

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin in the Upper Story of Caiaphas' House

Matthew 26:57, 59-68; Mark 14:53, 55-65; Luke 22:54a, 63-65

About 2:30 am Friday morning, the fifteenth of Nisan

DIG: Why was Jesus taken to the house of the high priest? What was the strategy of Caiaphas? Why two witnesses? What was unusual about Messiah's defense of Himself? What does this say about His view of the proceedings? What is blasphemy? Why would the members of the Sanhedrin think Yeshua was guilty of this? Why don't they press their case?

REFLECT: Saying nothing may allow wrongdoers to go unchallenged in their evil ways. Are you being falsely accused? If you discern that it's futile to argue, or if your pride has been hurt, can you, like Christ, say nothing? On the other hand, if you feel concern for the wrongdoers and want to see justice done, can you speak up?

There were, in essence, two trials, one by the Sanhedrin (see Lg - **The Great Sanhedrin**) and the other by the Romans. Judas was not needed for the Jewish trial, only for the Roman one. The Jews had jurisdiction over the religious matters of the Jewish community and, as such, could impose a suitable punishment for any guilty party with one major exception - the death penalty. Although the Romans were generally known to respect the decisions of the conquered communities under their rule, they took control of any capital punishment crimes. Jewish capital punishment was carried out by means of stoning; while the Romans perfected death on the cross as their means of carrying out their ultimate sentence.

The most common modes of killing a condemned man in the Roman Empire were hanging, burning people alive, beheading, placing them inside a bag full of scorpions then drowning them, and crucifixion. As terrible as the first four might be, the last was considered the worst by far. So even as crucifixion was practiced throughout the Roman Empire, even by a tetrarch such as Herod Antipas, it was a death so horrible that it was forbidden to execute a Roman citizen in such a manner.¹⁵¹⁸

Jacob had prophesied on his deathbed that **the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until He comes to whom [obedience] it belongs; and it is He whom the [Gentile nations] will obey (Genesis 49:10)**. So it should come as no surprise to us that the Romans took control of the death penalty from Judah, the ability to rule as it were, from them about the same time that Jesus was born (see my commentary on **Genesis Lg - The Scepter Will Not Depart from Judah Until He Comes to Whom It Belongs**) - He whom the [Gentile nations] would obey.

From Annas' residence, **Yeshua** was led next door the house of **Caiaphas**. The mock trial was held in the upper story of **high priest's** house. There **all the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Torah teachers** came together (**Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54a**). **There were 21 rules of the Great Sanhedrin regarding trials and in their zeal to kill Jesus they broke every one of them on the fifteenth of Nisan.** It was still dark outside, **breaking rule number 4 that said there were to be no trials before the morning sacrifice 9:00 am; and rule number 5 that said there were to be no secret trials, only public ones** (see Lh - **The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**).

The Sadducees and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death. But they did not find any. Though many false witnesses testified against Him their statements did not agree on essential details (**Matthew 26:59-60a; Mark 14:55-56**). The verbs are imperfect, showing that repeated attempts were made to bring testimony that would warrant conviction. **So this broke Sanhedrin rule number 9 where there were to be two or three witnesses and their testimony had to agree in every detail for conviction; and rule number 7 that stated the defense would speak first, and only then would the accusation be made,** (see Lh - **The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**).

The Lamb of God stood silent. It must have seemed ironic, even to **Him**, to see that the Jews who actively plotted against **His** life numbered so few, and those Jews who believed that **He** was **the Messiah** numbered so many, yet the first group could not seem to prove a case against **Him** while the second didn't lift a finger to save **Him**!

One by one, false witnesses came in to testify against **Him**. **At last, however, two people** (the number necessary to obtain a conviction under the Torah) **came forward** with a controversial claim. **They** stood before **the Sanhedrin** and brazenly lie about **Jesus**, spinning stories about things that **He** had supposedly said or done. According to **them** they heard **this man** say: **I can tear down God's Temple and build it again in three days** (**Matthew 26:60b-61; Mark 14:57-58 CJB**). So one of the false accusations against **Him** was that **He** was going to **destroy** the **Temple** (**Mark 13:2; Luke 19:43-44; John 2:19-21**). Obviously, **their** statements were taken out of context. Of course **Yeshua** made such a public statement. But **He** was making an allegory referring to **His** own death and resurrection on the third day (**John 2:19**). In addition, the integrity of the **two witnesses** (**Deuteronomy 19:15**) could be questioned, as **they** referred to **Christ** as **this man**, apparently a title of contempt when one wanted to avoid even the mention of a name.¹⁵¹⁹ Yet **even then their testimony did not agree** (**Mark 14:59**).

Even so, the statement is hardly **blasphemy**, and not a capital crime. The Pharisees, in their daily interpretations of the Torah, had been prone to far worse exaggerations. Each person in the room, with the exception of the high priest, seemed to forget that the specific charge against the prisoner was, in itself, unimportant. The primary concern was to validate that charge that would make him a criminal in the eyes of the Roman Procurator. They would have to make the case to Pilate that Jesus was a political threat to Rome. Since he claimed to be a king that would mean a new kingdom. In the absence of other evidence, that would have to do.

