

OVERVIEW SERIES:

Matthew 26:47

A Great Multitude, Part Two

When Judas came to the garden, there were “with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.”

This “great multitude” was not the ones who had followed Jesus in the past. Rather this was a carefully-selected group of men brought together for the sole purpose of arresting Jesus and putting Him to death.

The multitude, according to Luke, included “captains of the temple” (Luke 22:52). These officers of the Temple had been granted limited police power by the Roman government in matters concerning Jewish religion and society. The multitude also, according to John, included “a band of men” (John 18:3). This band of men was Roman soldiers. At full strength a band of Roman soldiers numbered 600. Now the Roman soldiers were there, no doubt, because their presence was requested by the religious leaders because they had to have Roman permission to exercise the death penalty. They had from the beginning intended to kill Jesus.

So here we have a massive force of armed men “with swords and staves.” The Jewish leaders had intended for some time to accuse Jesus of rebellion against Rome. And now, with Judas in place, there opportunity had come.

The chief priests and elders must have hurried to Pilate to request the immediate use of his troops. And under intimidation because he did not want to risk an insurrection, Pilate granted the request.

Not only did the “chief priests and elders” go to Pilate, they too were present with the multitude in the garden. They wanted to make sure that Jesus didn’t slip through their fingers. Whatever it took, these religious leaders were bound and determined to see Jesus killed. Their intent was wicked. And their gross injustice toward Jesus had no merit.

Jesus had broken no laws, Jewish or Roman. He had committed no crime. He was not immoral in any way. He had done nothing illegal. In fact, He was so perfect that the religious leaders sought for false witnesses against Him. They hated Him without a cause.

The whole group was cowards. One writer said, “Not only the leaders, but probably the soldiers and Temple police as well, preferred to arrest Jesus in this dark, isolated place rather than in the streets of Jerusalem in broad daylight. A riotous mob can be intimidating even to armed men. And despite the advantages of darkness and isolation, the cowardly, apprehensive leaders felt it necessary to bring a thousand men, including several hundred armed soldiers, to arrest a dozen men who were known to be peaceful.”

What an atrocity committed that night by the murderous, sinful men who dared to lay hands on the sinless Son of God.

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