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The Garden of Gethsemane
Matthew 26:36-44; Mark 14:32-40; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1
Midnight on Friday the fifteenth of Nisan

The Garden of Gethsemane DIG: Why did Jesus take Peter, James, and John with Him to pray? Why didn't the talmidim share Yeshua's sense of urgency? What did Messiah want most of all? Yet, how did He pray? What was unusual about His sweating? What did that mean? What were the other times that He prayed alone? What model for our prayers does Jesus provide here? What obstacles to prayer does Christ face?

REFLECT: What has been your Gethsemane? Where is the place where you have really wrestled with God? What was the issue? What determines for whom and what you pray? What do you mean when you pray, "Your will be done?" How will the Gethsemane story change the way you pray this week? How many friends do you have who will stand by you in times of trouble? What strikes you about Jesus' prayer?

Then Jesus went out as usual with His talmidim across the stream that flows in winter through the Kidron Valley to a spot called Gethsemane at the foot of **the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39; John 18:1 CJB).** As the party moved on, **the apostles** were fatigued to the bone. It had been a long day. **They** had been up by dawn at Bethany, where **Jesus** left **His** mother in the care of Mary and Martha. It was approaching midnight and the eyes of **the Eleven** were heavy and **their** feet were slow. Not only that, **Yeshua** had said so much that **their** brains ached with remembering. But **they** did not complain because **they** sensed that something was different. There was an urgency to the teaching of **the Master**.

They were two hundred yards from the little **olive** press and **the Garden** at the base of the valley that separates Yerushalayim from **the Mount of Olives**. For some time now, since **they** had crossed the brook, **they** had been bearing away from the City of David. At the base of **Olivet**, the wall and the Temple was a quarter

mile to the west.

They turned off the little road near the juncture of the highway to Jericho. There, **the apostles** trudged along in the midst of the little **olive** trees. In the moonlight **they** found a small stone cave beside **the Garden**, full of the odor of old **olive** oil. Some of **the apostles** sat, while others leaned against the cave wall. It was a quiet resting place where not only **the talmidim**, but also possibly others at different times, may have visited **the Master** there. And as such, **Judas** knew about the resting place and there **the traitor** led the armed party when they found that **Nazarene** and **His little band** no longer occupied the Upper Room.

The walk was finished. There was an end to the preaching . . . an end to the miracles . . . and an end to the instruction of **His talmidim**. There was nothing that had not been said, or done, several times – some to the point of redundancy for the sake of emphasis. **He** had offered **Himself** as **the Meshiach**, and Isra'el had rejected **Him**. It was a legitimate offer. But since the Sanhedrin claimed **He** was demon possessed, only the path to the cross was open to **Him**. And, as **He** knew when **He** had told **the Father** that **He** would consent to be born and live as **a man**, and to die as **a man**, the moment of trial would be slow and terrifying. **God the Father** would not be able to save **Him** from a speck of pain, a shred of shame, or even shield **Him** from the horror of anticipating the unspeakable things that were to come.

He said to eight of **them: Sit here while I go over there and pray (Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32). Jesus**, seen in all **His** humanity, needed **His friends** to watch with **Him** and support **Him** as **He** faced death. **Then Christ took Peter, James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, along with Him.** These three, in whom our **Savior** had a special trust, walked with **Him** out of the cave and across the little road of gray steps that stretched all the way from the Temple down to the Kidron and up to the top of **the Mount of Olives. They** crossed the steps and walked into the shadows of the little **olive garden**.

The three followed **Him**. **The Son of Man** stopped under **the trees**. In the pattern of foliage that blotted out part of the moonlight, **they** could see that **He** was **deeply distressed and troubled (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33). His** hands shook. **His** features seemed to be gray, tinged with blue. **His** mouth was slack. And **His** eyes were huge with a vision the others could not see. In those dark hours of the night of Pesach, **the Suffering Servant** came to that special place for **prayer**.

