

# “Jesus, the Roman “speira”, and the Lord’s Supper”

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It is the night before Jesus is to be crucified. Jesus has assembled with his disciples in the “Garden of Gethsemane”...the events which follow appear in all four of the canonical Gospels (see (Matthew 26:36-57, Mark 14:32-52, Luke 22:40-53 and John 18:1-11) but it will be the version from Matthew 26:36-57 we will be referencing from briefly in this article.....



“Jesus in Gethsemane” by Gustav Dore.

“36 Then Jesus came with them into a country place which is called Gethsemani. And he said to his disciples: Sit you here, till I go yonder and pray.

37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to grow sorrowful and to be sad.

38 Then he saith to them: My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Stay you here and watch with me.

39 And going a little further, he fell upon his face, praying and saying: My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt.

40 And he cometh to his disciples and findeth them asleep. And he saith to Peter: What? Could you not watch one hour with me?

41 Watch ye: and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

42 Again the second time, he went and prayed, saying: My Father, if this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, thy will be done.

43 And he cometh again and findeth them sleeping: for their eyes were heavy.

44 And leaving them, he went again: and he prayed the third time, saying the selfsame word.

45 Then he cometh to his disciples and said to them: Sleep ye now and take your rest. Behold the hour is at hand: and the Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46 Rise: let us go. Behold he is at hand that will betray me.

47 As he yet spoke, behold Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with

him a great multitude with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the ancients of the people.

48 And he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Hold him fast.

49 And forthwith coming to Jesus, he said: Hail, Rabbi. And he kissed him.

50 And Jesus said to him: Friend, whereto art thou come? Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and held him.

51 And behold one of them that were with Jesus, stretching forth his hand, drew out his sword: and striking the servant of the high priest, cut off his ear.

52 Then Jesus saith to him: Put up again thy sword into its place: for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

53 Thinkest thou that I cannot ask my Father, and he will give me presently more than twelve legions of angels?

54 How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that so it must be done?

55 In that same hour, Jesus said to the multitudes: You are come out, as it were to a robber, with swords and clubs to apprehend me. I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple: and you laid not hands on me.

56 Now all this was done that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then the disciples, all leaving him, fled.

57 But they holding Jesus led him to Caiphas the high priest, where the scribes and the ancients were assembled.

Jesus knows full well what will soon pass....Hs alleged “crime” would be “sedition”<sup>1,2</sup> vs. the reigning Roman Empire, punishable by a torturous death....the “threat” that Jesus poses to the Roman Empire



is evidenced by the wording in John 18:3.....

“So Judas, having procured a detachment (speiran | σπεῖραν ) of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.”

Referencing the soldiers who approach, the Greek word “speira” or “cohort” of Roman soldiers appears, a “tenth part of a legion” (Strong's Concordance, #4686), meaning 600 men, a massive military force <sup>3,4,5</sup> indicative of the perceived threat to Roman rule....600 armed soldiers of the most ruthless military force in history, the same army which would lay siege to Qumran, raze and burn Jerusalem to the ground, and finally assault Masada in coming years had come to arrest one man....but one man whose teachings would threaten the mightiest empire the world has ever witnessed, and whose teachings we are still following here today, nearly 2000 years later.

“This time they determined not to rely solely upon their own temple-guards or officers to execute their warrant or order of arrest, fearing that these officials, being Jews, might again be fascinated by the strange influence which Jesus exercised over His countrymen, or that His followers might offer resistance. They therefore applied to Pilate, the Roman procurator (governor), for the assistance of a band of Roman soldiers. He granted them a cohort (Greek: speira, 400 to 600 men) <sup>6</sup> from the legion then quartered in the castle of Antonia, which adjoined and overlooked the temple-area. The final arrangements as to these would probably be completed while Judas was at the supper room. It has been suggested that the whole cohort would not go, but only a selection from them. However, it is said that Judas "received the band (cohort) of soldiers" (John 18:3), and that

they were under the command of a chief captain (Greek: chiliarch, Latin tribune, John 18:12). If there had not been more than 100 soldiers, they would not have been under the command of a captain, but the chief officer would have been a centurion. The amazing popularity of Jesus, as shown by His triumphal entry into the city, may have led the authorities to make such ample provision against any possible attempt at rescue” .....[www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com).



“Jesus was arrested by a company of soldiers called a “speira,” a Greek word denoting 600 men. John tells us that while Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, “Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers (speira)” (John 18:3). Mark tells us that after Jesus’ trial, “The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers

(speira)” (Mark 15:16).”.....”The 600 Speira” by Rick Cunningham, from the “Main Messenger” of the 14th and Main Church of Christ, Big Spring, Texas.

