

Episode 2

BETRAYED WITH A KISS

Douglas Estes

Reading the Bible methodically, verse by verse, might cause us to miss the weighty themes within the text. For example: A hero sets out to change the world, but is falsely accused and betrayed by one of his closest partners. Though the hero has the power to escape, he submits to injustice and accepts his fate in order to save the world. It's an epic fit for Hollywood—in the pages of Scripture.

When Judas betrays his master into the hands of an armed mob, Jesus submits—not out of weakness but out of strength. He accepts the unjust arrest that will lead to his death in obedience to God and with love for his people.

All four Gospels record Jesus' betrayal and arrest, telling the story in slightly different ways based on what the writers did or did not know and what the writers did or did not wish to include. Good storytelling involves knowing what to leave out as much as what to put in (John 21:25).

AN UNDERHANDED ARREST

At the center of this episode are two people: Jesus is the hero, sent by God to call people to a new life that surpasses the brokenness of our world; Judas is the antagonist,

a disciple who followed Jesus but secretly was a thief (John 12:6) and an adversary (John 6:70–71). The Gospel writers suggest that Judas was motivated by a lust for money (Matt 26:15; Mark 14:11), which Satan used to tempt him to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3; John 13:2).

Jesus' mission and Judas' motives intersect on the night of the Passover meal. After Jesus and his disciples eat, sing, walk, talk, and pray, Judas—who knew the place well (John 18:2)—escorts an armed group from the Jerusalem leadership. Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe this group as an *ὄχλος* (*ochlos*; crowd), a generic and unspecific term that in this case indicates a large number of people without any description. Though this group likely included people from various leadership groups in Jerusalem, they were united in their mission to arrest Jesus. Judas was not in charge of the arresters; he was simply hired to guide them to Jesus and signal whom to arrest (Luke 22:47; in the dark of night, the crowd's lanterns would not have emitted much light).

Mark and Matthew note that Judas addresses Jesus as “Rabbi”—a polite honorific—and all of the Synoptics emphasize that Judas

uses a kiss to identify his mark. These two symbolic gestures make his betrayal all the more dastardly.

All four Gospels report a disciple attacking with his sword, severing the ear of one of the arresters. In response, Jesus tells his disciples to stand down (in Matthew, Luke, and John). Following the scuffle, the accounts in Synoptic Gospels have Jesus pointing out the hypocrisy of the underhanded arrest—in secret, at night, although his critics could have seized him anytime he was teaching in the temple. After describing the successful capture of Jesus, Matthew and Mark explicitly state that his disciples fled.

FOUR VANTAGE POINTS

To make sense of the events that transpired that night—events that were fast-moving, chaotic, confusing, and incredibly momentous—each Gospel writer sought to retell the story in a way that would convey its significance to his audience. As with any record of historical events, there really is no “exactly as it was” version; the past is meaningful and interpretable only in the light of the present. Because the Gospel writers were facing their own circumstances and addressing their own audiences

—at least several decades after Jesus’ time—they took different approaches and focused on different details and themes.

Mark recounts that the arresters tried to grab one young disciple, who pulled out of his own clothes to avoid capture (Mark 14:51–52). According to Matthew, Judas comes to regret his betrayal, but the damage cannot be undone and he takes his own life (Matt 27:1–10).

Not surprisingly, John’s Gospel has the most distinctive take on Jesus’ betrayal. Writing at a later time and in different context from the Synoptic Gospels, John wants to make sure his readers know that the crowd of Jewish arresters

was backed by an armed cohort of Roman soldiers (John 18:3). Given John’s penchant for details, he names the men involved in the scuffle with the sword—Peter and Malchus. Finally, John includes the peculiar occurrence of Jesus’ invocation of the divine name, which results in the armed crowd retreating and falling to the ground. Though the arrest is made, there can be no doubt now as to identity of the one they seize.

The momentous events surrounding the betrayal and arrest of Jesus initiate the sequence of his trial, execution, and resurrection. These events are included in all four Gospels because they are pivotal to

explaining why Jesus came into the world. What makes the story matter is its inclusion in all four Gospels. What makes the story fascinating is its distinct retelling in each of the Gospels. **B**



Douglas Estes is assistant professor of New Testament and practical theology and director of the D.Min. Program at South University-Columbia. He is the author or editor of six books, including *Questions and Rhetoric in the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 2016).



JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED



Matthew 26:47–56; 27:3–10; Mark 14:43–52; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:1–12

OVERLAPPING ELEMENTS

- Judas arrives with an armed group from the Judean leadership.
- Judas uses a kiss to signal the one to arrest (Matthew, Mark, Luke).
- One of Jesus’ disciples attacks with sword and severs a man’s ear.

DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS

- Judas addresses Jesus as “Rabbi” (Matthew, Mark).
- Roman soldiers participate in the arrest (John).
- The disciples ask Jesus whether they should “strike with the sword” (Luke).
- Only John names the men involved in the sword attack, and only Luke reports Jesus healing the victim’s ear.
- Jesus speaks the divine name as a sign, and the armed crowd falls to ground (John).
- Jesus notes that his arrest fulfills Scripture (Matthew).
- The disciples flee (Matthew, Mark).
- Only Matthew reports Judas’ regret and suicide.