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Jesus Formally Condemned
by the Sanhedrin in the Royal Stoa
Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1a; Luke 22:66-71
About 4:30 am Friday morning, the fifteenth of Nisan

Jesus formally condemned by the Sanhedrin in the Royal Stoa DIG: What is ironic about the Temple choir singing Psalm 93 on this particular day? How is the concern of the elders and priests in Luke 22:67-70 different from the concern that they bring to Pilate in Luke 23:2? How many laws of the Great Sanhedrin were violated when Jesus was condemned in the Royal Stoa?

REFLECT: What is the most disturbing aspect of this illegal trial to you? Have you ever personally been unable to prevent an injustice? How does that make you feel? Have you ever had a group of people plot to do you harm? How did it make you feel?

The Great Sanhedrin (**to see link click Lg – The Great Sanhedrin**) had previously met in the Hall of Polished Stones, which was located in the southwestern corner of the Temple. But in 30 AD **their** location changed to the eastern end of the Royal Stoa. The place where **the Sanhedrin** met was adjacent to where **the ancient serpent** had, some three-and-a-half years before, attempted to murder **the Holy One** by tempting **Him** to jump from its height (see **Bj – Jesus is Tempted in the Wilderness**)**.** The dizzying vantage point from the southeast corner of the Temple Mount was said by Josephus to drop some 450 feet to the valley below. And according to early tradition, **James**, the brother of **Yeshua** and the head of the Yerushalayim congregation, would later be martyred by being thrown from there because **he** would not renounce **his** faith. It was an ominous place.



Singing at the Temple: From the Talmund Tractate *thamid* we know exactly which Psalm would have been sung on which day of the week in connection with the daily burnt offering in the Temple. It is stunning how closely each of the Psalms coincides with the singing of these daily readings. It was Pesach. On this day the Temple choir sang **Psalm 93**. It deals with **ADONAI's** royal rule on **His throne** with **majesty and strength**. **Messiah** referred to this throne before **the Sanhedrin** in the Royal Stoa, when **He** said: **the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of ha-G'vurah, the mighty God (Luke 22:69).** The trial against **the Prince of Life** was simply a mockery in which the result had already been determined right from the start. Through this, **the holiness** of **ADONAI** was trampled on. How solemn it was as the choir sang at the daily burnt offering on this day:

ADONAI is King, robed in majesty. ADONAI is robed, girded with strength. The world is well established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; You have existed forever. ADONAI, the sea is raising up, the sea is raising up its voice, the sea is raising up its crashing waves. More than the sound of rushing waters or the mighty breakers of the sea, ADONAI on high is mighty. Your instructions are very sure; holiness adorns Your house, ADONAI, for all time to come (Psalm 93 CJB).

Very early in the morning, probably around 4:30 am, **all the Sadducees** (at least a quorum of **the Great Sanhedrin**) **and the Torah-teachers made their plans how to have the Son of God executed (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1a). Those plans violated rule 8 that held all could argue in favor of acquittal, but all could not argue in favor of conviction, and also rule 15 that said the verdict could not be announced at night, only in the daytime** (see **Lh** –

The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials).

No longer bound, **Jesus was led** inside **before them** and held, standing between the facing rows**. His Father** was being worshiped without ceasing in the Sanctuary. Many Jews who believed in **Him** walked on Solomon's colonnade by the candlelight, the sun not yet risen. Most likely some were wondering if **Yeshua** would come to **the Temple** that day to teach and heal. But to **the Sanhedrin**, standing in **their** midst, **He** was a dangerous creature that needed to be exterminated quickly and quietly to make the Land safe for **Ha'Shem**.

When **Jesus** saw the members of **the Jewish Supreme Court** file in, slowly and solemnly, glancing fleetingly at **Him**, and then edge into their seats, **the Son of God** straightened up and looked directly at **them**. When all had been seated **Caiaphas** made **his** entrance and began pressing the prisoner with the most important charge of **blasphemy**. **If you are the Messiah, he** said: **tell us (Luke 22:66-67). Once again, this violated rule number 10, there was to be no allowance for the accused to testify against himself.** The stated reason for **Christ** being put on trial was **blasphemy**; but the real reason was **His** refusal to follow the Oral Law (see **Ei – The Oral Law**). **There were 21 rules of the Great Sanhedrin regarding trails and in their zeal to kill Jesus they broke every one of them on the fifteenth of Nisan.**

