



CIVIL SERVANT MINISTRIES

An Affiliate Ministry of Capitol Commission

Christ and the Kangaroo Courts

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Select Passages.¹ Jesus faced three religious and three civil trials. So strong was the desire to execute Him that all six trials ended within 12 hours. Arrested late Thursday night of Passover, He was condemned the next morning, and died that Friday afternoon.

It was through a series of unjust trials that Jesus was killed, and yet, through these, we can rejoice that God's plan of salvation was fulfilled.

Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634) was an Englishman whose thoughts on law influenced the world for 300 years. In *The Institutes of the Laws of England*, he writes: "The law, that is the perfection of reason, cannot suffer anything that is inconvenient." Law is inherently rational. It should never tolerate inconsistencies.

"Inconsistent" is what best describes what happened the night of Jesus' arrest. Two of the world's greatest systems of law, Roman and Jewish, came together that night in a series of unjust trials. It was one inconsistency after another designed to condemn a just man.

What were the charges against Jesus? He was arrested without any charges at all. The Sanhedrin led by Caiaphas was comprised of Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes—leaders whom Jesus had rebuked for their hypocrisy (Matt 23). This traveling preacher had won the hearts of many people. The Sanhedrin was less than pleased. They despised Jesus, but they were also terrified of Him. Other men had claimed to be the messiah and led armed revolts against Rome. They were certain that Jesus would do the same.

The week was Passover. Jesus had entered Jerusalem amid palms waving and praises singing by hundreds of thousands. Palms were a political symbol, and He wept that the people didn't see Him as the One who could save them from death and hell (Luke 19:41-44). The authorities saw the palms and heard the shouts, "Hosanna!" *Save now!* Nothing could've been more disconcerting than this.

A powerful uprising couldn't be hidden from Caesar. If he became personally involved, it meant those under him were ineffective at governing. He could eliminate the Sanhedrin, replace his appointed Governor, and punish the region. If Judea erupted in violence, Pilate feared to lose his job. Caiaphas and his colleagues feared for their lives (John 11:49-50). It wouldn't end well.

RIDDLED WITH ERRORS

1) JESUS' DEPOSITION BY ANNAS (JOHN 18:13-27)

A cohort of 600 soldiers apprehended the Lord around midnight, bound and escorted Him to the home of Annas to be interrogated. There were no charges at the arrest, and none were found by Annas though he was a former high priest and an expert in Jewish law.

When prodded to say something, Jesus only said that Annas should ask the thousands who heard Him teach: "Why do you ask Me?" (John 18:20-21). In other words: *Annas, are you asking Me to incriminate Myself when you know our law forbids it? Call witnesses to testify.* Refusing to be corrected, Annas let a soldier brutally strike Jesus (John 18:22-23).

This was no court. The Jewish Mishnah states that a legitimate court could never have a single judge.² The idea was that multiple judges could protect the accused against bias and error. Annas, however, judged alone. Though ousted by the Romans nearly 20 years prior, it seems he was still a powerful member of the Sanhedrin. The irony is that Annas wasn't even qualified. He shouldn't have been a member of this Jewish body, let alone pass judgment on a capital case.³

Does it raise a red flag that Jesus met with his first judge in the dead of night? It was midnight or 1AM. All Judea was asleep as Annas probed, looking for a charge. He didn't find anything, so he sent Jesus to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, and the inconsistencies only continued to mount.

2) TRIED BY THE SANHEDRIN

Caiaphas was the official high priest and a master politician. He held office from 18-36 A.D. While Jesus met with Annas, Caiaphas has been busy calling a quorum of the Sanhedrin into session—23 of its 71 members. They met at his home possibly around 2AM to begin Jesus' official trial. (Matt 26:57-61; John 18:28).

Though he procured "witnesses", Caiaphas became unnerved that their stories didn't agree. Witnesses were necessary to convict, and dismissing them would acquit Jesus. Seeing this was going nowhere fast, Caiaphas invoked an oath: "I adjure you by the Living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." The Lord had been silent, and only now did He respond saying, "You have said so."

