

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

The Anguish, Arrest, Arraignment of Jesus

Lesson 51 Matthew 26:36-56

Prayer and Agony in the Garden (26:36-44)

Gethsemane (Hebrew Γεθσημανη) means *Olive Press*

Jesus agonized in struggle and submitted in final surrender to the will of God the Father. This event vividly displays His humanity as he experienced fear of facing a brutal form of execution devised by man, and more intensely, the fear of being temporarily forsaken through death as the Lamb of God, the sin offering.

Hebrews 5:7-10 “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest.”

Jesus entered into battle with Satan as was prophesied in Genesis 3:15 in which He would receive the “heel” wound from the same serpent that deceived Eve. At the same time, Jesus would deal a fatal, crushing head wound to the serpent. He had lived in perfect obedience to the Father’s will. He was about to die for the sin of Adam seemingly being defeated by Satan but ultimately defeating the Devil that deceived them.

Jesus would rise victorious over “Death, Hell, and the Grave.”

“And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” Romans 1:4

Jesus was the second Adam. Adam said, “not thy will, mine be done.” Jesus said, “not my will, thine be done.”

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit. The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven.” (1Corinthians 15: 22,45,46)

The process of rendering olive oil has been compared to the prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane. Olive oil is pressed in three phases. The first pressing yields extra virgin oil, which was consecrated for the Holy Place, anointed the High Priest, and used for the lights of the menorah in the Temple, similar to the tithing of the first fruits, the firstling of the flock, and the firstborn. It was consecrated to the Lord for anointing the High Priest and for the lights of the menorah in the Temple. Jesus is God’s anointed and the Light of the world. The second pressing yields oil for cooking and medical applications, symbolizing Jesus as the healer. The third pressing yields oil to be used in skincare and soaps symbolizing Jesus as the cleanser from sin who anoints our countenance with His radiance. Just as the olives are pressed three times, Jesus experienced three crushing in His spirit, mind, and body. He surrendered or yielded three times. It was in the last of these three spirit-crushing agonies that His sweat became as blood. Luke 22:44

“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

Example of US Justice process – The right to a speedy and public trial is written into the Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Here are the elements of due process that ensure that justice is served though not necessarily in this sequence. 1. Accusation 2. Warrant 3. Arrest 4. Grand Jury, 5. Arraignment 6. Hearing 7. Trial - The time between being charged with a crime, via information or indictment; and trial date is scheduled later to allow the defense and prosecution to build their case. 8. Sentencing; barring any appeals. 10. Incarceration or execution. Obviously, the American Justice system is not the measure of the first-century Jewish and Roman systems. The phrase “a rush to judgment” best describes what happened between the end of Jesus’ last Passover meal with His disciples at about 9 pm and His crucifixion by 9 am the next morning. Matthew’s text contains some of the details of His final trial in just under eight hours. It was anything but due process.

Malevolent Machinations

The Chief Priests and Scribes of the Law had been trying to find ways to stop Jesus for a couple of years. It had been difficult to catch Jesus along, because of the large crowds around Him. Just a few days prior, the multitudes had gathered around Him as He rode into Jerusalem on what we now observe as Palm Sunday. Things were about to escalate. Almost everyone was greeting Him as the son of David, a clear title of the prophesied Messiah King.

After overturning the moneychangers' tables in the Temple courtyards, Jesus caught the attention of the Jewish Temple Guards and the Roman Praetorian Guard in the Antonia Fortress. The Temple was expecting significant income during this time, and any disruption could lead to serious consequences. The Romans collected taxes from the Priests, who in turn collected offerings from the people. The Temple tax was fixed, but the amount the Priests would charge the people could vary. If Jesus' actions led to a riot, it could result in chaos and potentially impact the entire system of worship. The Essenes who fled to Qumran wrote that this corruption was the reason for their self-exile to a monastic life.

Did the religious leaders get a lucky break with Judas? No, it providentially designed. Judas had turned traitor, so it would be an inside job. Things could move quickly. And now with the kiss of a friend and 30 pieces of silver, Jesus would soon be theirs while all Jerusalem relaxed from the heavy feasting of Passover and settled in for a High Sabbath night's rest.

"After being securely bound by the temple guard in Gethsemane, Jesus was taken straight to Annas the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the High Priest. Jesus was examined by two preliminary hearings before being tried before the supreme Jewish tribunal, the Sanhedrin. had been appointed high priest by the Roman legate Quirinus in the year 6 A.D. Seven years later he was discharged from his high office by the Roman procurator Valerius Gratus for imposing and executing capital sentences which had been forbidden by the imperial government. His son Caiaphas would not act unilaterally and take the same risk. Although he was now only an ex-high priest, he was still the most powerful man in the affairs of the Jews. He still presided over the Sanhedrin at times, and practically dictated its decisions. The office of high priest remained in his family for fifty years. Josephus, the historian tells us that Annas was "haughty, audacious, and cruel." At the time Jesus was brought before him, Annas may have been president of the Sanhedrin" Annas and Caiaphas lived virtually under the same roof in the palace of the high priest with only a courtyard between their residences. It was in this courtyard that the rabble awaited the outcome of the hearings before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin. A maid, one of the servants of the palace, kept the door of the courtyard. It was she who admitted John and Peter. It was in that courtyard Peter was identified as he warmed by the fire.