Jesus answered: If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. Talking to **them** was useless. **But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God (Luke 22:68-69). The Son of Man** was about to end **His** earthly ministry and suffer death, but **He** was about to enter into **His** glory **(Luke 24:26; Acts 3:13)**. The present imagery combines **Psalm 110:1** (**right hand**) and **Dani'el 7:13** (**Son of Man**). **He** plainly told **the Sanhedrin** that **He** was **the Son of God**. Stephen saw the fulfillment of this prophecy in **Acts 7:54**.[1528]

They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied: You say that I AM. Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips" (Luke 22:70-71). Those actions violated rule 18 that said a unanimous decision for guilt showed innocence since it was impossible for 71 men to agree without plotting, and rule 19 which held the sentence could only be pronounced three days after the guilty verdict (see **Lh – The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**)**.**

Now **they** needed to vote, individually and formally, to certify the sentence. Ordinarily, **Caiaphas** said with some earnestness, it would be fitting to deliberate for another day, but one could not deliberate on the Sabbath, which would be upon them in a matter of hours. **He** reminded **them** that **the prisoner** was a chronic desecrator of the Sabbath, having been witnessed healing the sick, curing alleged blind people, and raising people from a stupor giving the appearance of death, all on the Sabbath. What a finer sense of justice than to kill **the blasphemer** just before the setting sun ushered in a particularly holy Sabbath?[1529]

After about an hour of interrogation and debate **they** voted one by one. **Rule 17 said voting for the death penalty had to be done by individual count beginning with the youngest so that the elders would not influence the young** (see **Lh –The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**)**. Joseph of Arimathea** was not present, since we know **he had not consented to their decision and action (Luke 23:50-51). Nicodemus** was apparently absent, probably not having been invited because of previous sympathy with **Jesus**. All the rest voted for **His** death. We cannot be certain that the roll call began with the oldest members first, but **the Sanhedrin** had broken every other rule regarding trials. Why stop now? This wasn't about justice, this was about getting rid of the thorn that had been in **their** sides for years. **They** couldn't kill **Him** fast enough. Rules? What rules?

Then the written name of the accused, the charge, the finding of guilt and the sentence, along with the prisoner, would be taken to the Roman Procurator for conformation of the sentence. The Sadducees came out of the meeting room first onto the second floor of the Royal Stoa. Then came the Temple guards with **Jesus** in their midst. They had changed their clothes so that no one could identify them as men who worked in the Temple.



Judas stood inside the Royal Stoa and saw the excitement. **He** was afraid to ask what the Sanhedrin had decided. But then again, he was afraid not to. The messengers ran off, and in minutes they were back again. The members of the Sanhedrin whispered among themselves and rudely brushed aside any questions of passing pilgrims. **The betrayer** stood beside one of the giant pillars in the shadows. Several times **he** started to ask about the verdict, but each time **he** lost **his** nerve. Finally, mustering up enough courage, **he** determined that **he** *had* to ask. **He** *had* to know. **He** wished **h**e had remained at home in **K'roit** where life was uncomplicated. **The little man** wished with all **his** heart that **he** had not volunteered to become a talmid, for **his** mind worried ever since and there seemed to be no end to it.

He would just have to make **Caiaphas** somehow understand that **he** and the rest of **the Sanhedrin** were mistaken. **Yeshua** had committed no crime. **He** had done nothing wrong. **He** was as innocent of evil as the lamb they would sacrifice at the 9:00 am Chagigah offering. If **he** could just make **the high priest** understand this, **Judas** was sure that everything would be all right because **Caiaphas** was a just and honorable man, a lawgiver.

Becoming increasingly nervous, **his** skin felt uncomfortable. People began to notice **his** unusual movements. **He** looked wide-eyed and scary. **He** tugged at **his** chest, thighs and the back of **his** neck. Some looked at **him** with caution. **Judas** stared sullenly at the faces around **him**. Some of them seem to resemble **the Master**. **He** feared that **he** was losing **his** mind. **The little man** pressed **his** palms against **his** temples and ran through the crowd. **He** almost collided with a messenger, and paused, breathlessly, to ask what **the Sanhedrin** had decided. The messenger said

he not time for such questions. **Judas** begged, saying **he** must know what had happened to **the prophet from Galilee**. “Oh, that one,” said the messenger. “**He** will be crucified on **the tree** this morning” **(Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29; First Peter 2:24)**.[1530]

The next step was to take **Jesus** to Pontius Pilate. The Procurator had little patience with the Jews and didn’t think they were loyal to Rome. During any of the three major festivals that he merely endured, he walked a fine line. If the Jews revolted, which they were inclined to do when they were emboldened by such large numbers, he would take the blame. But if he cracked down too hard, he could be recalled from Rome for disobeying emperor Tiberius’ decree that they be treated as a “sacred trust.”

