

An Exegesis of Luke 22:39-46

Jesus' Agony in the Garden

Introduction

The story of man is filled with many different turning points, which forever affected the course of human history. However, it is not the event itself, which brings about the dramatic shift in history, rather it is the decisions made by the participants leading up to the event that result in the change in history. This is true not only of secular history, but is also true of the greatest story ever told, Salvation History. Jesus' decision to do the will of the Father is the paradigm event of His whole earthly ministry. Without that decision there would be no Crucifixion, no Resurrection. The Agony in the Garden is a principal event and is found in all four of the Gospels and is referenced in the Letter to the Hebrews. Each writer nuances the story in his own way to convey slightly different meanings. This exegesis is concerned primarily with Luke's version of the event. Comparisons will be made to Matthew's and Mark's versions, the two other synoptic gospels. For brevity sake, comparisons will not be made to John's account, nor to a reference to the agony in Hebrews.

Background Information

Historically, Luke's gospel is the third gospel to be written. The author is Luke, a Syrian from Antioch, who was by occupation a physician, but became a companion of Paul. It is not known definitively if Luke was a Jewish convert living in Syria, a Gentile convert, or, more specifically, a Greek Gentile Christian (1). Luke's gospel was written to Theophilus (meaning "Friend of God"), who may or may not represent an actual person. It is written primarily to relate the story of Jesus to the Gentile Christians.(2)

The Agony in the Garden took place in the Garden of Gethsemane (meaning "oil press") located on the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is a 2 mile long flattened ridge, situated on the eastern edge of the Kidron valley, immediately adjacent to Jerusalem. The Mount is only a few hundred yards east of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The general, but not exact, location of the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount is known. The Mount of Olives is named in the OT as the place over which King David fled over to escape Absalom (2 Sam 15:30), the site of pagan temples built by Solomon (1 Kgs 11:7), the site of Ezechiel's vision of flying cherubim (Ez 11: 22-23), and the place where the olive branches were gathered for the first Feast of Tabernacles (Ne 8:15). In the NT, the mount is the site of the Olivet prophecy (Mt 24-25), the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Lk 19:28-40), and where Jesus was arrested (Lk 22:41-53). In the future, it is the site of Jesus' second coming (Zec 14:3-5, Mt 24:30-31).

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An Olive Tree at the Mount of Olives

A Map showing the Area of the Mount of Olives relative to the Temple.

Analysis of Context

The Agony in the Garden occurs in the context of Jesus' final days in Jerusalem, before his Death and Resurrection. In Lk19:28-44 Jesus begins His last journey into Jerusalem, days before the feast of Passover. From the beginning of this journey, it is evident that this trip to Jerusalem, is not just an annual trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jesus has a specific plan in mind. A special colt, one "on which no one has ever sat" is procured to bring Jesus into the city. Jesus will be doing something no one has ever done before. Jesus will bring redemption to mankind. It is a triumphal entry. Near the slopes of the Mount of Olives on Sunday, the day after Sabbath, Jesus is proclaimed King by the masses. The chant of the people for Peace and glory in the highest echo the angels' proclamations at the birth of Jesus. Jesus knowing the fate of the city of Jerusalem weeps.

Jesus, probably on the next day, proceeds to the Temple to teach, but ends up driving out the vendors, showing His authority (19:45-49). At this point, the chief priests, scribes, and leaders seek a way to put Jesus to death. They have, in effect, selected the Lamb for slaughter. In four days they will sacrifice this Lamb of God, just as in the original Passover the unblemished lamb was selected four days before being slaughtered. In an attempt to discredit Jesus and find a cause to arrest Him, they question the source of His authority, the legality of paying taxes,

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controversial questions about the resurrection of the dead. (20:1-40) They plot against Him, not knowing Jesus has His own plans to suffer and die for mankind.

Jesus proceeds with an eschatological discourse, describing the destruction of the temple (2nd reference to the destruction) (21:5-6), the signs of the end (21:7-11), the coming persecution (21:12-19), the Great Tribulation (21:20-24), the second coming of the Son of Man (21:25-28), more warnings (21:29-33), and the exhortation to be vigilant (21:34-36). Jesus continues His ministry, daily speaking in the Temple, at night sleeping on the Mount of Olives (21:37).