During Yeshua's life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions, crying aloud and shedding tears, to the One who had the power to deliver Him from death (Hebrews 5:7a CJB). What a picture. **Jesus** in pain. **Messiah** on the stage of fear. **Christ** is cloaked, not in sainthood, but humanity. The next time the fog finds you, you might do well to remember **the Lord** in **the Garden**. The next time your self-pity convinces you that no one cares, pay a visit to **Gethsemane**. And the next time you wonder if **God** really sees the pain that abounds in this world, listen to **Him** pleading among **the** twisted **olive trees**.[1487]

Then He said to them: My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (Matthew 26:38a; Mark 14:34a). Peter and **James** and **John** tried to help. **They** wanted to console. But **the Messiah** simply shook **His** head. **He** was beyond the help of mankind, precisely because **His** humanity was being emphasized more than **His** deity. As **a man he** was able to sustain the fullness of suffering. And, as **a man**, **the Nazarene** not only had the nervous structure of all other humans, plus the emotional capacity for great joy in addition to a great sensitivity, but as **the Son of God, He** understood what was to come shortly.[1488]

Because of **His** tremendous trial, **Jesus** requested that **His** inner circle **stay here and keep watch with Me (John 26:38b; Mark 14:34b). He** reached. Oh, how **He** reached! But **His** stretching, hungering touch went unfulfilled. There was only one gift **He** desired – to see **His** friends stand by **Him** as **He** carried out **His** faithful purpose. **Christ** was fully **God** and fully **man**: **God** enough to save and **man** enough to feel the loneliness of **His** task. **He** left, seeking support from those whose lives were **His** joy. It was as if **He** were saying, "Who will bear the heaviness with **Me**?" **On reaching the place, He said to them: Pray that you will not fall into temptation (Lk 22:40). He** knew what these **three**, and the rest of **His apostles** would soon face the full weight of the Roman boot and the Great Sanhedrin. Separately, they were formidable. But together they would be deadly.

It was at that time that young **Mark** (about seventeen years old) ran into **the Garden**. **He** was panting and in **his** nightclothes. **He** went to the side of the road where the cave was and, with excitement, told **the eight** who had been sleeping that there had been a raid on **his** father's house, and a great mob of men with torches and armed with clubs, led by Roman soldiers and Temple guards as well as some members of the Great Sanhedrin had searched the premises looking for **the Master**. They demanded to know where **He** had gone.

The Roman tribune and some of the members of the Sanhedrin questioned

his father and then they had left. Some said they were going to the Temple. At this news, one of **the eight** hurried across the road to tell **Jesus** and, not finding **Him**, conveyed the news in whispers to **Peter** and **the** other two **apostles** who waited. No one, with the exception of **the boy** who brought the news, seemed alarmed. Apparently **the talmidim** thought that if the raid on **Mark's** home had failed, then that was the end of it.

Their lack of concern was clearly seen by the fact that **the eight** in the cave and **the three** who reclined against the **olive** tree all fell **asleep**. Now and then, **Yochanan** awakened and listened to the loud and painful cries of **Jesus**, but in spite of **his** love for **the Lord**, and **his** natural compassion, the heavy lids of **his** eyes refused to obey **his** will and shut again. Thus in **the** little grove of **olive trees** there was the strange sound of **the Son of Man** crying out for mercy and, mingled with it, the sleepy noises of **His apostles** whose normal senses had been muzzled by fatigue. So humanly speaking, **Christ** was alone in **the Garden**.

Going a little farther, He fell repeatedly **with His face to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him (Matthew 26:39a; Mark 14:35; Luke 22:41).** The verbs **fell** and **prayed** are both imperfect, speaking of continuous action. This tells us that **Jesus** kept on **falling to the ground** and kept on **praying**. As **He** prayed, **His** anguish deepened and became almost unbearable. **He** stood. **His** agitation was pronounced. The hair, which normally hung smoothly to below **His** shoulders, was awry and some of it was plastered to the sweat on **His** forehead.

***Abba*, Father (that is: Dear Father!). His** voice cracked in **His** native Aramaic tongue**.** And the universe came to attention. Heaven heard **Him**. **His Father** always heard **Him**. **The Father** likely cried, "Make ready for the great separation. In the morning You must bear the pain of nails and thorns; and yet that pain will seem

small compared to all You'll feel when I shall turn away from You. The pain that We must bear in this bleak separation will be unbearable. Endure, **Son**, till death releases **Your** human form. Cry out when all is **paid in full** and hurry home to **Me**."

This word, **Abba**, is a term of endearment, like *daddy*. Rabbi Sha'ul would later use it in his letter to the church in Rome. **For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to bring you back again into fear; on the contrary, you received the Spirit who adopts us, and by whose power we cry out, Abba (Romans 8:15)**. This word is not used anywhere in Judaism. They viewed **God** in reverent fear. The curtain in the Temple had not been torn yet.

