



Matthew 26:57-68

The Jewish Trial of Jesus before the High Priest

At this point in the Gospel narratives there are four events taking place: the arrest of Jesus in the night, the Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin, the Roman trial before Pilate, and the crucifixion. The Jewish and the Roman trials have three parts. We will examine the Jewish trial in this study and the Roman in the next.

The Jewish trial has three parts. It begins with the preliminary hearing before Annas who was high priest appointed by the Jews for life. However the Romans had replaced him at their will with Caiaphas his son-in-law. Both Annas and Caiaphas hold the title high priest. Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas for the second phase of the trial. Jesus was accused of blasphemy and those present determine that He should die. The third phase is a formal hearing before the Sanhedrin at daybreak since Jewish law prohibited trials at night. This nothing more than a formal declaration and Jesus is sent to Pilate who alone can execute Jesus.

Friday morning before dawn Jesus is taken before the ex-high priest Annas who is the father-in-law of Caiaphas the current high priest (John 18:12-14). Annas had served as high priest from A.D. 6 to 15, and was still the power man behind the scenes in Jewish religion in Jerusalem. He made sure through astute politics with the Roman governor that five of his sons, and his son-in-law Caiaphas, and a grandson served as high priest. While they acted in public, he really directed affairs, without either the responsibility or the restraints which the office imposed. "Annas was enormously wealthy, and was able to furnish his friends in the Praetorium with large sums of money. . . The names of those bold, licentious, unscrupulous, degenerate sons of Aaron were spoken with whispered curses," says Eldersheim (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 547). Annas owned the famous Bazaars of Annas which controlled the sale of animals for sacrifices and the money changers at the Temple. The messiahship of Jesus was a threat to their enterprise. Annas and his family made the Temple a market place and a den of thieves. William Hendriksen describes these men as, "Greedy, serpent-like, vindictive Annas, rude, sly, hypocritical Caiaphas, crafty, superstitious, self-seeking Pilate; and immoral, ambitious, superficial Herod Antipas; these were his judges!" (*Matthew*, pp. 928-29).

Jesus was hurriedly tried and condemned by the Sanhedrin.

A. T. Robertson in the *Harmony of the Gospels* says, "The Jewish trial comprised three stages, the preliminary examination by Annas, the informal trial by the Sanhedrin, probably before dawn, and the formal trial after dawn. With these are narrated two related matters, the denial by Peter and the suicide of Judas" (*Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 209).

"The whole proceeding of this examination was illegal, both as to the time and place," writes John Shepard.

The preliminary examination of Jesus was conducted before Annas and was recorded by the apostle John. Later in the night the proceedings went before Caiaphas in the palace of the high priest. We get the impression that Annas also resided there since there were apartments around a large central court at the high priest's palace.

"The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. Jesus answered him, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.' When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, 'Is that the way You answer the high priest?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?'" (John 18:19-23).

Jesus had no secret society; He had no secret doctrine. He was honest, open and transparent before a watching world. Jesus got the best of the argument and Annas terminated the examination.

Jesus before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin

Each of the four gospels records for us these proceedings which take place in the residence of the high priest Caiaphas before dawn on Friday. The Jewish Mishnah makes it very clear such a meeting of the Sanhedrin in the night was illegal. "The regular place for the meeting of the Sanhedrin was in the Temple, but they led Jesus away to the house of the high priest Caiaphas . . . Nor was the legal hour of meeting for trials in the night. Other features in the illegality practiced in the trials of Jesus were: undue haste, seeking or bribing witnesses, neglecting to warn the witness solemnly before they should give evidence, forcing the accused to testify against Himself, judicial use of the prisoner's confession, and failure to release the prisoner when there was failure of agreement before witnesses" (Shepherd, p. 575).

They seized Jesus and led Him away to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest where the scribes and Jewish elders were waiting (Mark 14:53; Matt. 26:57; Luke 22:54; John 18:24).

For some time the religious leaders brought many false witnesses but could find none to agree in their testimony. "Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, 'We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' And Jesus said, 'I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?' And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, 'Prophecy!' And the officers received Him with slaps in the face" (Mark 14:55-65).

Matthew tells us two false witnesses came together on the matter of Jesus' statement about the Temple (Matt. 26:59-65). For Jesus to claim that He possessed the power to destroy the Temple in three days was equivalent to saying He was the Messiah (Tasker). Morris suggests, "They were not interested in the facts; they were interested in a condemnation. So they looked for the kind of testimony that would enable them to put Him to death" (Matthew, p. 681).

Each of the four gospels tells us Jesus remained silent as the accusations were presented and the witnesses spoke. Since Jesus remained silent to His accusers, the high priest put Jesus under oath with the statement "I adjure you" (exorkizo) a legal formula which informed Jesus that His answer would be regarded under oath and could be used against Him. "I put you under oath" is the regular formal Jewish way of placing a man under oath.

"Jesus remained silent" at His trial fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1-4; 53:7.

The high priest was fully aware that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Anointed of God, the unique, one of a kind Son of God. He puts Jesus under oath to state very clearly His claim to the Messiah in relationship to the LORD God. The witnesses did not produce the answer he wanted; therefore he wants to get a clear statement from Jesus as to the question are you the Messiah who is God.

Jesus said to the high priest in an emphatic, unmistakable conviction that rings down through the centuries until now. "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Only God could make such a claim to Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus was either God or committing blasphemy! When Jesus answered in the affirmative to his question the high priest tore his robes which is forbidden in the law of Moses (Lev. 21:10), and charged Jesus with blasphemy. "He has spoken blasphemy!" (Matt. 26:65). All who were present answered, "He is worthy of death" (v. 66). From Luke 23:50-51 we know that one member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph from Arimathea, was not present, and there may have been others absent also.