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: THURSDAYS AT 7:30AM, GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

JUSTICES AND STAFF: TUESDAYS AT 7:30AM, SUPREME COURT BUILDING

Illinois

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Jesus confirmed His identity and then warned everyone present: “I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt 26:59-64). Was does that mean? Well, the Sanhedrin was judging the Judge of Heaven and Earth. They stood on ice that couldn’t have been thinner. Christ warned them: *This isn’t the last time we’ll meet*. Caiaphas would see Jesus again, in power and glory and as his judge.

Caiaphas didn’t care. He tore his robes in a fit of rage and charged Jesus with blasphemy (Matt 26:65). He finally found a charge to pin on Jesus. So, he dismissed the need for outside witnesses and called for a vote. It was unanimous: Jesus was guilty (Matt 26:63-66; Mark 14:53-64). Some of Sanhedrin left their seats to spit upon, strike, and mock the Lord (Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65).

So, the defendant testified, the Sanhedrin witnessed, the high priest charged, and the whole body condemned Him. Reading the Gospels, it’s easy to see that the Sanhedrin convened not to try a case, but to find a charge. It doesn’t take a legal expert to see the inconsistencies. The location of the trial was in the comfort of Caiaphas’ own home.⁴ Witnesses were paid to testify, and when their testimony didn’t hold up, the court produced a charge in the middle of the trial itself. The defendant’s defense of being the Christ wasn’t weighed,⁵ and He was condemned on the basis of His own words.⁶

The Sanhedrin had also ruled unanimously to condemn Jesus. Unlike the American justice system, ancient Israel acquitted if a verdict was unanimous. Unanimity didn’t confirm guilt but suggested a conspiracy among the panel of judges.

There were no lawyers. When the Sanhedrin considered a case, at least some of the judges were expected to advocate for the accused. In a room of at least 23 judges (perhaps many more), no one spoke in Jesus’ defense. Every judge voted with Caiaphas to condemn Jesus of blasphemy. And though the ruling was legally invalid for so many reasons, the show went on.⁷

3) VERDICT CONFIRMED BY THE SANHEDRIN

The ancient Jews were judicially meticulous, exercising great care, and they were very reluctant to take life.⁸ For capital cases, they used a two-trial system. If the first trial resulted in a guilty verdict, the

Sanhedrin would reconvene for a second trial as a check-and-balance. At least a day between trials was required so the judges could fast and pray while reviewing the case. Capital punishment was taken seriously—so seriously it hardly ever happened.

The Sanhedrin under Annas or Caiaphas cared little about life and justice. With Jesus, the most august body in all Judaism had arrested a man without charges, convicted Him without witnesses, and condemned Him on the basis of His own testimony. The Sanhedrin reconvened not after a day of reflection but within a sleepless hour or two. Dismissing all inconsistencies with the first verdict, the judges voted unanimously once again. At this point, Jesus was officially sentenced to death (Luke 22:66-71).

The Lord was convicted of blasphemy by one court, and then He would be convicted of treason by the next. Inconsistent? Utterly. Yet, through the breakdown of two great legal systems, Christ died that you might live.

¹See: Walter Chandler, *The Trial of Jesus: From a Lawyer’s Standpoint* (Norcross, GA: Harrison Company, 1908; reprint, 1976).

²Mishnah. See: Pirke Aboth IV.10: “Judge not alone, for none may judge alone except One.”

³Annas was partial, an accomplice to bribery, and judged a capital case without any witnesses (cf. Deut 16:18, 17:6). According to the Mishnah, members of the Sanhedrin must be above reproach, pious, and humble. Annas was none of these.

⁴Mishnah. See: Sanhedrin IV.1: “Let a capital offense be tried during the day, but suspend it at night.”

⁵Mishnah, See: Sanhedrin IV.5: “The judges shall weigh the matter in the sincerity of their conscience.”

⁶The Jewish Rabbi Maimonides said, “We have it as a fundamental principle of our jurisprudence that no one can bring an accusation against himself.” See: Maimonides, Sanhedrin, IV.2.

⁷The Jewish Rabbi Wise said, “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.”

⁸Mishnah, See: Makkot 1:10: “A Sanhedrin that puts a man to death once in seven years is called destructive.” Hyperbole, but statements like this demonstrate great care when taking life. Death sentences were rare.