When Jesus stood before Caiaphas, at least a quorum of the Jewish Sanhedrin elders were present (Matthew 26:57). It was hoped that Jesus would make some statement on which an indictment could be based, charging Him with sedition against the government (26:59,60).

Jesus was condemned by two separate tribunals, one Hebrew and the other Roman. Each of the two court trials was divided into three parts, the first trial being Christ's hearings before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin. The second trial was before Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again. In the preliminary hearings before Annas and Caiaphas, it was hoped that Jesus would incriminate Himself, and thus furnish evidence which would convict Him on religious grounds. At this trial, a bevy of false witnesses accused Him here, but none of the testimony agreed (26:59,60).

Illegalities of the Trial

- (1) "His capture was not the result of a legal mandate from a court whose intentions were to conduct a legal trial
- (2) for the purpose of reaching a righteous judgment."ⁱ The intention was simply to seize a man and do away with him."ⁱⁱ The phrase "trumped up charges," applies here. "Benny, the noted Jewish legal expert, states the law of the Hebrews--and of all nations--when he says: "Nor under any circumstances, was a man known to be at enmity with the accused person permitted to occupy a position among his judges."ⁱⁱⁱ
- (3) In a case of condemnation, two sessions of the Sanhedrin held a day apart was required.

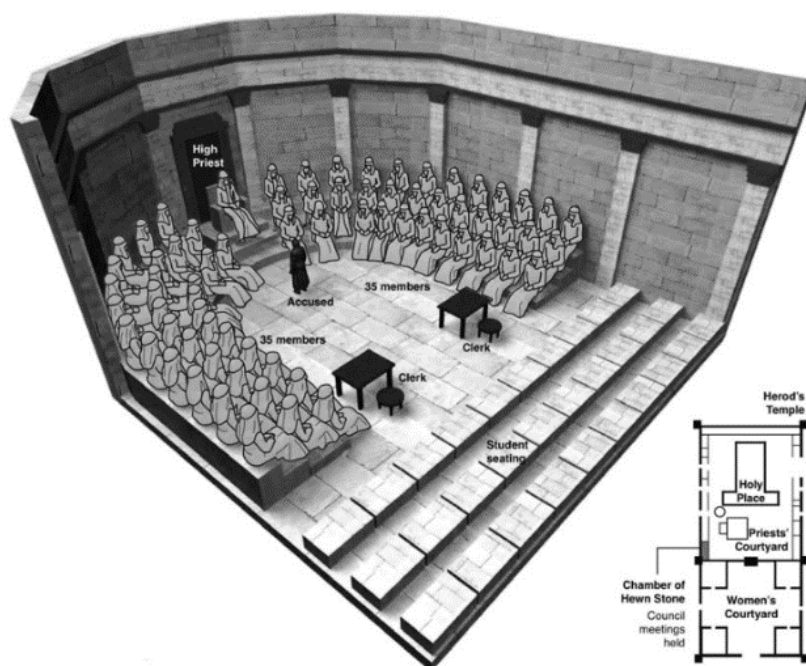
- (4) A capital death sentence could not be issued until the afternoon of the second day. It is evident from Mark 14:53 and 15:1 and other passages that there were two separate sessions of the Sanhedrin, one approximately just before midnight and one at the crack of dawn. (26:61-66)
- (4) The trial and condemnation of Jesus was illegal because it took place before the morning sacrifice. "The Sanhedrin could not convene until the completion of the morning sacrifice."^{iv}
- (6) The use of a traitor, and thus an accomplice, in effecting an arrest or securing a conviction was forbidden in Hebrew jurisprudence. "*Turning state's evidence*" (*Leviticus 19:16-18*).
- (7) "Court must not be held on the Sabbath, or on any holy day"
- (8) A person could not be convicted on a unanimous vote of the judges. "A simultaneous and unanimous verdict of guilt rendered on the day of the trial has the effect of an acquittal."^v "If none of the judges defend the culprit, i.e., all pronounce him guilty, having no defender in the court, the verdict of guilty was invalid and the sentence of death could not be executed."^{vi} The reason for this rule is simple. Under Hebrew law there were no defense lawyers. This was the work of the judges and at least one of them had to defend the accused, or he had no one to insure that he received justice. The accusing witness was the prosecutor. It is significant that throughout the trial, Jesus was silent when falsely accused and one might normally speak. And then He spoke at a time when silence would have been His best defense." The condemnation had already been decided upon before the trial. Jesus knew it disdained to reply to what was advanced in the first place because it was false; but what was advanced in the second place He of His own accord and freely admitted, because in its material basis it was true. Jesus was asked a direct question as to whether He was the Messiah. It would have been to His personal advantage to remain silent, and He would have been within His rights to do so. Silence at this time would have been a virtual denial of His identity and mission.