During the early part of His ministry Jesus did not openly declare that He was the Messiah because the people were looking for a political messiah and therefore would misunderstand His mission. Now was the time for Him to make a clear statement that He indeed is the Messiah, the Son of God. "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" His response is, "Yes, indeed." "Yes, it is as you say." Goodspeed paraphrases, "It is true." Montgomery, "I am He." Jesus not only answered in the affirmative, He provided details as the kind of Messiah and Son of God He was based on the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13-14.

"Blasphemy!" According to the Mishnah blasphemy involved the use of the sacred name of God Yahweh. "'The blasphemer' is not culpable unless he pronounces the Name itself." Clearly, from the evidence at hand Jesus did not commit blasphemy (Morris, p. 685).

"Jesus added predictive words of what God would show Him to be in His resurrection, ascension, and second advent," says Shepherd. Those who were condemning Him "would appear in judgment before Him, the Messianic judge, when He should come upon the clouds of heaven." The Son of Man has lived in humble obscurity, but when He is raised from the dead He will return to the heavenly glory He had before His incarnation. Plummer says, "He who now stands before their judgment-seat will then be seated on the clouds, invested with Divine Power, and ready to judge them."

William Hendriksen summarizes beautifully: "That is the way in which Daniel had seen the coming Redeemer (Dan. 7:13, 14). It was thus that David sang of him (Ps. 110:1), and thus also that Jesus had himself described himself (see on Matt. 16:27; 22:41-46; 24:30), be it previously only to his disciples. Jesus is looking down history's lane. He sees the miracle of Calvary, the resurrection, the ascension, the coronation at the Father's right hand ('the right hand of the Power,' that is, 'of the Almighty'), Pentecost, the glorious return on the

clouds of heaven, the judgment day, all rolled into one, manifesting his power and glory. On the final day of judgment he, even Jesus, will be the Judge, and these very men—Caiaphas and his partners—will have to answer for the crime they are now committing. Christ's prophecy is also a warning!" (Matthew, pp. 932-33).

The Mishnah states "in capital cases a verdict of acquittal may be reached the same day, but a verdict of conviction not until the following day. Therefore trials may not be held on a Sabbath or on the eve of a Festival-day."

All four of the Gospels tell us that Peter denied Jesus three times. They probably did not take place in rapid succession, but were spread out over the duration of the Jewish trial. During these Jewish proceedings Peter denied Christ three times and the rooster crowed (Mark 14:54, 66-72; Matt. 26:58, 69-75; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27). "The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62). Peter wept loudly as distinct from to shed tears. Lenski says the verb denotes "loud, audible weeping, 'he sobbed bitterly.'" Peter repented and Judas committed suicide that Friday morning (Matt. 27:3-10; Acts 1:18, 19).

Eldersheim paints a vivid picture for us. Judas rushed out of the Temple, out of Jerusalem in solitude. He crossed the Valley of Hinnom. "Crossed the Valley, and up the steep sides of the mountain! We are now on the 'potter's field' of Jeremiah. . . It is cold, soft clayey soil, where the footsteps slip, or are held in clammy bonds. Here jagged rocks rise perpendicularly: perhaps there was some gnarled, bent, stunted tree. Up there he climbed to the top of that rock. Now slowly and deliberately he unwound the long girdle that held his garment. It was the girdle in which he had carried those thirty pieces of silver. He was now quite calm and collected. With that girdle he will hang himself on that tree close by, and when he has fastened, he will throw himself off from that jagged rock." The deed was done. The weight of his body gave way and fell among the jagged rocks beneath and burst asunder (vol. 2, p. 575).

The Sanhedrin was the highest governing body in Judaea, composed of the high priests, elders, and scribes. It met under the leadership of the ruling high priest. They had the ultimate authority in religious, legal and governmental affairs as long as it did not encroach on the authority of the Roman procurator. It is after dawn on Friday morning that Jesus is formally condemned by the Sanhedrin. Farr suggests that not half of the members of the Sanhedrin had been present during the illegal night proceedings in the house of Caiaphas. They now had to have a formal session so all the members could hear something on which to found their vote to condemn Jesus. So Caiaphas solemnly asked Jesus again if He was the Messiah the Son of God. Robertson notes, "This ratification of the condemnation after dawn was an effort to make the action legal. But no ratification of a wrong can make it right. . . The hate of the Sanhedrin for Jesus made them violate their own rules of legal procedure" (p. 215).

Immediately the chief priests, elders and the whole Sanhedrin held a consultation to put Jesus to death. "When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, 'If You are the Christ, tell us.' But He said to them, 'If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.' And they all said, 'Are You the Son of God, then?' And He said to them,

'Yes, I am.' Then they said, 'What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth'" (Luke 22:66-71). It was an unequivocal confession that He was the divine Messiah.

The Sanhedrin will now take Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate because the Jewish leaders did not have the power to execute a person. The Roman trial will also have three stages: the first appearance before the Roman procurator Pilate, the appearance before Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee appointed by the Romans and the final appearance before Pilate.

When the Jewish leaders accuse Jesus before Pilate they will say nothing about the charge of blasphemy, but will twist the words of Jesus to make it appear he is an insurrectionist against the Roman government. They will argue before Pilate that Jesus was setting Himself up as a King in opposition to Caesar.

Well did Isaiah declare 750 years earlier: "He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:3-4). "But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand" (Isaiah 53:10). Peter declared at the end of one of his great sermons: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

"What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

If the blood of Jesus does not wash away all my sins there is no hope for anyone. Jesus died and there is salvation for all who will come to Him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved today."

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