As Passover approaches, a third entity, Satan, enters the picture. Satan enters Judas Iscariot, tempting him to approach the chief priests and temple guards with a “plan for handing Him over to them (22:4). Jesus, however, aware of the treachery of Judas and eagerly desiring to eat the Passover before he suffered, arranges a private Passover meal at a location unknown to Judas. He uses a pre-arranged signal of a man carrying a jug of water (most likely explanation, but could have been a miraculous event) to lead Peter and John to the Upper room (A man carrying the water jug would serve as a signal as a man would have stood out in the crowd since men typically carried water in skins, women carried water in jugs.(3)) There they were to make preparations for the Passover meal. Only the twelve apostles share the meal with Jesus. Jesus hour has come.

The reason that Jesus so desires this Passover meal becomes evident as during the meal Jesus institutes the Eucharist, institutes a new covenant, and institutes the New Priesthood (“Do this in remembrance of me.” (22:14-20). Jesus speaks of His death and His betrayal by one of the twelve (22:21-23). He explains that he who serves shall be the greater than he who is served. Jesus promises the apostles that they will sit on thrones in His kingdom (22:24-30). He turns to Peter, warns him of the danger of Satan, gives him the job of strengthening his fellow apostles after Peter’s faith returns following his denial of Christ (22:31-34). The apostles are to be prepared for opposition. It is now time to do what Jesus was sent to do. And so the Passion begins.

Structural Analysis

The Agony in the Garden (22:39-46) is a subunit in the larger unit often referred to as the Passion Narrative (22:1 – 23:56). Verse 39 serves as a transition into the Garden scene, which Luke simply refers to, as being on the Mount of Olives. By this verse, Luke changes from one scene to another. Beginning in verse 40, Luke uses a chiasmic form to give added emphasis to these verses (4). A chiasm (Gk, chiasma: crossing) is defined as (7):

the distribution of words in a sentence or the arrangement of elements in a periscope in such a way that they correspond two by two around a center that is not always explicit:
A B C D E D' C' B' A'

A chiasm places strong emphasis on the first, last, and middle verses. The greatest emphasis is placed on the middle verse. The chiasm in the Agony in the Garden subunit occurs from the

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middle of verse 40 through verse 46. Verses 43 and 44 are not present in some of the oldest manuscripts (2) and for now, they have been removed. The structure becomes as follows:

A. "Pray that you may not undergo the test"

B After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and

C. kneeling, he prayed,

D. saying,

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me;

still,

not my will but yours be done."

C' When he rose from prayer and

B' returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up And

A. pray that you may not undergo the test."

Note the symmetry in the chiasm. The first and last verse are identical and have been labeled A. The second line shows Jesus moving away from the disciples. This line has been labeled B. The second to last line, labeled B' (the ' indicating that the lines are connected, but not identical), reverses the process as Jesus returns to the disciples. Line C has Jesus going down on a knee and beginning to pray. Line C' has Jesus rising from the ground after ending a prayer.

This is a nice, concise structure. The structure itself points from the outer verses to the inner. The first and last line emphasis the necessity of prayer in our lives. However, should you undergo the test, the form itself points the disciple to solution – "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." These words of Christ are, in effect, the paradigm event defining Jesus' ministry for in these words Jesus truly tells us how we are to live. We are to do the Father's will.

Now lets add back in the disputed verses 43 and 44.

A. "Pray that you may not undergo the test"

B After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and

C. kneeling, he prayed,

D. saying,

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me;

still,

not my will but yours be done."

(And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him.

He was in such agony

and

he prayed so fervently

that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.)

C' When he rose from prayer and

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- B' returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them,
"Why are you sleeping? Get up And
A. pray that you may not undergo the test."

Here we see that the disputed verses nearly destroy the beauty of the chiasm. The middle verses are bulky and detract from the structure. An analysis of structure leads me to believe that verses 43 and 44, while perhaps true, did not belong in the original Lukan manuscript but seems to belong to a later, perhaps less talented writer. This redactor may have been unaware of the presence of the chiasmic structure, and perhaps knowing of and wanting to emphasize the agony Jesus underwent for us, inserted these verses into the text. The redactor may have also wanted to tie the event to the earlier temptation of Jesus in the desert (to be discussed below)