Pilate had been procurator of Judea for three years. On the surface, his job was merely mediating between local disputes and keeping the peace, but that was easier said than done. The Jewish philosopher Philo would write that Pilate is “a man of inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition,” and yet the Jews had already managed to outsmart him and at the same time damage his career.

Only two years previous, **Caiaphas** had had a test of strength with Pilate when he brought his army from Caesarea and moved it to winter quarters in Jerusalem. He took a bold step in subversion of the Jewish practices, by introducing into the city the busts of the emperor that were attached to the military standards. The Torah forbids the making of images. It was for this reason that the previous procurators, when they entered the city, used standards that had no such ornaments. Pilate was the first to bring the images into Jerusalem and set them up, doing it without the knowledge of the people, for he entered at night. But when the people discovered it, they went in a throng to Caesarea and for many days entreated him to take away the images. He refused to yield, since to do so would be an outrage to the emperor; however, since they did not cease entreating him, on the sixth day he secretly armed and placed his troops in position, while he himself came to the speaker’s stand. This had been constructed in the stadium, which provided concealment for the army that lay in wait. When the Jews began to pray for **God’s** help, at a pre-arranged signal he surrounded them with his soldiers and threatened to kill them if they did not put an end to their uproar and return to their own places. But they, casting themselves prostrate and baring their throats, declared that they would rather die than to violate the Torah. Pilate, astonished at the strength of their devotion to the laws, immediately removed the images from Jerusalem and brought them back to Caesarea.[1531]

Not only that, but **Caiaphas** also wrote a letter to emperor Tiberias detailing Pilate's blunder. Tiberius was just livid. As the historian Philo wrote, "Immediately, without even waiting for the next day, he wrote to Pilate, criticizing and scolding him a thousand times for his new-fangled audacity."

You would think he would have gotten the point, but things only got worse. He had the bright idea of building a new aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem. Good idea, but he couldn't get out of his own way. Even though he thought he was doing a good thing, he sabotaged his own effort by forcing the Temple treasury to pay for it. Understandably, the Jews were outraged about the use of "sacred funds," and during the next festival, a small army of Jews rose up and demanded that he stop its construction. They cursed at Pilate in the streets of Jerusalem.

Adding to his reputation for cruelty, Pilate anticipated the protest and disguised hundreds of his soldiers in the clothes of Jewish pilgrims who hid their weapons in their clothes. When the crowd marched on the palace, the disguised soldiers surrounded the mob and attacked them. They beat and stabbed unarmed pilgrims. "There were a great number of them killed by this means," the Jewish historian Josephus would later write, "and others of them ran away wounded. An end was put to the attempted overthrow of the sedition."

The Jewish people viewed Pilate as a thug. And for good reason. Once again Josephus helps us to understand their feelings. They thought him, "spiteful and angry" and spoke of "his venality, his violence, his thefts, his assaults, his abusive behavior, his frequent executions of untried prisoners, and his endless savage cruelty."

Yet **Caiaphas** was just as guilty.

The fact was that Pontius Pilate could not rule the Jewish people without the help of Joseph **Caiaphas**, the acting high priest and leader of the Jewish Supreme Court known as the Great Sanhedrin.

Caiaphas was a master politician and was fully aware that emperor Tiberius not only believed it important to uphold the Jewish traditions, but that he held the hotheaded Pilate on a very short leash. Yes, Pilate may have been in charge of Judea, but it was Caiaphas who oversaw the day-to-day running of Jerusalem, masking his own cruel agenda in religiosity and piety. Few Jews living in Jerusalem would have guessed that the same man who lead the rituals for the atonement for

their sins, who appeared in the Temple courts during Passover and Yom Kipper wearing the most stunning ceremonial robes was a dear friend of Rome and of the immoral emperor Tiberius.

