

# Trials

---

Last week we saw Jesus agonizing in prayer for hours in the garden while his closest disciples, oblivious to Jesus' state of mind, slept. He was left alone to face the terrors in the night. Just as he awakens them they all are approached by an armed crowd led by one of their own and sent by the Temple authorities to arrest Jesus. Stunned and shocked they watch their beloved messiah taken away recognizing their own danger and flee from the garden. And once again Jesus is left alone to face the terrors of the night. Peter and one other disciple alone make their way behind the arrest party to observe what will happen.

In our homework we will have six passages of study this week. Pace yourself and don't forget to ask the Lord for wisdom and understanding as you work through each passage. We will work through all six trials Jesus faced in this one long night. We will keep close track of who led each trial, of what Jesus is charged, and the trial's outcome. We will focus on how the impropriety of the trials falls into God's sovereign salvation plan. What human authorities have intended for evil God will use for the good of his creation.

## The First Trial

Annas was appointed High Priest in AD 6 by the governor Quirinius. The post of High Priest was originally intended to be a position held for life by a descendant of Aaron in the line of King David's High Priest Zadok. Fearing that a term of that length permitted too much power to one person, the Roman authorities would reassign that post at their own convenience to the highest bidder willing to compromise with the Roman authorities regardless of their family tree. Annas held the position of High Priest until Pilate's predecessor, Valerius Gratus, found him intolerable and replaced him in AD 15. Annas kept the title of High Priest, much as our previous presidents retain their title, but along with his title Annas maintained much of his power and controlled the temple through his sons whom he arranged to be appointed as high priests. At the time of Jesus' arrest, Annas' son in law Caiaphas was the seated High Priest, but Annas had the real power.

This first trial is found only in John's Gospel. While John is not directly identified, the traditional belief is that he is the unnamed disciple allowing him to describe these events with the details of an observer in the household of Annas.



Read John 18: 12-14, 19-24 and answer the following questions.

*"Who Do You Say I Am?":*

*A Study of Jesus, Part 2*

What are we reminded of Caiaphas saying in verse 14?

What was Caiaphas intent with this statement?

What was God's intention in this prophecy?

Why do you think Jesus was brought to Annas first rather than the high priest?

Verse 19 tells us that the high priest (Annas) questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. What was Annas trying to discern about Jesus? What is it he feared/believed Jesus was doing?

What is Jesus response?

In verse 21 Jesus said "*Why question me? Ask those who heard me.*" What is Jesus demanding that Annas do? .

Jesus is then struck by one of the officials and reprimanded for the way in which he spoke to the high priest. What does this reveal about Jesus' attitude during the trial?

Jesus demands the officials do what?

 What is Annas able to establish, if anything? What do his actions prove although remain unspoken?

Why does Annas send Jesus to Caiaphas?

On the last page of this week's homework you will find a table in which to record significant details of these trials. This table will help you to organize and better understand these events. I have completed the information for the first trial for you. For each trial record the appropriate information in the table.

Annas' first priority is to determine if Jesus has been teaching his followers privately to lead an insurrection against the Roman authorities. The most important responsibility of the high priest was to maintain the peace amongst the Jews. If he failed to do that he would find himself out of favor with the Roman authorities, and potentially lose his position. While Annas

wasn't the official high priest, his power still came from the Romans he served. He was much more consumed with the politics of his position than the religious responsibilities of his position. Annas tried to intimidate Jesus with a show of force by arresting him with a threatening, armed crowd at night, and then by allowing his officials to strike Jesus. Annas knew he had no legal standing against Jesus so he resorted to intimidation hoping to reduce Jesus to a weak and terrified victim, thereby putting to a quick end any question of further trouble. Jesus was neither weak nor terrified. He stood up to Annas and demanded that witnesses be brought forth to determine his guilt or innocence regarding the substance of his teaching. When struck, he held his ground and again demanded that Annas present witnesses against him as well as demanding an accounting for allowing the official to strike him, an illegal show of force and form of intimidation. Both Annas and Jesus knew that Annas had nothing against him. Jesus had called his bluff. Annas had gotten nowhere so he sent Jesus to Caiaphas, the "official" high priest. Let him deal with this problem.