Verse by verse analysis

Lk 22:39 *Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.*

The phrase "Then going out he went ... to the Mount of Olives", serves as a transition from Upper room scene to the Mount. This differs from Mark in that the location at the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount is not specified. The phrase itself shows an independent, dynamic action of Jesus. He isn't led away. He doesn't wander about and, by chance, end at the Mount of Olives. There is intent in His action. The location itself is significant. In Luke "mountain" takes on the motif of prayer (5), a motif which will be directed toward the "Our Father". In Zechariah 14:4, the Mount of Olives is depicted as the site of battle against all nations against Israel. The Mount of Olives becomes a site in which human nature of Jesus struggles against temptation. This leads one to a subsequent verse in Zechariah, verse 14:9, which states that "the Lord will become king over all the earth". This promises that God's kingdom will come ("Thy kingdom come") (6).

The phrase, "*as was his custom*", is significant because this shows that the apostles, including Judas, regularly went to this spot. If Jesus was trying to avoid being captured, He might have gone elsewhere. He went to a spot where He could be easily found. A place where the disturbance would not invoke a public reaction as might occur if soldiers marched in the middle of town in the middle of the night, and arrested an individual out of the upper room.

"and the disciples followed him." It is not specified if disciples other than the eleven apostles (Judas Iscariot being gone to betray him) were present. It is possible that other disciples, not invited to the Upper Room, may have accompanied Jesus. In reference to the Upper Room, Luke uses the term "apostoloi" (22:14). Perhaps influenced by Mark's gospel, Luke uses the term "mathétai", a term normally denoting a group larger than the apostles. However it is generally understood to reference to the eleven here (8). From Mk 14:15, it is known that "*a young man wearing only loin cloth*" was present at the time of arrest. From Church tradition (with a small t), it is believed that the young man is Mark, and the Last Supper took place at the house of Mark's father. When Judas and the Roman soldiers arrived at the

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Upper Room to arrest Jesus, Mark's father woke Mark up and sent him, scantily clad, to warn Jesus; but Mark arrived to late.

"and the disciples followed him." The verse, not only shows what a good disciples (including us today) are to do, but also is prophetic for what will happen to the apostles themselves, as they will all, except John, suffer and die doing the will of the Father.

40 *When he arrived at the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not undergo the test*

Matthew's and Mark's versions have Jesus first praying independently by Himself. In Luke's version, Jesus invites the disciples to pray right away. Luke emphasizes that solution for problems is prayer. The Greek word for "test" or, as is sometimes used, "temptation" is peirasmos (9), which is the same word that is used in the Lord's prayer 11:4 *"and do not subject us to the final test"*. Thus a strong connection is made to the Lord's prayer at the outset of the Agony. In the OT mindset, God was the source of both good and evil. Examples of bringing Israel to the test are found in Ex 16:4, 20:20; Dt 8:2,16; 13:4; 33:8; Jgs 2:22. The same concept of God being the source of good and evil is found in the NT, e.g. Rom 9:18 where God "hardens the heart of whomever He wills". The concept of the Permissive Will, did not occur until the debates on Predestination in the 16th century (10). This language also echoes back to the warnings given to the apostles at the Last Supper (Lk 22:31-37). The test of the apostles is usually referenced to the test of apostasy, or losing one's faith.

41 *After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed,*

In the Matthew's and Mark's versions, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him. Luke shows no inner circle of apostles. The distance of a "stone's throw" is a colloquialism which existed in Greek writings (8). It indicates that Jesus was removed, but still close enough to be seen (if light permitted it) but out of earshot for normal speech levels. The Lukan version also differs from the Markan version in that Jesus is in self-control and kneels before God, as compared to being "troubled and distressed" then falling to the ground to pray. (11). The normal praying position for a Jew was standing with arms outstretched.

Again, Jesus shows the need for prayer.

42 *Saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done."*

Luke reformulates the Markan prayer opening of "Abba, all things are possible to you" (Mk 14:36). Luke's version uses the Greek term *pater* and assumes that God can do anything. Luke prefers to emphasize the will of the Father. The term, Father, itself, as a reference to God was not unheard of in OT writings. While not common, a few examples of God being called Father are Dt 14:1, 32:6; Hos 11:1-3; 2 Sam 7:14; Mal 2:10; Ps 89:27, and Sir 23:1,4.

