Funk [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961], 300.) Contextually, it makes more sense to understand it as a command of Jesus to Judas. Only after Jesus gives the word are the arresters able to proceed. See the section on "Structure" in this paper.

approached⁹ him and laid their hands on Jesus and arrested him. (51) And behold, one of the ones with Jesus stretched out the hand, drew his sword, and struck¹⁰ the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. (52) Then Jesus said¹¹ to him, "Put back your sword into its place; for all those who take¹² a sword will perish by a sword. (53) Or do you think that I am not able to call upon my Father, and he will place beside me at once more¹³ than twelve legions of angels? (54) Then¹⁴, how shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that in this way it is necessary to happen?" (55) In that hour Jesus spoke to the crowds, "As against¹⁵ a revolutionary have you come out with swords and clubs in order to seize me? Every day in

⁹The predicate participle (aor. act. masc. plur. nom.) was translated as a temporal circumstance.

¹⁰Both predicate participles (aor. act. masc. sing. nom.) in this verse were translated as attendant circumstance.

¹¹Historic present.

¹²The attributive participle (aor. act. masc. plur. nom.) is used as a substantive for the subject of the main verb.

¹³"pleiw is an indeclinable comparative adjective. . . . later manuscripts include the emendation pleious." Robert Hanna, A Grammatical Aid to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 53.

¹⁴oun is "a particle, never found at the beginning of a sentence. . . . it is an inferential and then mainly a transitional conjunction. . . . Its meaning varies with the context, and at times it may be left untranslated." Five categories are listed for translation: (1) Inferential ("so, therefore, consequently, accordingly, then") a. in declarative sentences, b. in commands and invitations, c. in questions. (2) In historical narrative oun serves: a. to resume after an interruption ("so, as has been said"), b. to indicate a transition to something new, c. to indicate a response ("in reply, in turn"). (3) Emphatic ("certainly, really, to be sure"). (4) adversatively ("but, however"). (5) Used with other particles. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, 592-593.

¹⁵epi with the Accusative can indicate hostility in personal relations. Robertson, 602.

the temple I continued to sit teaching¹⁶ and you did not arrest me. (56) But this whole thing has taken place in order that the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples abandoned him and¹⁷ fled.

Part II: Limits, Structure, and Themes of the Unit

Limits

The text, Matthew 26:47-56, constitutes a complete section within Matthew. This is not to deny the connection to its larger context within the passion narrative or to the Gospel as a whole. The limits of the text are discerned through the following data.

First, the focus of the previous section (26:36-46) is on Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane and his faithfulness to the Father, in contrast to the disciples' inability to resist temptation (by falling asleep). This is a different concentration from our text, which narrates Jesus' encounter with Judas and the crowd. In the preceding text, Matthew records Jesus' first two prayers (vv.39, 42). He admonishes the disciples to pray with Him (vv.38, 41), and reprimands them when He finds them sleeping (vv.40, 45). During the final reprimand, Jesus announces Judas and the crowd in the distance. His attention is turned to the encounter with Judas and the crowd, signaling a change of focus in the narrative.

¹⁶The present participle has been translated as attendant circumstance. Voelz, 131.

¹⁷The predicate participle (aor. act. masc. pl. nom.) was translated as coordinating circumstance. The conjunction "and" was added for ease of reading.

Second, Jesus prays in the previous section, and then the Father answers his prayers in this section. In the previous section, Jesus prays first "if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me" (v.39). In his second prayer, Jesus prays, "If it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done" (v.42). The third prayer is not recorded. It is described, however, as ton auton logon ("the same thing," v.44). God then answers that prayer. It is as if He says, "No, I won't take this cup of suffering from You." We see that in this section with Jesus' arrest (v.50). In this instance, the move from the prayers to the answer to the prayers is a signal to the reader that something new has happened in the narrative.

Third, there is a contrast in verses 46 and 47 regarding Judas' placement. In verse 46, Judas "has come near" (eggiken). He has arrived in the garden, but Jesus is not speaking to him. How close he is to Jesus, we are not told. In verse 47, however, Judas "came" (elthen). Jesus then addresses His words to Judas (v.50).

Finally, the scene that follows this unit (Matthew 26:57-68) describes Jesus before the Sanhedrin. The change in setting notifies the reader that a new section has begun. Thus, the limits of this text are from verse 47 to verse 56.

Structure

Matthew 26:47-56 can be divided into two halves (vv.47-51 and 52-56). The first half is mainly the narrator's words,

and the second half is mostly Jesus' words. Each half can also be divided into two parts. This pericope also contains one concluding sentence. The first half (vv.47-49 and 50-51) contains mostly action. Verses 47-49 report the entry of the large armed crowd into the garden. In verses 50-51, Jesus directs the crowd to carry out their task. As they do, one of Jesus' companions ignores his words and attacks a member of the crowd. The second half of this pericope is mostly a monologue by Jesus (vv.52-54 and 55-56a). In verses 52-54, Jesus rebukes the disciple who disobeys him. Then He addresses the crowd in 55-56a. The conclusion is the last half of verse 56, which explains that the disciples deserted Jesus.

