

John 18:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

Analysis

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it" (Σίμων οὖν Πέτρος ἔχων μάχαιραν/Simōn oun Petros echōn machairan)—the insertion of Peter's full name and the participle "having" emphasizes his preparedness and initiative. The μάχαιρα (machaira) was a short sword or large knife, likely the weapon Jesus told them to procure in Luke 22:36-38. Peter's action was impulsive, violent, and completely contrary to Jesus's kingdom teaching.

The verb ἔπαισεν (epaisen, "smote") indicates a striking blow, and **"cut off his right ear"** (ἀπέκοψεν αὐτοῦ τὸ ὡτάριον τὸ δεξιόν/apekopsen autou to ὀταριον to dexion) shows Peter aimed for the head, intending lethal force. Only the servant's movement—likely ducking—saved his life but cost his ear. The specificity "right ear" adds eyewitness detail, and Luke the physician notes Jesus healed it (Luke 22:51), a miracle the arresting party ignored in their hardness.

"The servant's name was Malchus" (ἥν δὲ ὄνομα τῷ δούλῳ Μάλχος/ēn de onoma tō doulō Malchos)—John alone records the name, perhaps because by the time he wrote (AD 90s), Malchus was dead and couldn't be endangered. Naming him personalizes the incident and may suggest John knew him, given his connections to the high priest's household (v.15). Peter's violent defense contradicts everything Jesus taught about His kingdom not being of this world (18:36).

Historical Context

Carrying weapons was common for travelers due to bandits, but using them against Roman soldiers and temple police was treasonous and suicidal. Peter's action could have resulted in the disciples' immediate execution. His courage was genuine but misguided—he was willing to die for Jesus but unwilling to let Jesus die for him. Malchus was likely a trusted servant to warrant accompanying the high priest's delegation. High priestly households were wealthy and politically connected, with servants holding significant status. Jesus's immediate healing showed mercy to His enemies and prevented escalation that would endanger His disciples.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What does Peter's violent defense reveal about our natural tendency to advance God's kingdom through carnal means?
2. How does Jesus's healing of Malchus demonstrate love for enemies even while being betrayed and arrested?
3. In what ways do Christians today use worldly 'swords' to fight spiritual battles?

Interlinear Text

Σίμων	οὗν	Πέτρος	ἔχων	μάχαιραν	εἷλκυσεν	αὐτοῦ	καὶ
Simon	Then	Peter	having	a sword	drew	his	and
G4613	G3767	G4074	G2192	G3162	G1670	G846	G2532
ἔπαισεν	τὸν	τοῦ	ἀρχιερέως	δούλω	καὶ	ἀπέκοψεν	
smote	G3588	G3588	the high priest's	The servant's	and	cut off	
G3817			G749	G1401	G2532	G609	
αὐτοῦ	τὸ	ώτιον	τὸ	δεξιόν·	ἡν	δὲ	ὄνομα
his	G3588	ear	G3588	right	was	G1161	name
G846		G5621		G1188	G2258		G3588
δούλω		Μάλχος					
The servant's		Malchus					
G1401		G3124					

Additional Cross-References

Mark 14:47 (Word): And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

John 18:26 (References Peter): One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him?