So the same man who stands in the presence of **God** and sees that sins are forgiven is also the high priest who does not object when Pilate loots the Temple funds. **Caiaphas** was also silent when Jews were massacred in the streets of Yerushalayim. He didn't complain when Pilate forced him to return those jewel-covered ceremonial robes at the end of each festival. The procurator preferred to keep them in his custody as a reminder of who was in charge, returning them seven days prior to each festival so that they could be purified.

Prior to Joseph **Caiaphas**, the high priests were puppets of Rome, easily replaced for acts of disobedience. But **Caiaphas**, a Sadducee, had fashioned a simple yet brilliant formula for staying in power: stay out of Rome's business.

Caiaphas helped Pilate keep his job, and in turn, Pilate helped to increase **his** power.

Both men understand their relationship of convenience. So while **Caiaphas'** four predecessors served just one year as high priest before being removed, **he** had been in office twelve years – and showed no signs of slowing down. And with each passing year in power, the bond between Rome and the Temple grew stronger, even as the gap between the high priest and the working-class Jews grew even more spacious. What a pair.

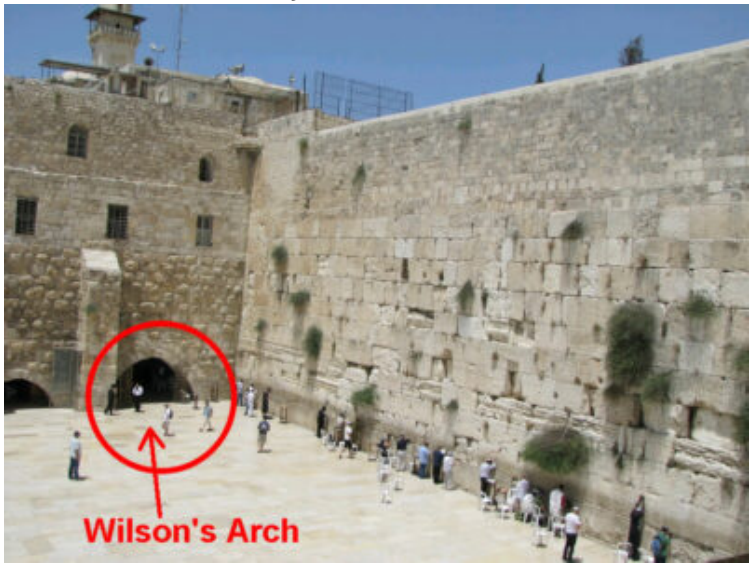
It helped that Pilate and **Caiaphas** were more alike than they were different. Pilate was born into the wealthy equestrian class of Romans, and **Caiaphas** was born into a centuries-long line of wealthy Temple priests. Both men were middle-aged and married. Each likely enjoyed a glass of imported wine at the end of a long day. When Pilate left Caesarea and traveled down to Jerusalem, the two of them live a mere hundred yards apart in **the** well-to-do Upper **City**, in palaces staffed with slaves. And they both fancied themselves religious men, although they worshiped far different deities.

The last thing Pilate or **Caiaphas** needed was a **renegade Rabbi** to upset the careful balance of power – which was exactly why **Caiaphas** and the members of **the Great Sanhedrin** planned to arrest **Jesus** and convict **Him** by any means necessary.

The Pharisees had completed their second stage of interrogation and had reported back to the Great Sanhedrin. The vote had had been taken and **Jesus** had been found guilty. And sentenced to death. The next step is to send **the criminal** to Pontius Pilate to see if he would order **Yeshua's** execution. This would be no small task.[1532]

It was about 5:30 am and **the Son of God** was led out through "the Gate of Rejection" in the in order to be executed with Roman sanction outside **the Holy City of David (Mark 15:1)**.1533 It was no accident that "the Gate of Rejection" was at the western wall to **the back** of the Most Holy Place. Isra'el rejected **Christ**, but **His** greatest pain would to take place later that same day during the last three hours on the cross. There, for the first and only time in all eternity, **God the Father** had to turn **His back** on **the Second Person of the Trinity** when **Jesus became sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (Second Corinthians 5:21 NASB and First Peter 2:24).**

Today, in the area of the former Gate of Rejection, is the Wailing Wall. It is the remnant of the outer supporting wall of the Temple. The first archway after the former Gate of Rejection is Wilson's Arch.



