

# The Trial of Jesus

**Intro:** Our verse-by-verse study in Mark's gospel has taken us to the action packed week of our Lord just before the cross and the resurrection. To some of us, these events that occurred almost 2,000 years ago seems so far away. Sometimes we are so caught up in our daily lives that these events seem so remote. We get caught up in the news of the day: the Ebola crisis, the wars in the Middle East, the elections in our state. But all these current events will be nothing but a dim memory ten years from now. Just think back to the things that were happening ten years ago and how unimportant they seem to us now.

But the events around the death of Jesus are the most significant events in all history -- already every person in all the world who ever lived has been affected by these events. If we believe the Scriptures, this event is the focal point of history. These are the most crucial events that have ever taken place. How will these events have an impact on you today?

After Jesus was captured in Gethsemane Garden, he was led away by the soldiers to the high priest. Mark doesn't record for us the appearance of Jesus before Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest, but moves directly to the courtyard of Caiaphis, the current high priest. Listen as I read Mark 14: 53-65:

- 53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes.**
- 54 But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.**
- 55 Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none.**
- 56 For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.**
- 57 Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying,**
- 58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.' "**
- 59 But not even then did their testimony agree.**
- 60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"**
- 61 But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"**
- 62 Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."**
- 63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses?"**
- 64 You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.**
- 65 Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.**

In these verses, we have the details of our Lord's trial before the Jewish court. In this trial, Jesus is accused and condemned by the very people He came to this world to save. They arrested Him, arraigned Him, accused Him and condemned Him, they believed that they were judging Jesus that night. In reality, He was judging them! They condemned Jesus, but in doing so, they really condemned themselves.

In truth, this text does not show Jesus on trial as much as it shows the religious leaders of Israel on trial. They are in the presence of their Messiah, their King, their God, and their Judge, but they are too blind to see Him for Who He is. They declare Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy, but are truly guilty themselves.

## **I. GUILTY IN THEIR CONVOCATION v. 53-59**

When Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, John tells us He was first taken to the home of Annas, (John 18:13) the father in law of the current High Priest, Caiaphas. After Annas was finished questioning Jesus, he sent Him bound to Caiaphas (John 18:24).

Mark records here for us the Lord's trial before Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the 71 member supreme court of Israel. The word "Sanhedrin" literally means "to sit together". They were the official rulers of the nation. These powerful, religious men could smell blood. They had wanted to destroy Jesus for some time, and this was their chance. So, they came together to judge Him. The High Priest was in charge of the proceedings and thus he took center stage in the Lord's trial.

This trial is clearly a farce. The outcome was determined long before the trial was convened, verse 55 says they "**sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death.**" The chief priests hunted people down to accuse Jesus. They went in search of witnesses against Him because they were determined to put Him to death. It reminds me of those old westerns where the vigilantes announced to their victims, "We're going to give you a quick fair trial and then we're going to hang you." This is what the chief priests did to Jesus.

Their little convocation was illegal on several levels. The illegal nature of their proceedings would have invalidated any rulings they might have issued, but God had already determined that Christ would die that day. The wheels of divine sovereignty are in motion and they will not stop until Jesus is dead on the cross.

The trial was illegal right from the very beginning:

- A. **It Was Illegal Because Of When It Was Held** – The Jew's own laws, that regulated their court system, prohibited them from having a trial at night or on a feast day. Having a trial at either of these times would prevent the entire council from gathering, and it would prevent the accused from mounting an effective defense, since it would make it more difficult for witnesses to come to the trial. This trial obviously violated these provisions, since it was held at night and on the Passover.
- B. **It Was Illegal Because Of Where It Was Held** – The same Jewish law mandated that all trials conducted by the Sanhedrin were to be held in The Hall Of Hewn Stones, which was located on the Temple grounds. This rule was violated because this trial was held in the private residence of the High Priest.
- C. **It Was Illegal Because Of The Way It Was Held** – There are many problems with the trial of Jesus that night:
  - 1. Trials were illegal on the eve of the Sabbath because Jewish law required a one day adjournment in the event of a conviction.
  - 2. A guilty sentence could only be handed down the day after a trial.
  - 3. The Sanhedrin could not bring charges against a defendant, they could only investigate charges that had been made by others.

4. The charges against Jesus were changed during the trial. He was first charged with threatening to destroy the Temple. Later, He was charged with blasphemy. Then, when He stood before Pilate, His charges were changed again. This time, He was charged with claiming to be the King of the Jews and of forbidding the paying of taxes to Rome.
5. Jesus Christ was allowed no defense before the court. All charges against Him should have been thoroughly investigated and He should have been allowed time to call His Own witnesses.
6. The Sanhedrin pronounced the death sentence. By law the Sanhedrin could not convict or pass down a death sentence.

D. **It Was Illegal Because Of Why It Was Held** – This trial was not about seeking the truth of a man's guilt or innocence. This trial was over before it started! In the eyes of the Sanhedrin, Jesus was guilty before the trial ever began. He had no chance of leaving this trial with anything but a guilty verdict and a sentence of death!

E. **It Was Illegal Because Of The Witnesses They Called** – As you read the text, you can see that the Jewish leaders have a problem. The men actually went out and “**sought**” witnesses to testify against Jesus. The word “**sought**” means “**to hunt, to seek, to crave**”. These men were desperate to anyone who would come forward and make some accusation against Jesus.