Father. Here **Son. If it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me (Matthew 26:39b; Mark 14:36a; Luke 22:42a).** The idiom of a **cup** is frequently used in Judaism for the tasting of a particular experience. What was the **cup** that **Jesus** didn't want to drink of? Physical death? No. Dying a premature death? No. It was **His** coming separation from **the Father** and **the Spirit**, or spiritual death. **He** will say from the cross: **My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me (Mattityahu 27:46)? God** would not be there – only the black curtain – the separating burden. In the Garden of Eden the first Adam learned disobedience, but in **the Garden** of **Gethsemane** the last Adam learned obedience **(First Corinthians 15:45)**.[1489]

Despite all the anguish of body and soul, our **Savior** adds one more remarkable statement to **His** prayer . . . **Yet not what I will, but what you will (Matthew 26:39c; Mark 14:36b; Luke 22:42b). Messiah's** love and commitment for mankind was revealed once again with those words. Even though in **His** humanity **He** would have gladly passed on the suffering ahead of **Him**, **Jesus** also knew that

by **His** suffering, the world's redemption (see my commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Bz – Redemption**) would be purchased. Consequently, **He** gladly submitted **His** prayer and attitude to **theFather** since **He** knew **He** had to fulfill **His** purpose for leaving heaven and coming to the earth.[1490]

There are only **six** occasions in the Gospels in which **Jesus withdraws to pray by Himself**, and each incident involves the temptation *not* to carry out **God's** mission for **Him** – a mission that would ultimately bring suffering, rejection, and death. These crises seem to increase in intensity and reach their climax in the agony of **Gethsemane**.[1491]

The **first** time **He** went away **by Himself to pray** was when our **Savior** was driven into the wilderness and tempted by the devil. There, **the Holy Spirit** was present with **Him** as **He** faced the ancient Serpent (see **Bj – Jesus Tempted in the Wilderness**).

Second, **Jesus withdrew to pray** prior to **His** second major preaching tour (see **Cm – Jesus Traveled Throughout Galilee, Proclaiming the Good News**). **He** knew that the Adversary would be actively opposing **His** mission and **prayer** would be needed.

Third, **the Lord prayed alone** after **His** first messianic miracle (see **Cn – The Healing of a Jewish Leper**). **He** knew that **He** would get the attention of the Sanhedrin because it was their responsibility to investigate any claim of messiahship. And so **He** did – as members of the Sanhedrin traveled all the way to Capernaum to hear **Him** preach. **Jesus** knew it was going to be a turning point in **His** earthly ministry because **He** not only healed a paralytic that day, but more importantly**, He forgave His sins** – claiming to be deity.

Fourth, **Yeshua Ha'Mashiach went** to a quiet place **to pray** before choosing **His** talmidim who would carry on **His** ministry after **He** was gone (see **Cy – These are the Names of the Twelve Apostles**). These were important decisions and **He** needed to be by **Himself** and pray about it.

Fifth, after feeding the five thousand, the people wanted to make **Him** king. Thus, **the Rabbi from Galilee** sent **His talmidim** back across **the Lake** to the **Gennesaret,** and dismissed the crowd before going **up on a mountainside by Himself to pray** (see **Fo – Jesus Rejects the Idea of a Political Messiah**)**.**

He delayed going to **His apostles** long enough to save **them** from another storm. By **walking on the water**, **He** displayed **His** deity.

And **sixth**, here, in the climax of **the Suffering Servant praying alone**, **He** was under so much stress that **His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground** foreshadowing the cross in the morning.

This was the height of spiritual warfare. As **He** prayed **He** rocked back and forth as though in deep physical pain. Then **He** looked up and, for a moment, fell silent. **An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. And being in anguish, He prayed** continuously and **more earnestly.** Suddenly the salty **sweat**, gleaming on **His** face and forehead, began to change color. It reddened and deepened in hue until, in **His** agony, **He** knew that it was **blood**. It clung to **His** face and moved slowly down to **His** chin. Some of it dropped off in clots and congealed in **His** beard. **And His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground** foreshadowing the cross that same morning **(Luke 22:43-44a).**

Medically, this is called hematidrosis. It occurs when fear is piled upon fear, when an agony of suffering is laid upon an older suffering until the highly sensitized person can no longer sustain the pain. At the moment, the patient ordinarily loses consciousness. When that does not happen, the subcutaneous capillaries sometimes dilate so broadly that, when they come into contact with the sweat glands the little capillaries burst. The **blood** is exuded with the perspiration and, usually, this occurs over the entire body. **Luke** later wrote: **And His sweat became clots of blood, trickling down upon the ground (Luke 22:44b).**[1492]