The Sanhedrin, in their haste to deal with Jesus quickly before his followers could assemble a resistance effort, threw all sense of justice aside. Instead they favored expediting their plan of sacrificing one man for the sake of keeping peace and retaining their positions of power and influence. From the very beginning of the evening the events unfolding are one transgression of the law after another on the part of Israel's religious leaders. It was against the law to arrest a man at night. It was illegal to hold a trial at night. It was illegal to fail to present witnesses to determine the guilt or innocence of a defendant. It was illegal to intimidate a defendant with physical abuse. It was illegal to refuse to allow a defendant to defend himself. Jesus' guilt was determined even before the trial began when Caiaphas proclaimed, *"You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."* (John 11:50) The trials were a mockery of justice, a going through the motions in order to get the verdict and sentence they desired.

## The Second Trial



Read Matthew 26: 57-68 and answer the following questions.

Who presided over this trial?

What were the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin looking for?

Why weren't they seeking actual testimony to support their case?



*"Many false witnesses came forward"* (v. 60) but evidence against Jesus could not be found. Why not? (See also Mark 14: 55-59)

***"Who Do You Say I Am?"***

***A Study of Jesus, Part 2***

What was wrong with the testimony of the two men in verse 61? See John 2:19. What is the irony of their testimony?

What charge, if any, is brought against Jesus before he is required to answer the questions of the high priest?

The High Priest demands what of Jesus?

What is Jesus response?

What do they do to Jesus?

Turn to the last page of your homework and complete the table for the second trial.

Again the Sanhedrin meets in the dark of night, in secrecy, in the High Priest's residence rather than the Sanhedrin's meeting hall. Adherence to their own legal system is of little importance. Jesus is not officially charged with a crime. According to their own law, the Sanhedrin was to oversee a public trial where witnesses were brought forth to bear testimony. Corroborating witnesses were required in order to come to a guilty verdict. Witnesses had to be questioned individually. If the testimony of the witnesses failed to corroborate the testimony presented, then the defendant had to be acquitted. The defendant must be allowed to defend itself and was never required to testify against himself. The role of the high priest was to oversee and facilitate debate among the members of the Sanhedrin, not to question the defendant.

The officials attempt to present false witnesses against Jesus, but even those false witnesses can't bear testimony that can be corroborated by another witness. The testimony cannot be used. No official charge is brought against Jesus. No witnesses can prove that he is guilty. Two witnesses are able to recall, incorrectly, a statement Jesus made regarding the temple. If they could prove that Jesus did indeed speak against the temple, they would have something with which to censure him, but not enough to charge him with blasphemy. The officials begin to interrogate Jesus trying to force him into blasphemy. If they can't find evidence against him, then they will attempt to force an incriminating statement out of Jesus. Jesus responded with a clear statement of his deity, even going so far as to prophesy that he will be seated "*at the right hand of the mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.*" (v. 64). It is what the high priest wanted to hear, and despite the illegally obtained admission, Caiaphas accuses and convicts him of blasphemy. No further investigation goes into determining if Jesus is who he claims to be. To convict a charge of blasphemy the Sanhedrin would have to prove that while Jesus claims to be God, he is not. The High Priest and Sanhedrin refuse any further discussion and jump straight to the verdict. "*He is worthy of death*" (v. 66) and they resort to physical abuse and mockery.

## The Third Trial

In our preceding passage the council had condemned Jesus on religious grounds that require the death penalty. The Sanhedrin did not have authority to carry out the death penalty. They would need to find away to convince the Roman authorities to administer the sentence, but Rome cared very little about religious squabbles. They would have no understanding of the religious issues at stake, and certainly no interest in becoming involved in a religious dispute over blasphemy. The Sanhedrin would have to find away to present this to the Roman authorities which would ensure their interest and quick response.



Read Matthew 27:1-2; Mark 15:1 and Luke 22:66-71 and answer the following questions.

What time of day does Matthew tell us it is?

Who assembles?

At this assembly what transpires?

To whom is Jesus handed over?

At this time with what crime is Jesus officially charged?

What is the verdict?

What is the sentence?

Complete the information in the chart for the third trial.



What about this trial is different than the second trial?

While the information relayed by Luke appears to be identical to that written by Matthew, the gathering in Matthew takes place immediately after the interview with Annas shortly after Jesus' arrest. Matthew's account takes place in the middle of the night and is interwoven with the story of Peter's denial, which we will look at more closely down the road.

## *"Who Do You Say I Am?":*

### *A Study of Jesus, Part 2*

This passage in Luke takes place at daybreak and functions something like a “seal of approval” for the events of the night before. The two previous meetings were rife with improper (illegal) proceedings. This one had to cover up their corrupt trials and make their verdict appear right and proper. At this trial, all the evidence was presented again. Jesus was convicted and bound over to a hearing before the Roman officials. The Sanhedrin had taken things as far as they could, now they had to present their case to the Roman authorities in such a way that their verdict would be upheld and their sentence carried out.