The first half (vv.47-51) is action described by the narrator. Verse 47 tells the reader that Judas has arrived in the garden with the large crowd armed with swords and clubs. Matthew also gives the reader extra data about these people. Judas is "one of the twelve," "emphasizing the enormity of his offense."¹⁸ By use of the singular verb "came" the emphasis is on Judas' actions at this point, not the crowds. That Judas and the crowd are sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people shows that they were official representatives of the Sanhedrin.

Verse 48 is a flashback that provides the reader with

¹⁸Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 672.

background material. The reader is informed that the betrayer had arranged a signal with the crowd previously. The one he would kiss would be the one they should arrest. The function of the flashback indicates that Judas and the crowd had made a plan how they would arrest Jesus.

Verse 49 returns to the narrative. Everything seems to be going according to their plans. Judas kissed Jesus fervently, or affectionately. This was the signal used to notify the mob who Jesus was. There remains the unanswered question of how this action of Judas is to be interpreted. Two views were found in the commentaries, but neither was substantiated. The Interpreter's Bible states that it was customary for a disciple to greet his Master with a kiss.¹⁹ However, W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann state that it was never permitted for a disciple to greet his teacher first, for this implied equality. With this signal, Judas was giving a "final repudiation of his relationship with Jesus."²⁰ Other commentaries (such as R. T. France²¹ and Leon Morris²²) simply cite Albright and Mann. Because there are not enough facts

¹⁹The Interpreter's Bible. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951, 10:582.

²⁰W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, Matthew (Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 329.

²¹R. T. France, The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 375.

²²Morris, 674.

available, the question will remain unanswered.²³

Verse 49 also tells us that Judas did it "immediately." This, combined with the flashback in verse 48, emphasizes that everything was going exactly according to their plan.

Verse 50 contains two parts. In the first half of the verse, Jesus responds verbally to Judas with eph' o parei. Should this be understood as a question or a command? The scholars disagree. Since the syntactical data leaves the question open, we turn to the context to decide the issue. Some scholars would understand this phrase as an interrogative: "Why are you here?" If Jesus were asking a question, it would appear that he did not know that his time had come to be arrested and be put to death. This view is contradicted by 17:22; 20:18; 26:2; and 26:46, in which Jesus prophesied about his own death. 26:45-46 also proves that He did not speak the question rhetorically for His companions' benefit. In 26:45-46, Jesus tells them that his time has come to be betrayed.

A second option would be "a comment of resigned disappointment in Judas: 'for *this* you come!'"²⁴ The

²³Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch: Das Evangelium Nach Matthäus (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), 995. They describe three types of kisses: 1) a kiss of honor (most often conferred by a teacher on a student), 2) a kiss after a long separation, and 3) a goodbye kiss. No insight is given for this passage.

²⁴Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14-28 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1995), 789.

contextual evidence found by this author to support this translation is based on Judas' receiving of the Lord's Supper, and the text is silent on this issue. When Judas left the passover meal is not mentioned. If he had received the Lord's Supper, this would demonstrate that Jesus continually reached out to him with His love. Even though Jesus knew Judas would betray Him (26:25), He was still disappointed with him when he did. Again, the weight of this argument is based on the silence of the text.

A third option is to understand this phrase as a directive: "[Do that] for which you came."²⁵ The motif of Jesus' control supports this option. Judas might think he is in control since he and the crowd had a plan, and the circumstances seem to be following that plan. But the crowd does not move to arrest Jesus until Jesus gives the word. The theme that Jesus is in control is also shown in verses 54 and 56 when He states that all this is happening to fulfill Scripture.²⁶ The contextual evidence points towards a directive translation rather than an interrogative or a resigned disappointment translation.

In verse 51, one of the men with Jesus counter-responds to the men with Judas, not with words, but with action. His response is of the same type as that of the men arresting

²⁵Cf. footnote 8 of the translation.

²⁶This issue of power and powerlessness is discussed below under "Themes" (12-16) and again under "Part III: Genre and Literary Setting of the Text" (29-31).

Jesus. He drew his sword and cut off the high-priest's servant's ear.²⁷

The second half (vv.52-56a) of this pericope is dominated by Jesus' words. In verse 52, Jesus speaks directly to the one who cut off the ear and reprimands him. He uses words to condemn actions. Jesus explains that if you live by violence, you will die by violence.

Jesus continues to speak to the unnamed disciple in verse 53, "Or do you think that I am not able to invite my Father, and he will place beside me at once more than twelve legions of angels?" "A legion consisted of 12,000 foot soldiers besides a number of horsemen."²⁸ This is obviously a rhetorical question by Jesus. The ou in this question tells the reader that this question expects an affirmative answer. The implication is that Jesus has at his disposal all of the aggressive powers of heaven, which would be more than equipped to handle this situation, but he is choosing not to use them.

In verse 54 Jesus explains why all this is happening. It is occurring so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. "The purpose of God was in those prophecies, and that purpose

²⁷Morris, 675, cites D. Daube, [The Journal of Theological Studies, n.s. XI, 1960), 59-62], who claims that this action was a well chosen insult. A wound on the ear would have disqualified a man from the office of high priest. Through this action, the unnamed disciple was insulting the high priest through the slave. Although an interesting thought, Morris rejects this view, citing darkness, lack of swordsmanship, and urgency to escape as reason for believing that it was a poorly waged attack.