In **Gethsemane**, **the garden** of **the olive** press, the fruit was **crushed** until its **bloody** oil flowed **(Isaiah 53:5)**. One can only imagine the spiritual oppression **Christ** was under as Satan tried to prevent **Him** from going to the Cross. **Jesus** was one hundred percent **God** and one hundred percent man. So humanly, knowing what **He** was about to face, it should not be surprising that **He** was somewhat fearful. It would have been unnatural not to have that feeling; but understand this – our **Lord** was no wimp. **He** was **overwhelmed with sorrow**, **deeply distressed and troubled**, not terrified. The cross was not **His** biggest concern. **He** didn't want to drink that **cup** because that meant being separated from the Trinity for the first and only time in **His** existence. **He** also was going to take upon **Himself** all the sins of every human being that ever existed. **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross (First Peter 2:24a;** also see **Second Corinthians 5:21).** The

Father, **the Son** and **the Holy Spirit** had been **One** for all time. **He** knew **He** had to die. That's why **He** came – that was **His** purpose in **His** life. But for three hours, from noon until 3:00 pm, **God the Father** would, by necessity, turn **His** back on **His** beloved **Son** (see **Lv – Jesus' Second Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of God**). **God made this sinless man be a sin offering on our behalf, so that in union with Him we might fully share in God's righteousness (Second Corinthians 5:21).**

Could Ye Not Watch With Me One Hour by James Tissot

Then Jesus rose from prayer and returned to His apostles. He looked down and **His** heart ached as **He found the three sleeping** again**.** From those whom the humanness of **Christ** needed support **He** heard nothing. Silence. They were **asleep**! **Simon, He said to Peter: Are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour (Matthew 26:40; Mark 14:37; Luke 22:45)? He** addressed **Peter** by **his** old name and chided **him** for **his** failure to **watch for even one hour. How can you be sleeping? Jesus asked.** Then **He** exhorted all three: **Get up** and **watch** (be alert to spiritual dangers) **and pray** (acknowledging dependence on **God**) **so that you will not fall into temptation (Luke 22:46). He** was dismayed at the sight of **His** defenders grunting apologies and struggling to get to **their** feet. **His Father** may have originally chosen **the Twelve**, but **He** had granted these **three** special honors – only **Peter, James** and **John** had been privileged to see **His** transfiguration on the mountain; only these **three** had been present when **He** had raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. How could **they** now **be sleeping**?

It was obvious that **they** needed much prayer for **the temptations they** would soon face. **The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38).** Of course it was about midnight and **they** had celebrated Pesach with a full Seder, not to mention the cups of wine. On the other hand, it was a crucial time in

Christ's life and, humanly, **He** desperately needed **their** support.

Having awakened **His talmidim**, **He went away a second time and prayed the same thing (Mark 14:39): My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done (Matthew 26:42).** If **Yeshua the Messiah** and **God the Father** are **One (John 10:30)**, how could **their** wills ever differ? They can differ because **Christ**, even though **in the form of God . . . appearing as a human being** and became **obedient even to death (Philippians 2:6-8 CJB).** As a human being **Jesus** was **in every respect . . . tempted just as we are, the only difference being that He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15 CJB). Even though He was the Son, He learned obedience through His sufferings (Hebrews 5:8 CJB).** It was as a **human being**, not as **God**, that **he** experienced the process of learning to conform **His will** to **His Father's will**, since as **God**, who is omniscient, **He** did not need to "learn."[1493]

When he came back, He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to Him. So He left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing (Matthew 26:43-44; Mark 14:40). Three times **He prayed** that **the cup** could **be taken away** so **He** wouldn't have to **drink it**.

In **Gethsemane**, **Messiah** found **Himself** abandoned – not because **His friends** were gone, but **they** took humanity too casually. **They** had not really chosen to isolate **Him** in **their** unconcern. **They** loudly affirmed **their** love and allegiance when laughter was easy and **their** lives were not threatened. But now **they** sent **Him** through the Red Sea alone. **They** never wanted **Him** to be alone, but **His** need escaped them as **they** focused on **themselves**.

It's the glory of **Him who has been tempted in every way, just as we are (Hebrews 4:15)** to have sampled the human nature of our lives. Here and there we stumble blind in grief through our Gethsemanes and find the ground already stained with **His blood**. In our **Gethsemane** there's an unseen plaque on every twisted tree that says: ***Jesus*** *was here.*

He is still here, and we can bear our Good Fridays if we let the rest of our week call to mind the glorious solitude of **Him** who conquered loneliness. In life, in death, on every cross and every garden that comes before us, *we are not alone*. With our hand we can wipe the kiss of Judas from our lips and shout with confidence: **Emmanuel! God with us –** regardless.[1494]