Even here in his final hours, his disciples are unable to even stay awake and comfort him (Matthew 26:40)...He is “sorrowful”, “even unto death” (Matthew 26:38)...He is beset by enemies on seemingly all sides, from the Roman Empire, which views Him as a potential political threat, to the Jews, who regard Jesus as a blasphemer (John 10:31-33)....Judas, his infamous betrayer, brings the Roman forces directly to Him (Matthew 26:47)....He is mere hours from his rendezvous with those who serve as His executioners....He will soon enough be tried, beaten, mocked, scourged, and ultimately crucified, all to pay the price for the sins of a vile and lost world. But yet for all the betrayals he had and would experience, for all the fear and trepidation He would certainly feel, for all the dread certainty of what He would soon experience, Jesus would not be detoured from his task. The will of His father would be of paramount importance (Matthew 26:42) and Jesus would not be dissuaded from His mission.

That “mission” was to provide his own precious life, and body, for the eternal salvation of each and every one of us.....let us therefore never lose sight of the meaning or importance of the weekly observance of “Communion”. Let us never dismiss this “act” as a mere meaningless repetition to be followed each Sunday morning. How many of us have witnessed for ourselves people passing notes to one another, or giggling, or sending text messages during this observance, a time when, perhaps more than any other, our own utter sinful nature and the astounding love of Almighty God should be our focus. We are both observing and commemorating the greatest gift, and the greatest sacrifice, ever bestowed upon mankind...the bread emblematic of the

broken body of Jesus Christ, the fruit of the cup representing the blood of our savior Jesus Christ....given to provide ALL OF US eternal salvation.

“19And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.... Luke 22:19-20.

The Lord's supper is a memorial of Jesus Christ having come, for each and every one of us, the atonement for the sins of mankind, the ultimate and immeasurable sacrifice. Let us each, without exception, focus on the life, the mission, and most especially, the DEATH of Jesus Christ each time that we partake. Let us not drink unworthily unto ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-28)....let us put away the thoughts and cares of this world, and focus on the sacrifice made for each of us which we certainly do not deserve and which we certainly cannot repay.

1- “Jesus was crucified for sedition, that is rebellion against Rome. Anyone who laid claim to the Jewish throne (there were many) got the same treatment” ..... “Did Jews Really Kill Jesus Christ?” by Lewis Loflin.

2- “Jesus stood accused of sedition, not blasphemy—a civil crime, not a religious one. Rome’s punishment was a painful, and visible, death by crucifixion. In the age of Roman domination, only Rome crucified. And they did it often. The two men who were killed along with Jesus



are identified in some translations as “thieves,” but the word can also mean “insurgents,” supporting the idea that crucifixion was a political weapon used to send a message to those still living: Do not stir dissent or this will be the result. “.....How the Romans Used Crucifixion—Including Jesus's—as a Political Weapon”, BY JOHNNA RIZZO,, 4/4/15, Newsweek.

3- “Matthew refers to Jesus being brought before the governor’s troops. He uses the terms *speira*/*speira* to refer to the size of the body of soldiers involved. The Greek *speira* meant literally anything round or whatever might be wrapped around a thing. It is usually used to refer to a body of soldiers. The New American Standard Bible and Net Bible translate it as “cohort”, KJV and RSV as “band”, and NIV as “company” Cohort is the Latin term (*cohortes*) simply brought into English largely untranslated. John describes the unit sent to arrest Jesus in John 18: 3 and 12 as a *speira*. The term itself is imprecise. A cohort consists six centuries of eighty men each. As the name implies, the century was originally one hundred men each”, from “The Roman Military in the New Testament” at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

4- “ the tenth part of legion”, “about 600 men”, from Thayer's Greek Lexicon at [www.bibletools.org](http://www.bibletools.org).

5- “....a Roman cohort (Polyb., xi. 23, 1) or tenth part of a legion, and therefore containing about 600 men... denotes the garrison of the castle Antonia, which, during the Passover, was available to assist the

Sanhedrim in maintaining order.”.....Expositor's Greek Testament.

6- “A speira (which corresponded to the Latin cohort, often translated "company") consisted originally of six centuries with each "century" consisting of 100 men. Around 100 B.C. the number was generally reduced for each century to about 80 men. That would make the speira in the arrest of Jesus approximately 480 men plus a commanding officer with an aide or a couple of immediate subordinate officers beyond the centurions over each respective century. Of course, depending on the strength at time due to illness, injuries, and even military patrols each century may not have been at full strength, and yet still would be consider a complete unit for the mission at hand, even understaffed. But 480 plus would be a safe guess”.....Howard Daniel Denham, Truth Bible Institute, July 27, 2015.