Men pray there as well as in the open area towards the south, up to the barrier of the women's section. Is it not ironic that it was exactly there, where about 2,000 years ago the Meshiach was thrown out of the Temple by the Jewish leadership, and where the Jewish people lament the lack of peace and the oppression of hostile nations of the world today?[1534]

When visiting Jerusalem during Sukkot in October of 2023, just before the war broke out, I went into Wilson's Arch and saw the thousands of volumes of **the Oral Law** (see **Ei – The Oral Law**) being studied as the Orthodox and Hasidic men were praying against the Wailing Wall inside Wilson's Arch. To see this unique scene click **here**.

Back to the story, **Caiaphas** and **his** small group of Sadducees were clever men, and **they** knew **their** best chance in convincing Pilate to confirm the death penalty on **the Nazarene** lay in minimizing **him** as a religious factor. **They** had to make **him** appear to be a small, cheap religious fraud from Galilee. If Pilate guessed that this **man** had a huge following then all was lost, because the procurator would begin at once to play one set of Jews against another. If he could split the Jews he would soon have them at each other's throats, and this, from the standpoint of the oppressor, would be ideal.

Thus, it worried **Caiaphas** to think that any schism in this matter might end up pitting the people against the Temple. In such a fight, more and more people would turn to **the Lord** because **he** could perform works of wonder and the priests could not. In time, the holy Temple would become like the pyramids of Egypt – a huge tomb. No, this had to be done!

They had to get **Jesus** out of the Temple Mount unnoticed. There were already about thirty thousand people on the outer court in anticipation of the Chagigah offering at 9:00 am, and if they realized that **the Nazarene** was being taken to Pilate's headquarters then there could have been a riot. So **they** led **the convict** to the west end of the Royal Stoa, down the Tyropoean Valley behind the western wall of the Temple Mount to the Praetorium. To get there they would have pass by Herod Antipas' Palace in the Upper City and people were still streaming to the Temple Mount for the celebration. What if **He** were recognized?

They took no chances. One of the Sadducees suggested that it would help if they brought along a crowd to shout against **Jesus** in the presence of Pilate. The little group of men were amazed at the simplicity of this idea. Whom could they get? Someone suggested to enlist the services of the Temple guards. Those who earned their living at the Temple should work for its preservation. It didn't matter what they believed, or even if they believed that lie about Lazarus being raised from the dead – they would do as they were told.

Therefore is was decided to take along a large number of temple guard, who would

change into their civilian clothes, and to have them shepherded by several Levites. On the march to Pilate's headquarters on the outside of the western wall they would press closely around the prisoner so that his followers in Jerusalem could not get close to him, or even see who **the prisoner** was. Then, at the praetorium, the disguised Temple guard would take their cues from the priests who would lead the shouting from the entrance of the double arches.

They led **the convict** to Pilate's headquarters in the middle of the road. At all times, **the supposed blasphemer** had many people ahead of **him** and on both sides and behind **him**. No one casually walking these roads in the gray of the morning could tell whether a prisoner was being led somewhere, or whether a group of worshipers were going around to Solomon's Porch to enter the Temple Mount to celebrate the Chagigah offering later that morning.



With a head start directly out of the Robinson's Arch (to the left), **Caiaphas** arrived at the praetorium first. As earlier that morning, **the high priest** stood under the twin arches and sent a Gentile messenger in with the news that **the Great Sanhedrin**, in all its wisdom, had found guilty of blasphemy, one **Jesus of Nazareth**, who deceived the people by pretending to be king of the Jews. This **man** had been arrested, tried under the Torah, and condemned to death. If it pleased the procurator of his imperial majesty, Tiberius, the Great Sanhedrin asked that he, Pontius Pilate, endorse the sentence and see that it was executed this day before sunset, the coming of their Shabbat. The messenger disappeared across the courtyard pavement, up the cascading stone steps leading to the praetorium apartments, and into the presence of the procurator. It was read without comment and the messenger was told to ask **the high priest** to wait.

This was a rude opening move, but **Caiaphas** had expected it. **He** stood under the arches with other Sadducees and Pharisees and watched the despised Roman sentries pace their posts. **He** thought to **himself** that someday, with the help of **ADONAI**, **the Holy City** would be rid of all these defilers. **The high priest** sighed. If only **Meshiach** would come. **He** would drive them out! One of the Sadducees, standing outside the arches, said that the contingent was coming up the street with **Jesus** in tow. At almost the same moment, Pilate came out on the balcony with a staff of officers just behind him.[1535] It was just about 6:00 am.