²⁸Morris, 676.

would inevitably come to its appointed conclusion."²⁹

In verse 55, Jesus addresses his arresters with a question. He makes a nonviolent reply to the inappropriate violence against him in his arrest. He inquires if they mistook him for a "revolutionary," since they came out to arrest him with "swords and clubs." The irony is that the crowds represent the real "revolutionaries" (lestai, also translated "robbers"), for they are the ones with the unwarranted weapons. Jesus continues the irony by proclaiming that he taught in the temple "every day." Broad daylight is contrasted with the night, when robbers use the cover of darkness to carry out their activities. These "revolutionaries" have to resort to the darkness of Gethsemane and to violent weapons to carry out their task.

Jesus states in verse 56a, "But this whole thing has taken place in order that the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Note that "prophets" is plural. The attachment of the plural "prophets" to "the Scriptures" is unique in Matthew's gospel, and will be discussed below in the "Genre and Literary Setting of the Text." Suffice it to say that Jesus is now fulfilling and bringing to completion all that the prophets ever wrote about him. Jesus' words explain the timing of the arrest. It is not that the leaders successfully planned this arrest or that the Jesus is a "revolutionary" who has finally been caught. Rather, and this

²⁹Ibid.

cannot be overemphasized, all this is being carried out according to God's plan as He prophesied in the Scriptures.

Verse 56b is the concluding sentence of this unit. The whole situation was too much for the disciples to handle. Judas, one of them, had betrayed Jesus. One of the disciples made an attempt at resistance (albeit wrong-headed), and Jesus reprimands him for it. Rather than doing something miraculous, Jesus speaks with the crowd. The disciples were not prepared to suffer with Jesus despite 26:33-35. Only after Jesus makes the statement that this was happening to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets do the disciples abandon him and flee. Jesus was left to suffer alone.

Themes

On a larger level, there are three dominant themes that appear in this text. These themes are (1) the power and powerlessness paradox, (2) the similarities of the disciples and the opponents of Jesus, and (3) the isolation of Jesus.

The first theme is the paradox of power and powerlessness. Even though the ones with the weapons appear to be in power, the main figure, Jesus, makes it clear that they are not. In verse 47, the crowd with Judas arrives carrying swords and clubs. It appears that they hold the power. Verse 48 gives a flashback. The prearranged signal was for Judas to kiss Jesus, the one they were to arrest. Verse 49 and 50 tells us that all was going according to their plan. Judas went "immediately" to Jesus, and kissed him. The

crowd then arrested Jesus. If power came by threatening with and using weapons, the disciple with Jesus probably attempts to apply a little power of his own. He drew his sword, and attacked one member in the crowd (v.51). Jesus seemingly possesses the least power of all.

His words, however, reveal His control of the situation.³⁰ He tells the disciple to put his sword away. He then explains that He holds the greatest power. He could at any time call on His Father who would place beside Him "more than twelve legions of angels" (v.53). The implied message is that the angels of heaven would severely outmatch anything human. Jesus then explains that even though it appears that He is not using His power to control the situation, everything is going according to his Father's will. Indeed, it is this for which He prayed (26:39, 42). This is all happening to fulfill Scripture. Jesus then speaks to the crowd (v.55). He tells them that He has been teaching in the temple courts daily. They could have easily arrested Him there. Why didn't they? Not because *they* didn't want to arrest Him there, but because *God* didn't want them to arrest Him there. God wanted them to arrest Him in the garden, and by that action fulfill the Scriptures (v.56).

To summarize, the theme of power and powerlessness is displayed in these verses. Judas and the crowd with the swords and clubs appear to have the power. They have made a

³⁰See Part II, Structure, 7. "Verse 50. . ."

plan, and that plan is being carried out. But Jesus is the one who gives the word to proceed. Everything is being carried out according to the Father's will (vv.54 and 56). The unnamed disciple appears to believe also that power comes through displaying force, and so he levels an attack with his weapon. But Jesus, the "powerless" arrested one, is the one who stops the attack. Jesus, who holds no weapons and wages no attack, is the one who holds the power.

The second theme is the similarities of the disciples and the opponents of Jesus. Several features express this motif. First, Matthew uses the same words to describe both parties. Idou ("behold") and eis tw'n ("one of . . .") introduces both the action of Judas and "a great crowd with their swords and clubs" (v.47) on the one hand, and the disciple who stretched out his hand to cut off the high priest's servant's ear (v.51) on the other hand. Both groups have machairai ("swords") (vv.47, 51). Matthew also refers to the cheiros ("hands") of both the crowd that arrests Jesus (v.50) and the disciple who draws his sword (v.51). The disciple is even shown to be more violent than the crowd, because the disciple uses the sword (v.51).

Second, Matthew shows that both groups are involved in similar actions. In verse 50, Jesus addresses Judas verbally. The crowd responds with actions. They arrest Jesus. Similarly, in verse 51, the one with Jesus then responds violently by drawing and using his sword. Jesus is the one to

break this cycle by speaking, rather than acting aggressively. He speaks first to the one with Him (vv.52-54), and then to the crowd (vv.55-56).