Caiaphas was caught. **He** could not prove the prisoner guilty of charge, and **he** could not ask the uncommitted judges to vote for conviction. It was quite possible that the majority of the judges hated **the troublemaking Rabbi** and feared the reaction the multitudes to **Him**. They wanted to convict **Jesus**, and they wanted **him** to suffer death for the turmoil that they believed **He** had caused **the Temple**. But first, they wanted to hear from **His** own lips that **He** was **the Son of God**.

With that formal charge, **the high priest stood up before Messiah** and **His** accusers and cross-examined **Him**. **Caiaphas** said to **Jesus**, "Are you not going to answer? The prisoner looked at **him** and said nothing. What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you" (Matthew 26:62; Mark 14:60)? **This broke rule number 10 where there was to be no allowance for the accused to testify against himself** (see Lh - **The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**). This was the action of an irritated and baffled man, trying to make up by bluster, what **he** lacked of evidence. **Christ's** hands were bound behind **His** back and **His** feet were spread slightly apart. Some of **the members of the Sanhedrin** studied **Him** closely. But in all sincerity **they** couldn't see what there was in **Him** that attracted so many people (**Isaiah 53:2b**). I am sure it was a surprise to everyone present that **Yeshua remained silent and gave no answer** (Matthew 26:63a; Mark 14:61a). The verb **silent** is in the imperfect tense, meaning **He** continually maintained **His** **silence**. This also fulfilled the words of **Isaiah: He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter** (**Isaiah 53:7**).

The high priest was still standing. So long as **Jesus** remained **silent**, the **Great Sanhedrin** had to acquit. In desperation, and almost pleading, **the high priest** shouted, "I charge you under oath by the living **God**: Tell us if you are **the Messiah, the Son of God**" (Matthew 26:63b; Mark 14:61b). It was the one question that everybody in the room wanted answered. Indeed, it was the one question that all Jerusalem wanted answered. This was somewhat ironic, because **the living God** was standing in front of **him**! **But under rule 12, charges could not originate with the judges, they could only investigate charges brought to them** (see Lh - **The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**).

But refusing to answer this question would be equivalent to a denial of His deity. Therefore, **Yeshua answered the startled Sadducee: The words are you own (Matthew 26:64a CJB). The Lord always says the right things at the right time and here He called attention to the words of His accuser, not His. This was inadmissible because rule number 14 said that a person could not be condemned on the basis of his own words (see Lh - The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials).** It was as if Jesus was really saying, "**Caiaphas, whatever your concept of the Messiah is - I AM**" (Mark 14:62a). And as such, He had a unique relationship with ADONAI as His Son (Psalm 2; Proverbs 30).

But just to be sure there was no misunderstanding, the Lord added more detail: **I tell you that one day you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Powerful One (or HaG'vurah, a common substitute for the actual name of God) and coming on the clouds of heaven (Mathew 26:64b; Mark 14:62b).** To those educated rabbis and priests, the messianic phrase **Son of Man** would arouse a clear image of the appearance of the Messiah. In Psalm 110:1, the Meshiach is invited to sit at the place of honor. Daniel spoke of his vision of the coming **Christ on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13).** Those standing in judgment of **Yeshua** knew those verses all to well. So it was quite obvious that the maverick Rabbi from Nazareth was claiming to be much more than merely a good rabbi or even a prophet. No, He claimed to be the unique **Messiah** sent from the **God** of Isra'el.

What a relief **Caiaphas** must have felt! When all else had failed, the **renegade Rabbi** had condemned himself! He had, in effect, pleaded guilty, though perhaps not exactly as the **high priest** wished. There was no further need for pointless witnesses, even though **rule 10 said there was to be no allowance for the accused to testify against himself,** the words out of the **prisoner's** own mouth: **the words are you own,** was enough. The entire body of the Great Sanhedrin was witness to the declaration that **Jesus** had said that **he** was sent by ADONAI to save Isra'el.

There seems to be some confusion today whether **Jesus** actually claimed to be **God**. But those in the Sanhedrin were not so confused. **Messiah** declared that **He** was in fact **Yeshua ben David, the Son of God**. This not only answered their question, but also gave them a perfect opportunity to take their case to the Roman authorities. If the claim of messiahship was explosive within the Jewish community, it was nuclear to the Roman leadership that always feared a political uprising.¹⁵²⁰

Then, upon hearing the truth of **Christ's** response, the **high priest tore his clothes.** The **tearing of clothes** was an old sign of mourning or sorrow first mentioned in **Genesis 37:29. Under the rules of the Sanhedrin, number 11 specifically said that the high priest was forbidden to tear his clothes (Leviticus 10:6 and 21:10).** The reason for this was to maintain an atmosphere of objectivity while seeking justice. Such behavior was really

inexcusable in such a legal hearing because a man's life was at stake. Basically, **the high priest** just lost it.