The gospels record that when Caiaphas asked Jesus whether He claimed to be the Messiah, He replied, "I am" (Mark 14:62) (or "You have said so" (Matthew 26:64) or "If I tell you, you will not believe" (Luke 22:67-8) or "You say that I am" (John 19:7

THE SANHEDRIN Hall of Gazith

- (9) The verdict against Jesus was also illegal because it was not given in the place required by Hebrew law. It was believed that Deuteronomy 17:8-9. For this, they chose a room in the Temple that was called "The Hall of Gazith," or "the hall of hewn stone." It is evident from the record that Jesus was tried and condemned in the palace of Caiaphas on Mount Zion, and not in the hall of hewn stone. And what is the record: Within the six months previous to the trial, there had been at least three meetings of the Sanhedrin, the highest council and court in the land, specifically to plan the death of Christ. The first of these three sessions is given us in John 7:37-53. The second occurred a few weeks before the trial and is recorded in John 11:41-53. The third council meeting to plan His death took place just before Passover (*Luke 22:1-3*)."

The Jewish high court consisted of 71 men and was led by the high priest. The Sanhedrin council could decide almost any fate of its people—except the death penalty, which was decided by the Romans. The courtroom of the Sanhedrin was located within the Chamber of Hewn Stone inside the Temple.



"Throughout the whole course of that trial [of Jesus before the Sanhedrin] the rules of Jewish laws of procedure were grossly violated, and the accused was deprived of rights, belonging even to the meanest (lowliest) citizen. He was arrested in the night, bound as a malefactor, beaten before His arraignment, and struck in open court during the trial; He was tried on a feast day, and before sunrise; He was compelled to criminate Himself, and this, under an oath of solemn judicial adjuration; and He was sentenced on the same day of the conviction. In all these particulars the law was wholly disregarded."^{vii} "Grasping priests denounced Him, false witnesses accused Him, judges of bad faith condemned Him; a friend betrayed Him, no one defended Him; He was dragged with every kind of contumely and violence to the malefactor's cross."^{viii}

The cruel physical abuse by the members of Israel's highest religious leaders stooped to a shameful low. (Matthew 26:67,68) Caiphas' response of rending his garment at Jesus' claim to be the Messiah who will come in glory, was declared to be blasphemy and greenlighted this physical abuse. The previous false accusation that Jesus intended an insurrection to destroy the Temple was already blood in the water. Now they were triggered and they felt justified. John the Apostle gives additional insight. Caiphas gave an order veiled in a quasi-prophecy. "Now Caiphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people." As we will see in the later trial before Pilot, Caiphas was a close second behind Judas in the worst sin ever committed. Jesus said it would have been better if Judas had never been born. Those Jewish leaders in Matthew 12 who accused Jesus of using satanic powers rather than credit Him with divine power to do miracles would likely come in third with the "unpardonable sin." Pilate only registered fourth in this ranking. "Jesus answered ... he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (John 18:14). This ranking of sin is based on the words "greater sin." James later said some have a "greater condemnation." In His condemnation of the Pharisees Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation" (Matthew 23:14) The greater condemnation principle is based on greater responsibility. James pointed out that teachers have responsibility for the lives of others. Those who with greater opportunity to respond to the Gospel message yet reject it, bear greater condemnation than those who have never had the opportunity. Hebrews 12:1-3 warns that we who have the words of the Son of God have much more to answer for than those who only had a partial revelation by an angel of God through a prophet. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" We possess the complete revelation of Scripture while they only had a portion of it, yet they believed.

Ossuary of Caiphas



Empty Tomb of Jesus



ⁱ Chandler, vol. 2, p. 237

ⁱⁱ Giovanni Rosadi, *The Trial of Jesus*, p. 114

ⁱⁱⁱ Philip Berger Benny, *The Criminal Code of the Jews*, p. 37

^{iv} Talmud, *Jerus.*, "Sanhedrin," C.I. fol. 19

^v Mendelsohn, *The Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews*, p. 141

^{vi} Rabbi Wise, *The Martyrdom of Jesus*, p. 74

^{vii} Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence*, p. 6

^{viii} Giovanni Rosadi, *The Trial of Christ*, p. 1