Third, Matthew shows the reader that Jesus treats both groups in a similar manner. In verses 52-54, Jesus speaks directly to the one who cut off the high priest's servant's ear. He concludes his reprimand by stating that this is happening to Him to fulfill "the Scriptures." Jesus then directs his comments to the crowd in verses 55-56, and says basically the same thing. All this is happening to Him so that "the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." He has to clarify for both the disciples and the crowds in the same way.

This leads into the third theme, that of the isolation of Jesus. It is obvious that Judas, "one of the twelve" (v.47), has left Jesus' camp. He is Jesus' betrayer. But even the remaining disciples are not really with Jesus. They do not understand that Jesus' arrest was to fulfill "the Scriptures of the prophets." Jesus alone comprehends the proper, divine interpretation of these events. The concept that no one is on Jesus' side becomes a physical reality when the disciples desert him (v.56).

Through the limits, structure, and themes of the unit, Matthew is drawing the contrast between Jesus and the other men. Paradoxically, Jesus is the one who holds the power. He is the one who is consciously fulfilling Scripture. Jesus is

alone. No one understands Him. To make this point clear, at the end of this text his disciples bring this abstract idea home by making it a physical reality. They abandon him.

Part III: Genre and Literary Setting of the Text

Matthew 26:47-56 belongs to the genre of narrative. It stands within the narrative context of the Matthean passion narrative and the entire Gospel as a unified narrative. The Gospel possesses both the characteristics of a narrative's "story" (events, characters, settings), as well as those features that comprise the "discourse" of a narrative (narrator/IMPLIED author, point of view, IMPLIED reader, various rhetorical techniques).³¹

Jack Dean Kingsbury finds the structure of Matthew's narrative to consist of three parts: 1) 1:1-4:16, 2) 4:17-16:20, and 3) 16:21-28:20. The major themes found in Matthew might be described as the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus brings with him the kingdom of heaven, thus inaugurating and bestowing the blessings of the eschaton. Those who are opposed to Jesus' life and ministry create conflict with Him. That conflict is resolved with Jesus' crucifixion. The irony is that through His death, God's salvation becomes reality.

In the first part (1:1-4:16), Jesus is presented to the

³¹For a clear and concise discussion of these features of narrative, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 2-40.

reader. He is the culmination of Israel's history, the Messiah born from Abraham and David's line (1:1; 4:17). He is "God with us" (1:23). He is the "Son of God," connoting a "unique filial relationship" that "Jesus has with God, his Father (3:16-17; 11:27). In Jesus Son of God, one encounters God (11:27)."³² The conflict that Jesus will later face in the Gospel is only presaged in 1:1-4:16 when Herod tries to have him killed. The conflict lines are further intimated when John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, calls the religious leaders a "brood of vipers" (3:7).

The person of Christ is no more clearly seen in the first part than at His baptism (3:13-17). God bestows Jesus with His Spirit and declares that He is His unique Son. From here the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert where a conflict with Satan takes place (4:1-11). Jesus is victorious in the conflict, and goes back to Galilee where His ministry will begin.

In the second part (4:17-16:20), the tension between Jesus and the religious leaders builds. This section is able to be divided into two parts, Jesus' ministry to Israel (4:27-11:1) and Israel's response to him (11:2-16:20). In His ministry to Israel, Jesus teaches, preaches, and heals (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). In the latter half (11:2-16:20), Israel leaders reject Jesus' ministry.

The tension between Jesus and the religious leaders

³²Ibid., 58.

steadily mounts until it reaches the point of irreconcilable hostility. The leaders directly attack Jesus himself over matters pertaining to the Mosaic law, and they conspire on how to take his life (12:1-8, 9-14).³³

Besides Jesus and the religious leaders, there are two other main "characters" in Matthew's Gospel: the crowd and the disciples. Despite the religious leaders' hatred of Jesus, the crowd is not as vehement in attitude and speech toward and about Jesus.

On balance, then, the Jewish crowds are "well-disposed" towards Jesus but "without faith" in him. In being without faith in Jesus, they contrast with the disciples. And in being well-disposed toward Jesus, they contrast with the leaders.³⁴

The disciples have faith in Christ, are commissioned to preach and heal as Jesus did (9:35-10:42), and are able to make a confession with which Jesus is pleased (14:33; 16:16).

In the third part of Matthew's story (16:21-28:20), the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders runs its course to resolution.³⁵ In this section, Jesus journeys to Jerusalem (16:21-21:11) and then spends the remainder of his earthly ministry in or near Jerusalem and its temple (21:12-28:15 [16-20]). In this section, Jesus is also in conflict with the disciples. He strives to make them understand that the Son must suffer (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19), and that disciples of the Son must also suffer (16:21, 24). "Jesus'

³³Ibid., 76.

³⁴Ibid., 25.