Then **Caiaphas** rendered **His** official judgment and cried out in a voice so loud it seemed as if all of Isra'el could hear: **He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy (Matthew 26:65; Mark 14:63-64a). This broke rule 16 that said in cases of capital punishment, the trial and the guilty verdict could not occur at the same time but had to be separated by at least twenty-four hours.** In addition, **rule 13 said the accusation of blasphemy was only valid if he pronounced the very name of God Himself (see Lh - The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials),** which **Jesus** never did.

Continuing to seize the moment, **Caiaphas** said to the quorum present: **What do you think?** The clerks then began to call the roll, probably starting with the oldest members. Each in turn stood and said: **He is worthy of death (Matthew 26:66; Mark 14:64b).**

The Lamb of God said nothing. It was about 3:30 am and when **Caiaphas** announced that the seventy stood in recess until they could meet in the Royal Stoa (see **My - The Royal Stoa**) in an hour so that **the imposter** could be formally condemned, the judges came down from their benches. Some walked up to **the Prince of Peace** and spat in **his** face. Others, in the crowd around **Him**, clenched their fists and hit **him**. **He** said nothing, though some of the blows caused **him** to double over with pain.

At this point, things took a turn for the worse. Because **Caiahpas** lost control, so did **the Temple guard** in **his** presence. What **Jesus Christ** suffered next were some of the greatest indignities under Jewish civil law. **The Temple** guards grew more frustrated because **Yeshua** would not answer the questions put to **Him**. It showed a lack of respect. So **they** asked a few questions of **their** own. Then some of the men who were guarding **Jesus** began mocking, and beating **Him** (Luke 22:63). **This was the first mocking. This broke rule 21 that said a person condemned to death was not to be scourged or beaten beforehand (see Lh - The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials).** When no answers were forthcoming **they** slapped **Him** and repeated **their** questions. **They** took turns standing before **Him**, and the stinging slaps spun **His** head to the left and then again to the right.

The **men** began to enjoy the game. They progressed from the slaps to heavy punches on the head and chest and stomach. When **the Suffering Servant** doubled up, **they** hit **Him** in the face and the brought **Him** erect again. **They** stood close to **Him** spit in **His** face and saw **their** saliva cling to **His** cheeks.

Then someone in the group had a more amusing idea. **He** found a cloth and **blindfolded Jesus**. Then **the Temple** guards danced around **Him** and **struck Him with their fists**, while **others slapped Him and demanded**, "Prophecy to us, **Messiah! Who hit You?**" And they called **Him** cruel names. And obscene names. **Then they beat Him again (Matthew 26:67-68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64-65)**. **They** all knew that the prisoner **had** been found guilty of **speaking blasphemy** was legitimate prey for **their** sadistic pleasures. So long as **He** was conscious at the time of execution no one would be reprimanded. **Jesus** was bloody and bruised. **His face** was swollen. So the guards got some water and used **the blindfold** to wipe **His** face. If **He** was going to **the Temple**, they didn't want **Him** to incite the pity of the morning worshipers.

At the home of **Caiaphas**, the quorum of Sanhedrin members filed out and headed for **the Temple** compound. As they walked out of the courtyard, some, in their great robes and tapering hats, paused to look at the condemned man. Others did not. It was a busy house with messengers running in and out and notable people standing on the porch, but nevertheless it was a happy house. They were thrilled with what they had done.

The Sanhedrin had trapped the counterfeit **Messiah**, and not only that, they had managed to bait **Him** into admitting **His** own blasphemy. **He** had had the nerve to refer to **Himself** as **the Meshiach** in front of everyone! **He** had already been found guilty of blasphemy. Now all they had left to do was to sentence **him** by daylight and the job was done. Any member who had the slightest qualms about the possibility of **the Nazarene** being **the Messiah** only had to walk over to the corner of the courtyard and look at him. **He** was not Godlike. **He** was manlike, and currently, a poor specimen of man. **His** face was gnashed and raw and swollen so the purple welts marked **his** cheekbones, and both eyes were puffed. **His** hands shook in the shackles and **he** was bent over like an old man. **The Anointed One?** Not a chance.¹⁵²¹

Among those who stood waiting outside the home of **Caiaphas** was **Judas**. **The betrayer** had been paid for **his** work, but **he** wanted to know what had happened to **the Master**. **He** waited . . . and when **Yeshua** came out **Judas** looked and was sickened by what **he** saw. **He** was shocked and a wave of **remorse** engulfed **him**. **He** did not believe that **Jesus** was **the Meshiach**, but **he** knew from **his** own experience that this was the gentlest **man** in the world.

The military unit passed **him** with their **prisoner** in toe and **Judas** watched **the Temple** guards push **Jesus** and kick **Him** when **He** stumbled. **The little man's** sorrow grew into horror and **he** told **himself**, over and over again, that **he** had not meant for this to happen. Perhaps **Yeshua** deserved punishment. Yes, perhaps banishment to **Galilee** or further. But not this.¹⁵²²