"take this cup away from me" The metaphor of "cup" is used in many places in the OT. A few examples of the metaphoric use are "the cup of salvation Ps 116:13, "the cup of his wrath" Is 51:17, "cup of trembling" Is 51:17, "cup of consolation" Jer 16:7, and the "cup of

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astonishment" Ez 23:33. Many view the cup as an image of bitter suffering (12) This phrase, "*take this cup away from me*", demonstrates the humanity of Jesus, who like any man, would be fearful tremble at the thought of impending torture and death by crucifixion. Scott Hahn has popularized in recent years, the interpretation that, at least on one level, the cup represents the completion of the Passover meal and with it the sacrifice of the Lamb.(13) In this interpretation, the first cup is drunk with the blessing over the breaking of the bread. The second cup is drunk after the basin of water is passed around (which Jesus and Judas dip their hands into), while the purpose of the Seder is verbally explained. The third cup is the cup of blessing which Jesus changes to His blood. The fourth cup is drunk after the Great Hallel is sung. (17). In Mark's account, the apostles abruptly leave after the Great Hallel is sung. Jesus eventually drinks the fourth cup of the Passover feast when He sips wine given to Him on a sponge on a hyssop branch by the soldiers just before His death (sacrifice) on the cross, thereby completing the true Passover.

"still, not my will but yours be done" The use of the word "*still*" is important. This word shows that no matter what God decides, Jesus has made the decision that He will follow the Father's will. The phrase word "*be done*" shows that Jesus is now prepared for His cross. He does not ask the Father to postpone His cup for a couple of weeks. Now is the time for the salvific sacrifice to be done.

43 *(And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him.*

44 *He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.)*

Verses 43 and 44 are not found in many of the oldest manuscripts. According to Luke Timothy Johnson, author of a commentary on the gospel of Luke, "the evidence is split fairly evenly with perhaps a slight tilt against inclusion" (11) As noted in the structural analysis, adding in the two verses destructively affects the chiasmic structure of verses 40-46. Many of the early church fathers such as Marcion, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Ambrose, Cyris, and John Damascene omitted the verses, while Justin Martyr, Ireneaus, Hippolytus, Eusebius, Didymus, and Jerome include them . Claims also exist that the verses were contained in *The Gospel of the Nazarenes* and *The Gospel According to the Hebrews* (14)

In addition, there are many philosophical reasons to include the verses. The verse themselves are very Lukan in nature. Luke's gospel contains many references to the demonic. In the Temptation in the desert (4:1-13), Luke indicates that Satan will return. Now with the entering into Judas, Satan has returned. In Matthew's version of the temptation, the angel appears after the devil leaves to wait on Jesus. Luke chooses to have the angel appear and strengthen Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (how the angel strengthens Jesus is not explained). This serves to remind the reader of the earlier temptation scene and the presence of the Devil as the source of evil in the world. In addition, if one removes these two verses from the Agony in the Garden scene, there is no agony, There is ,but simply, a prayer. Even the description of the agony is Lukan in nature. Luke tends to be very descriptive. For instance in the when describing the illness of Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4:39), it is a "severe fever"; here,

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we see "sweat like drops of blood". So if, Luke himself did not write these verses here are elsewhere, the verses appear to be written in a style and content that Luke would have used.

Many articles have been written on the feasibility of sweating blood, the most famous recent article appeared in the prestigious Journal of the American Medical Association (16). From personal experience, I have seen an individual become so upset that the capillaries broke all across his face, leaving a blotchy pattern on his face for days. However, it is not necessary to go that far, because the text speaks of "sweat like drops of blood that fall to the ground". This may be an attempt to describe the profuse, copious sweating, produced by great anxiety (11). When one is severely cut, pools of blood may fall to the ground. Ordinarily, during sweating a few drops of sweat may fall to the ground, certainly a comparison to bleeding would imply a much greater quantity of sweat, flowing down the body, such as blood from a cut would flow.

Finally, it is important to note the reference to and importance of prayer. Luke emphasizes that when one is under great stress, prayer is the proper and best response. The placement of the verses after Jesus' act of submission is important. God does not send a trial that is greater than the individual can bear. Here we see evidence that God sends the angel to strengthen Jesus so that He will be able to endure the trial.