³⁵Ibid., 6.

conflict with Israel is to the death."³⁶ The religious leaders believe they are acting in a God-pleasing manner by destroying a false messiah (27:64). In so doing, they are responsible for Jesus' blood (27:25) and "call down God's wrath upon themselves and their nation (21:43; 22:7)."³⁷ Ironically, Jesus' death is God's means of salvation for all humans, both Jews and Gentiles. "In the final analysis, therefore, God vindicates Jesus in his conflict with Israel"³⁸ by raising him from the dead. At the end of time, Jesus will return in all his glory to judge (25:31-46). In the meantime, the disciples are commissioned to go and to make disciples of all nations (28:16-20).

The text under examination, 26:47-56, is located in the third part, 16:21-28:20. In 26:47-56 the conflict with the religious leaders has reached a new level. It is no longer just a verbal debate. The religious leaders have now waged a physical assault on Jesus, and they have swayed the crowd to their point of view. The crowd with Judas the Betrayer arrest Jesus in the Garden.

Leaving the consideration of plot, we now make a comparison to parallel material throughout the story of Matthew. Three facets of 26:47-56 receive illumination: 1) fulfillment, 2) the use of "Rabbi," and 3) the three themes

³⁶Ibid., 93.

³⁷Ibid., 93.

³⁸Ibid., 93.

previously identified in this pericope.

The first point to be considered is the fulfilling of the Scriptures of the prophets. The reader of the Gospel according to St. Matthew learns very quickly that the narrator is aiming this book at an audience that knows and accepts the Old Testament Scriptures.³⁹ The author announces that Jesus Christ is "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). Several times the narrator refers to the Scriptures being "fulfilled" (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; and 27:9). From these verses it is easy to see that the author expects the reader to be aware and mindful of the Old Testament. But that is not all. The author wants the reader to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The word plhrow can be translated "make full," "complete," "bring to completion," "fulfill," and "finish."⁴⁰ The words that were spoken beforehand by the prophets of the Lord are now fully completed and accomplished in Jesus.

In verse 56, Jesus says that "this whole thing has taken place in order that [it]. . . may be fulfilled." This phrase is very similar to 1:22 ("All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet").⁴¹

³⁹Mark Allen Powell, "Expected and Unexpected Readings in Matthew: What the Reader Knows," The Asbury Theological Journal, Vol. 48, No. 2 (1993): 31-51.

⁴⁰Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, 670-672.

⁴¹1:22 is very similar to 21:4. In 21:4, some Mss (including B C³ W) contain olon, making it virtually identical

Matthew 1:22 is sandwiched between names for Jesus which describe what he came to do (" . . . give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins," 1:21) and who he is ("call him Immanuel"--which means, 'God with us'" 1:23). Touto de olon appears to be referring, not just to a specific incident, but to the "whole" mission of Jesus, who he is and what he has come to do. He is God with men to save His people from their sins. Matthew 26:56 should also be understood in this wholistic way. Jesus' predicted journey to the cross (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:2) was now reaching its climax. Only by the cross would he accomplish His mission.

Verse 56 also says that "the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." "Scriptures" occurs four times in Matthew (21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56). In each case Jesus is reprimanding His opponents. ("Did you never read the Scriptures" [21:42]; "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God" [22:29]). He believes they should know the Scriptures and what His purpose is from them. In Matthew, "Scriptures" is always in the plural form. "The plural form, hai graphai, 'the Scriptures,' connotes all of Scripture."⁴² Prophets occurs in the plural form in 2:23; 5:12, 17; 7:12; 11:13; 13:17; 16:14; 22:40; 23:29, 30, 31, 34, 37. In 5:17,

with 1:22. Other Mss (such as C D L Z Θ) do not include olon in the text.

⁴²Gilbrant, 11:646.

7:12; 11:13; and 22:40, "prophets" is connected to "law" in describing the whole Old Testament. Although only "prophets" occurs in this verse, it does not appear to be understood differently than "the law and the prophets." The context would suggest that "prophets" is to be understood as a genitive of source. The "prophets" is a shorthand way of emphasizing that Jesus is now fulfilling and bringing to completion all (olos) that the prophets ever wrote about him.

The theme of fulfillment is so strong in Matthew's Gospel that R.T. France in his book Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher says Matthew "himself would have accepted [it] as summarising his message."⁴³ Chapter 5 of France's book is entitled "'Fulfillment,'" and he carries the theme through in chapter 6, "Matthew and Israel." An overview of the high points seems fitting here. He explains that Matthew uses both explicit and implicit means to refer to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. When Matthew uses explicit means, he makes such statements as "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet" (1:22). Other times Matthew's technique is implicit. Matthew 1:18-2:23 is such an example. It contains five brief sketches of Old Testament quotations (1:23 = Isaiah 7:14; 2:6 = Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2; 2:15 = Hosea 11:1; 2:18 = Jeremiah 31:15) which are fulfilled in Jesus' birth and travels.

⁴³R. T. France, Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 166.

France also points out that typology is also a method that Matthew uses in his fulfillment theme. Typology is a technique which demonstrates how a central figure or event is connected to an earlier figure or event. Matthew employs this method with several Old Testament characters. Note, as an example, the allusions to Moses.