## **The Fourth Trial**

The Fourth Trial begins after daybreak when Jesus is led to the Governor’s Palace by the Sanhedrin who has found him guilty of blasphemy. This trial is the first of three civil trials that Jesus will face before the Roman authorities in Jerusalem. We will follow both Luke and John’s narrative of these events.



Read Luke 23:1-7 and John 18:28-38 and answer the following questions.

According to Luke, of what does the Sanhedrin claim to have found Jesus guilty in verse 2?

How do these charges compare with the Sanhedrin’s verdict from the second and third trials? (See Matthew 26:65-66)

What is the difference?

John’s narrative reveals more of the private conversation between Jesus and Pilate. What does Jesus say about himself?

Does Pilate think Jesus is leading a revolt against the Roman authorities as the Sanhedrin claims?

 Why does Pilate respond to Jesus words about truth with the question “What is truth?” What does this reveal about Pilate?

What is the verdict of this hearing with Pilate?

Why does Pilate send him to Herod? (See Luke 23:6-7).

Complete your table with notes for the 4<sup>th</sup> trial.

When the Sanhedrin brings Jesus before Pontius Pilate, they know they must present a case against Jesus that will receive the correct response, or verdict, that they are seeking. Already the trial is stacked against Jesus when he is brought forth and now charged with subverting the nation, refusing to pay taxes, and claiming to be king. The Sanhedrin previously found him guilty of blasphemy and not one of these new charges had been mentioned in the previous trials. The Romans were extremely liberal in their religious thinking and had no interest or understanding of Judaism. The concept of a spiritual messiah or a human son of God would not interest the Roman governor. The Sanhedrin had to present their case against Jesus in terms that would concern the governor. An insurrectionist leading a revolt and claiming to be the true (political) King of the Jews would catch his attention. Pilate had no patience for anyone leading a revolt and breaking the peace. Pilate's own political position was tenuous at best, after lending support to the man who later became responsible for Emperor Tiberius' son. Pilate did manage to distance himself from that political fiasco, but politics in Israel had also led to a riot and massacre in Caesarea a few years earlier. This insurrection and ensuing bloodbath had also caught the attention of Tiberius who held Pilate in no favorable light for his brutal handling of those events. Pilate found himself between a rock and a hard place.

During Pilate's private interview with Jesus as recorded by John, it became clear to Pilate that Jesus was not a political insurrectionist. He didn't know what to make of Jesus and his talk of a "kingdom not of this world....a kingdom from another place", or his talk about "truth". For Pilate, who had attained his position as Governor for holding to whatever "truth" was expedient, there was no absolute truth. Truth for Pilate was whatever "truth" that let him out of difficult political situations and into the best light with the Emperor of Rome. Rome and power determined his truth.

His private conversation led him to believe that Jesus was no threat to the Roman powers that be in Israel. He was loath to condemn an innocent man which could result in an insurrection by Jesus' followers and another bad report to his own superiors. On the other hand, he could not afford to cross the will of the Jewish leaders and risk another complaint to his superiors claiming he failed to arrest and punish an insurrectionist. When Pilate realized Jesus was from Galilee, he saw his way out of a political quagmire...send him to Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee. Technically, Jesus fell under his jurisdiction.

## The Fifth Trial

Only Luke's gospel records the events of Jesus' trial before Herod Antipas. The trial is made mention of in the books of Acts (4:27-28). It is hard to understand the reasons behind Pilate sending Jesus to Herod. Possibly he was seeking to pass off a sticky situation for Herod to deal with, or possibly he was seeking Herod's counsel on how best to handle the Jewish leaders. Seeking Herod's advice would certainly be viewed as flattery to the self-absorbed and paranoid tetrarch. In any case Herod had wanted to see Jesus for some time and hopes of being entertained by him.



Read Luke 23:6-12 and answer the following questions.

How did Jesus respond to Herod's questions?

What were the chief priests and teachers of the law doing?



Why do you think Jesus remained silent? Matthew 7:6 speaks of not casting pearls before swine. What does this mean and how does it possibly relate to Jesus' silence before Herod?

In dressing Jesus in his own royal robes and mocking Jesus, what does Herod reveal about himself?

Did Herod render a guilty verdict before sending him back to Pilate? (See v. 15)

Fill in the details of the 5<sup>th</sup> trial in your table.