45 *When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief.*

Rising from prayer is a foreshadowing of the Resurrection which will be happening in a few days. The same word, *anistemi*, is used by in other passages such as "though one should rise from the dead" (Lk 16:31), "after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:41), "that he rose again on the third day" (1 Cor 15:4). Jesus returns to the disciples. Jesus seeks out the disciples, just as the shepherd seeks out the lost lambs. The disciples are sleeping, ignoring all the warnings to be alert which Jesus had given at the Last Supper. The only other reference to sleeping in Luke occurs at 9:32 when Peter, John, and James fell asleep during the Transfiguration. It seems that mentally, Peter and his companions are not conscious at critical times, but are in some kind of mental fog. *Sleeping from grief* is unusual terminology. Ordinarily, one gets insomnia when one is upset. If the disciples were grieving, one might have expected that the disciples would seek out Jesus for counsel. The Greek word used for sorrow, *lype*, is sometimes associated with cowardice. This word would have negative implications to the Greeks. (15) One could imagine the apostles being very fearful after Jesus warned them at the Last Supper of the impending betrayal and persecution. Perhaps they hid their faces and being emotionally exhausted fell asleep. This passage is greatly different from Matthew and Mark, where Jesus makes a threefold return to Peter, James, and John. Here, Jesus returns to the disciples as a whole. Luke reduces the whole scene. For Luke, the emphasis is simply on the test and Jesus' response, not on showing an inner circle of apostles.

46 *He said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test."*

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The phrase *Why are you sleeping?* could also be interpreted as *What! Are you sleeping?* Either interpretation would fit the scene. The first interpretation would reflect a, perhaps disappointed, Jesus, who, after explaining so much to the apostles, find that they just don't understand. The second interpretation would reflect a much more indignant Jesus. It would be almost as if He were saying, "*How could you be sleeping! Here I have been in such agony thinking about all I am about to suffer for you and the rest of the world. And you just don't care. Couldn't you at least have prayed with me? Don't you know the trial you will be going through? Don't you want the trial to be lessened? ...*"

Luke ends the verse with the same exact words as he used in verse 40. The repetition of the command to pray serves as an inclusio on the agony, indicating that structural unit is complete, allowing the next unit 47-53, the arrest of Jesus, to begin.

Ramifications in Our Lives

The decision of Jesus to submit to the will of the Father is the paradigm event in Jesus' life. We see in this passage on the Agony in the Garden, that Jesus submitted His will to the will of the Father. At some point in each of our lives, we must come to the point where we submit our wills to that of the Father. This goes beyond just knowing that there is a God, or believing that Jesus is God. As an infant or, perhaps, as an adult, the Christian is baptized into the faith. At some point, one must make the active decision to submit your life to the will of God. Without that decision, faith is meaningless, faith is false. Certainly, Jesus knew the Father. He believed in the Father. But His belief was backed up and His life made meaningful by the decision to do the will of the Father.

Secondly, we see the importance of prayer. All major decisions should be surrounded by prayer before, after and during the decision process. Jesus was the one who prayed. This enabled Him to know and do His Father's will. The apostles did not pray. When the test came, the apostles were scattered. When we pray, God will, in turn, strengthen us so that we can do His will.

Thirdly, we must be wary and watchful for we know neither the hour or the day. We must not be caught sleeping. Satan is also trying to sift us like sand, each and every day. All who follow Christ will be put to the test, will be persecuted. If we are alert, pray for God's help, and submit our will to the Father, God will strengthen, give us His graces, unite ourselves to Him.

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Three Translations of Luke's Version of the Agony in the Garden

| NAB | RSV | Douay-Rheims |
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| 39 Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. | 39* And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. | 39 And going out, he went, according to his custom, to the Mount of Olives. And his disciples also followed him. |
| 40 When he arrived at the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not undergo the test." | 40* * And when he came to the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." | 40 And when he was come to the place, he said to them: Pray, lest ye enter into temptation. |
| 41 After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, | 41 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, | 41 And he was withdrawn away from them a stone's cast. And kneeling down, he prayed. |
| 42 saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." | 42* "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." | 42 Saying: Father, if thou wilt, remove this chalice from me: but yet not my will, but thine be done. |
| 43 * (And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him.) | 43 (omitted) | 43 And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed the longer. |
| 44 He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.) | 44 (omitted) | 44 And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground. |
| 45 When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. | * 45 And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, | 45 And when he rose up from prayer and was come to the disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow. |

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| 46 He said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test." | 46 and he said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." | 46 And he said to them: Why sleep you? Arise: pray: lest you enter into temptation. |
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