The basic parallel is that of the wicked king's attempt to kill the future deliverer of God's people, an attempt which is thwarted by a period of self-imposed exile, even though many other children are killed. Of course the parallel with the exodus story is not exact: Herod's plot, though indiscriminate in its effects, was directed against a specific usurper, whose birth had been supernaturally revealed, while Pharaoh ordered a general killing of all male Hebrew babies; Moses' escape as a baby was not by exile, and his subsequent exile was in response to a threat in adult life; Moses went into exile from Egypt, Jesus was taken to Egypt. But even so there is sufficient common ground in the king's fear, the multiple killing of children, the saviour's deliverance, the theme of exile, and the reference to Egypt to cause any Jewish reader to ponder the parallel.⁴⁴

The Transfiguration (17:1-13) is another parallel between Jesus and Moses. The fact that Jesus' face shone draws a comparison with Moses (Exodus 34:29-35). But Jesus is even greater than Moses. Jesus was the central figure in the Transfiguration; He delivered His people, not from an earthly temporary slavery, but from the slavery of sin (1:21).

Another parallel between Moses and Jesus deals with the law. Moses is honored as the giver of the law. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states that He came not "to abolish [the Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill [it]" (5:17). France

⁴⁴Ibid., 187-188.

quotes Banks' interpretation of this text:

'It is not so much Jesus' stance towards the Law that he is concerned to depict: it is how the Law stands with regard to him, as the one who brings it to fulfilment and to whom all attention must now be directed.'⁴⁵

France goes on to state how Jesus is much more than the New Moses. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

God's purpose is now to be found in Jesus rather than in the Old Testament in its own right. . . . The key to its [Old Testament] interpretation is in Jesus and in his teaching. . . . Matthew's presentation of the law is above all *christological*.⁴⁶

Not only is Jesus considered to be the New and Greater Moses, but He could accurately be described as the New and Greater Israel. In Hosea 11:1, God calls Israel His Son: "Out of Egypt I called My son." Matthew quotes this verse in 2:15 to refer to Jesus coming back from Egypt. The visit of the Magi (2:11) might be seen as a fulfillment of Isaiah 60:1-6 which speaks of Gentiles bringing gold and frankincense and praising God. 2:17-18 is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:15, "a passage which sees that loss as the prelude to a joyful return and restoration of the people of God, just as Jesus is now to be restored from his exile in Egypt."⁴⁷ The temptation of Jesus in the desert (4:1-11) parallels Israel's wanderings in the desert. Jesus refutes Satan with quotes from Deuteronomy, a book which tells of Israel's desert experiences. In the

⁴⁵Ibid., 195. France is quoting Banks, Jesus, 226.

⁴⁶Ibid., 196-197.

⁴⁷Ibid., 208.

first refutation, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. The surrounding context (Deuteronomy 8:2) amplifies the typology. It reads,

And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Israel was tested in the desert, but often failed those tests. Jesus relives Israel's history and passes the test in the desert.

Jesus' New Israel typology continues in his ministry and teaching. Isaiah's Servant of Yahweh is seen as a blending of "individual and corporate aspects."⁴⁸ Matthew quotes Isaiah to show that Jesus has fulfilled this role (8:17 = Isaiah 53:4; 12:17-21 = Isaiah 42:1-4). Even the Beatitudes can be seen as a parallel to Isaiah 61.⁴⁹ Jesus is Isaiah's Servant.

'The Messiah is not only founder and leader of the Israel-to-be, the new people of God; he is its 'inclusive representative.' In a real sense he *is* the true Israel, carrying through in his own experience the process through which it comes into being.⁵⁰

Matthew also uses the Psalms to point to Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel. "The rejected stone of Psalm 118:22 is a figure for the vindication of Israel," but Jesus applies

⁴⁸Ibid., 209.

⁴⁹W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., The Gospel According to Saint Matthew (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 436-437.

⁵⁰France, 209, quotes C. H. Dodd, The Founder of Christianity (London: Collins, 1970), 106.

this psalm to himself "as the one in whom God's purpose for his people will be paradoxically fulfilled."⁵¹ Psalm 22 is another example of typology. France states that it was "generally understood to have been used . . . as a psalm of national lament," but echoes of its words in 27:35, 39, 43, 46 are applied to Jesus in individualistic terms.⁵²

Since Jesus is the New and Greater Israel, then what of the descendants of Abraham? The blessings or judgments of God they will receive are dependent upon their relationship with the New and Greater Israel, Jesus. The religious leaders reject Jesus, and so they will lose their nation (21:33-41). But what of the "crowd"? In the beginning of the narrative, they seem somewhat "well-disposed" toward Jesus. They are without a leader (9:36) and follow Him (4:25; 8:1; 12:15; 14:13; 19:2; 20:29; 21:9). He heals them (4:23-25; 9:35; 11:5; 14:14; 15:30; 19:2) and feeds them (14:15-21; 15:32-38). Yet, they are without faith. They raise the question whether Jesus might be the Son of David (12:23) and hail Him upon His entry into Jerusalem (21:9), but they do not confess Him to be the Son of God (16:14). The neutral position of the "crowd" towards Jesus turns antagonistic in our text (26:47-56). They arrive with weapons to arrest Jesus. In 27:20, the religious leaders persuade the "crowd to ask for Barabas and to have Jesus executed." Matthew depicts the "crowd" to be

⁵¹France, 209.