Herod, while claiming to be half-Jewish conducted his life as a caricature of a Roman despot. The son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas was descended from Jewish monarchy through the Hasmonean dynasty. Upon Herod the Great's death, Herod Antipas inherited a quarter of his father's kingdom, a tetrarchy. The rest of the kingdom was divided among his three brothers. The tetrarchy of Judea and Samaria had gone to his brother Archelaus, who was removed from office by Rome for ineptitude and replaced with a series of governors of which Pontius Pilate was the current appointee. Herod had a claim to the title King of the Jews and ruled Galilee and Perea ruthlessly and for his pleasure. He was known for his paranoia, grand building schemes (a legacy immortalizing his name and reputation), and his debauchery. Jesus of Nazareth was not a threat to his crown, just a spectacle to entertain his court with signs and miracles much like a court jester.

Jesus, as he had during all previous trials, stood in silent dignity refusing to waste words on the debauched ruler. While the religious leaders hurled accusations, Herod never took the proceedings seriously. When Jesus refused to perform, Herod had him dressed in his own royal robes and subjected him to cruel mockery and ridicule, behavior unfit for a king. When he tired of his game he sent Jesus, still dressed in royal robes, back to Pilate finding no basis for a guilty verdict.

## The Sixth Trial

We are in the homestretch of our homework this week. I know it has been a lot of work carefully studying each of these trials. We have finally reached Jesus' last trial where he is again brought before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. While these events are recorded in all four gospels, we will be studying the accounts of Luke and John.



Read Luke 23:13-25 and John 18:38-19:16 and answer the following questions.

What does Pilate restate to the Jewish leaders regarding the findings of both his own and Herod's examination of Jesus?

In Luke 23:16 what does Pilate want to do?

What do the religious leaders want?

According to Luke 23:22, how many times does Pilate declare that he has found no grounds for the death penalty?

Who do the people want released instead of Jesus? For what was he being held and awaiting crucifixion?

What did Pilate ultimately do?

John presents additional information in his gospel, let's examine it more closely. In verse 7 what do the religious leaders finally reveal as their motive behind bringing Jesus to Pilate?

**"Who Do You Say I Am?":  
A Study of Jesus, Part 2**



John records an additional conversation between Pilate and Jesus in verses 8-11. What is the meaning of Jesus' reply when Pilate claims to wield the power of life and death over Jesus?

What threat do the religious leaders use to force Pilate into sentencing Jesus to crucifixion?

In verse 15, how do the religious leaders answer Pilate when he asks them "*Shall I crucify your king?*"

What does their answer reveal on a spiritual level?

Complete the table of the sixth trial.

Ironically, during the second trial the Sanhedrin had great difficulty finding two witnesses to attest to Jesus' blasphemous activity. By the end of the fifth and into the sixth trials, we have two very weighty witnesses attesting to his *lack of guilt* in the charges brought against him. Both Roman officials, Governor Pilate and Herod Antipas, have declared him not guilty. It becomes very apparent that the Jewish leaders' bloodthirsty desire for the death penalty of crucifixion – the punishment for sedition and treason, (as opposed to stoning, the traditional Jewish penalty for blasphemy) has nothing to do with justice. They are so intent on seeing Jesus crucified they would rather see a true insurrectionist and murderer released. The leaders then pressure Pilate into sentencing Jesus with crucifixion by pointing out that he, Pilate, must not be "a friend of Caesar" if he would allow someone who claims to be king go unopposed. It is a threat that Pilate cannot risk defying. If the religious leaders lodge a complaint with Caesar, Pilate fears losing his own place and position with Rome. He bows to their desire.

When Pilate finally presents Jesus bloody and beaten from his flogging and dressed in Herod's royal robe with the crown of thorns, he bitterly introduces their king to them. He asks the religious leaders "*Shall I crucify your king?*" and the chief priests answer, "*We have no king but Caesar*". The priests of God not only deny Jesus as their King, but in so doing they deny the sovereignty of God. In their response they have abandoned every trace of loyalty to God when they claim allegiance to Caesar and Rome, whom they detest. They throw away their own God in order to reach their goal: get the death penalty against Jesus instated. Their actions reveal that the chief priests have rejected their vocation as God's anointed shepherds of Israel leading the people of Israel to God, in favor of pursuing their own evil desires. They would rather bow

down in allegiance to Rome and forsake their own God and kill their Messiah. They are truly guilty of a greater sin than Pilate.

*Personal Reflection:*

Luke 18:31-34 is Jesus' third prediction of his death. Read this passage and reflect upon what Jesus knew was before him at the Garden of Gethsemane and detailed in the events we have studied this week. God's sovereign plan took into consideration all the thoughts and actions of Roman powers and godless men, and used them to bring about his salvation plan. What does this reveal to you about his divine perspective and timing?