⁵²Ibid.

sympathetic towards Jesus, but vulnerable to being misled by their leaders. The judgment that falls on the religious leaders will also fall on the crowds (22:1-7). The crowds are not guaranteed salvation because of their genealogy (3:9). Jesus is the New and Greater Israel, and only those are attached to Jesus through faith are counted as being part of Israel, that is, in God's family.

Finally, take note of France's comments regarding Matthew 12.

The Old Testament 'models' selected add up to a remarkable overview of the main channels through which God's authority was formerly exercised among his people--David, the greatest king (and model of messianic expectation), the temple and its priesthood, Jonah as a representative prophet, and Solomon the wise man (and also, hardly insignificant, the king, the son of David). To have claimed that in Jesus all these lines of authority came together and found their contemporary manifestation would have been bold enough. But he is 'greater', 'more' than all of them. 'This "more" indicates that the salvation history of the past has not only been taken up, but has been transcended; in other words this "more" has an eschatological ring. . . . God is speaking for the last and final time.'⁵³

The excursus on fulfillment is finished. This was done to bring insight into 26:47-56. When Jesus speaks of the Scriptures being fulfilled, He is not simply completing predictions. He is more than satisfying them. Jesus is the New and Greater Moses. He far surpasses the accomplishments of Moses. He is also the New and Greater Israel, passing the tests that Israel failed. All the Old Testament points to

⁵³Ibid., 189-190. France is quoting from Jeremias, NT Theology, 82.

Jesus. He is the Great Fulfiller. All of the Old Testament prophecies overflow abundantly in Christ.

A second feature in our text that is illuminated by parallel material in Matthew is the title "Rabbi." "Rabbi" occurs four times in Matthew (23:7, 8; 26:25, 49). In chapter 23 Jesus is preaching against the Pharisees. He states, "And they love . . . being called by men, 'Rabbi.' But do not be called 'Rabbi.'" The religious leaders sought honor among men. This honor came in the form of titles. Jesus warns the multitudes and his disciples not to seek the honor of men. It is not, however, that the title "Rabbi" is bad in and of itself. Jesus connects "Rabbi" and "Teacher" when, in the same context, He states in 23:10, "Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ." Here Jesus "points out in this connection that it is as 'the Messiah' that he is teacher."⁵⁴

"Rabbi" also occurs two more times in chapter 26. In 26:20-25, Jesus and the disciples are eating the passover meal. Jesus says, "'Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.'" And being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, 'Surely not I, Lord?'" But Judas' question is phrased differently. He asks, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Whereas the other disciples address Jesus as "Lord," Judas calls him "Rabbi." The other reference to "Rabbi" in chapter 26 is found in our text, 26:49. Right before Judas betrays

⁵⁴Kingsbury, 63.

Jesus with a kiss, he says, "Greetings, Rabbi."

Kingsbury accurately summarizes the data just presented. "The designations 'rabbi' and 'teacher' attribute to the person so addressed human respect but nothing more."⁵⁵ When Judas addresses Jesus in the Garden, he is giving Jesus the honor due any human teacher. Judas does not address Jesus as "Lord." In so doing, Judas does not acknowledge Jesus' Messiah position or His divine authority. Judas insults Jesus by what He does not say. He does not address Jesus as "Lord."

Above, three themes were identified: (1) the power and powerlessness paradox, (2) the similarities of the disciples and the opponents of Jesus, and (3) the isolation of Jesus. Each of these themes is amplified by looking at the larger literary context. The first theme to be examined is Jesus' power, or control, of the situation, even though it might first appear that He is powerless. This comes through in several different points.

First, Jesus, more Lord than Rabbi, counters Judas' traitorous gesture by addressing Judas as "Friend" (v.50). The same term is used in the parable of the workers in the Vineyard by the landowner (20:13) and the parable of the Wedding Banquet by the king (22:12). In both cases, a person in charge is addressing a subordinate. A rebuke is implied. By addressing Judas as "Friend," Jesus indicates his

⁵⁵Ibid., 64.

superiority over his defector.⁵⁶

Second, the apparent powerlessness is actually the will of God that is being lived out powerfully. Jesus' confidence that his Father would provide him with rescuing angels (4:11) "illustrates how it would indeed be 'possible' for Jesus to avoid the 'cup' of suffering and death, if he, as God's beloved Son, insisted upon the powerful protection of 'my Father' (26:39,42)."⁵⁷ Jesus, however, is more concerned about being in submission to the Father's will than his personal protection. Jesus, again through a rhetorical question, states in 26:54 that his prayer in 26:42, "Your will be done [genetheto]," is being answered in his arrest. The same word, genesthai, is used in 26:54. Jesus' apparent powerlessness is really the Father's powerful will.

Third, the paradox of power and powerlessness is a theme prevalent in the rest of Matthew. Dorothy Jean Weaver demonstrates this theme by examining the relationship between Jesus and three political leaders: Herod the king, Herod the tetrarch, and Pilate the governor.⁵⁸ It appears that these three political figures hold the power. They give orders, and

⁵⁶John Paul Heil, The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 51.

⁵⁷Ibid., 52.

⁵⁸Dorothy Jean Weaver, "Power and Powerlessness: Matthew's Use of Irony in the Portrayal of Political Leaders," Society of Biblical Literature: 1992 Seminar Papers (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), 454-466.

these orders are often followed to the letter. But a closer look at the story shows that they are really powerless in God's divine plan. Herod the King (chapter 2) is powerless in finding the newborn King of the Jews. Herod the Tetrarch (14:1-12) is powerless to carry out his own desires with John the Baptist (14:3-4), the crowd (14:5), and his dinner guests (14:9). Pilate the governor "is manifestly powerless either to influence the views or to control the action of the crowds."⁵⁹ These examples display the paradox of power and powerlessness that is also present in our text. God is accomplishing his plan in Christ, despite appearances to the contrary.

A second theme identified earlier was the similarities between the disciples and opponents of Jesus. The larger context of Matthew gives the reader insight into the lives of the disciples and the lives of his opponents.

Matthew uses the same word (aphiemi) to describe the sharp contrast between the disciples' actions toward their possessions in following Jesus and their action on the night of the arrest. Peter and Andrew had previously "abandoned" [aphentes] their nets to follow Jesus (4:20). James and John had "abandoned" [aphentes] their boat and their father to follow Jesus (4:22). In fact, Peter testified, "Behold, we have left [aphekamen] everything and followed you" (19:27). Now, they shamefully abandon [aphentes] their Lord (26:56).

⁵⁹Ibid., 464.

Also to be noted is the fact that "all" the disciples abandoned Jesus. This underlines the fulfillment of Jesus' previous prediction in 26:31: ". . . you will all fall away on account of me." It is further emphasized with "all" the disciples protesting against this in 26:35. "It stands in paradoxical contrast to the fact that 'all' of them were invited to drink from the Passover cup of Jesus' wine-blood, to share the close bond of fellowship with Jesus on his way to suffering and death."⁶⁰

By abandoning Jesus, the disciples identify themselves with the opponents of Jesus. For Jesus stated, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (12:30). By such an action, they are stating that they do not understand that Jesus must die (16:22), and that in dying the Scriptures will be fulfilled.

In 26:45, Jesus explicitly describes His arresters as "sinners" when He says, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners." This is very similar to 17:22, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." "Sinners" and "men" are used interchangeably. Another similar verse is 20:18: "The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes." "The chief priests and scribes" are connected with the "sinners" and "men" in their mission and task, that is, to kill Jesus. The word "sinner" in 26:45 occurs four other times in Matthew (9:10, 11, 13; and 11:19).

⁶⁰Heil, 53.

Three of those four times (9:10, 11; and 11:19) the text reads "tax-collectors and sinners." "Sinners" are connected to "tax-collectors," a position despised by the Jews. The irony is that the religious leaders criticized Jesus for receiving "sinners," and yet in 26:47-56 they show themselves to be "sinners." Thus, the opponents of Jesus (by arresting Jesus) and the disciples of Jesus (by abandoning Jesus) show themselves to be similar: "sinners."

The fact that the disciples abandoned Jesus and fled (26:56) advances the third theme of isolation, which is also elucidated elsewhere in the Passion Narrative. First, this theme was stressed in 26:31 with the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." Second, this theme of separation is seen in Gethsemane when Jesus wants his disciples to pray with him (26:36-44). Even though His disciples are in the garden with Jesus, they cannot stay awake. They are no moral or spiritual support for Jesus. Finally, Jesus is abandoned even by his Father (27:46). Jesus is alone. No one "had the courage to go with him and plead his case or share his lot."⁶¹

Part IV: Concluding Thoughts

Three themes are dominant in this pericope. The first is the paradox of power and powerlessness. Judas and the crowd believe they hold the power because things are going

⁶¹Floyd V. Filson, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 281.

according to their plan. They do not see God's plan. Jesus' arrest in the garden was actually accomplished to fulfill the Scriptures. God is the one who holds the power. This is so important that Jesus mentions it twice. In submitting to the will of the Father, Jesus becomes powerless to be within the will of the one who holds all the power.

A second theme is the similarity of the opponents of Jesus and the disciples of Jesus. The two groups are described with the same words, use the same tactics, and are confronted in the same way by Jesus. Even though the disciples are physically with Jesus and emotionally for him, they still do not grasp what he is about. They do not understand that the will of the Father is for Jesus to go to the cross. This misunderstanding fills them with cowardice, and the disciples abandon Jesus and flee.

A third theme is the isolation of Jesus. This is directly proportional to the second theme, but is so prominent that it deserves to be mentioned on its own. "One of the twelve," Judas, has obviously left Jesus, for he has become Jesus' betrayer. He leads the crowd against Jesus and those who are with him, the disciples. The remaining disciples are not really with Jesus, for they do not grasp what he is about. They do not understand that he is in submission to the will of the Father. By submitting to the will of the Father, the gospel will become a reality. Jesus alone understands the Father's will. Jesus is alone to face the cross.

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