Verse 56 says that “**many bore false witness against Him**”. They found many who came forward that night willing to lie for them. The problem with their witnesses was that none of their testimonies agreed with one another. According to the Law, the testimony of witnesses in a trial had to be in perfect agreement, Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Num. 35:30. These were the best witnesses money could buy, and yet everything was falling apart and the priests were getting uneasy and restless because the testimony of these witnesses did not agree.

Finally, according to verses 57-58, two of these false witnesses got their stories somewhat straight. They told the court that Jesus had threatened to destroy the Temple and to build it again in three days. Even their versions of what Jesus said didn't agree, v. 59.

The word “**temple**” in verse 58 refers to the Holy Place, not the entire Temple grounds. They are accusing Jesus of threatening to demolish the holiest place in all of Israel. To their ears, it was pure blasphemy. Add to that the ludicrous claim that He would rebuild the Temple in three days when it had already been under construction for nearly 50 years.

The fact is, Jesus did not say what they claimed He said. In *John 2:19*, Jesus did say this, “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**” When He said that, He was not referring to the Temple grounds in Jerusalem. He was referring to His own body that would be destroyed on the cross and raised from the dead three days later, *John 2:21*. And, if you go back and read the words of Jesus, He never said that He would destroy anything. He said, and I paraphrase, “**If you destroy this temple, I will raise it up in three days.**” Their accusations were a total fabrication!

What we see in these verses is a clear portrait of the human heart. These men did not care that Jesus was innocent. They did not care that He had done nothing wrong. They did not care that He was their Messiah and that He was the Son of God. They hated

Him because He was a threat their way of life. They hated Him so much that they were willing to lie, to break their own laws and to condemn an innocent man to death.

It is still the same today! There are still people in our world who hate the name of Jesus so much that they will do anything in their power to destroy Him and all those who follow Him. We are seeing that hatred manifested in our society, and things are only going to get worse. Jesus said in John 15:20, “**Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.**”

## I. Guilty In Their Convocation

## II. GUILTY IN THEIR CONFRONTATION v. 60-62

- A. **Caiaphas And His Shame** v. 60 – As the trial continues, Caiaphas has a real problem. It is impossible to convict Jesus with the testimony of conflicting witnesses, so he changes tactics. He is frustrated with the proceedings thus far, so he assumes the role of prosecutor and goes on the attack. He is mystified by the fact that Jesus has not opened His mouth to refute the lies the false witnesses have told about Him. So, he calls on Jesus to defend Himself.
- B. **Christ And His Silence** v. 61a – In response to Caiaphas’ demands, Jesus remains silent. He refuses to dignify the lies of His enemies. In this passage, Jesus is fulfilling the ancient prophecy of the prophet Isaiah. **Isaiah 53:7**, “**He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.**”
- C. **Caiaphas And His Solution** v. 61b – To get around the refusal of Jesus to speak, Caiaphas changes tactics again. He places Jesus under oath before God. In Matthew 26:63, Caiaphas said, “**I put You under oath by the living God...**” this was an attempt to force Jesus to answer. Caiaphas is finished with witnesses who can’t agree. He is finished with the trial. He is finished with Jesus. So, he gets right to the heart of the Sanhedrin’s problem with the Lord.

He asks Jesus point blank, “**Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?**” This question is designed to make Jesus incriminate Himself and say for the record things they have heard about Him. It would be blasphemy in their eyes to claim to be the Son of God. By asking this question, Caiaphas hopes to get Jesus to condemn Himself.

- D. v. 62 **Christ And His Statement** – Jesus doesn’t disappoint Caiaphas. Jesus opens His mouth and says two words that condemn Him to the cross. He utters two words that identify Him to His enemies. The two words Jesus said were words that had not been uttered by Jewish lips in hundreds of years. When Jesus opened His mouth, He said “**I AM**”.

Need I remind you that this is the covenant name of God? When Moses asked the Lord who he should tell them send him, he was told to tell them, “**I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you,**” **Ex. 3:14**.

This was a clear claim by Jesus to be God in the flesh. It was clear statement to the Jews that He was the Son of God. There are many critics of the New Testament and liberal scholars who insist that at no time did Jesus ever claim to be the Messiah or the Son of God. They tell us that these claims were made about him by his disciples.

If you ever hear anyone say that, just turn to this passage of Scripture. There are other places where Jesus clearly claims to be the Messiah and the Son of God, but this one is the clearest, because he was under solemn oath to tell the truth, and he simply and clearly states, "I am the Messiah -- I am the Son of God." There is no doubt about it.

He went on to tell them that one day, they would face Him in judgment! The Jewish leaders thought they were in control that night. They thought they had Jesus right where they wanted Him. Nothing could have been farther from the truth! They did not believe that He was Who He claimed to be, but their lack of faith did not change the truth of Who He was and is. They will see Him **"sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."**

The fact is, Jesus is God. He is the only way of salvation. He is the Righteous Judge who will judge the world some day, John 5:22. One day, every person who has ever lived will stand before Jesus in judgment. They will see the great white throne, the impressive scene described in Revelation 20 when all the dead are gathered together and the books are open, and men stand before Jesus, the judge of all the earth.

### I. Guilty In Their Convocation

### II. Guilty In Their Confrontation

### III. GUILTY IN THEIR CONDEMNATION v. 62-65

- A. **Their Drama** v. 63-64a – When Caiaphas hears the words of Jesus, he has heard all that he needs to hear. In his mind, there is no more need for witnesses. There no more need for trials. There is no more need for evidence of the Lord's guilt. Caiaphas believes that he has heard blasphemy, when in fact, he has heard the truth!

Caiaphas rips his clothes. This was a dramatic reaction to what he considered blasphemy. It was a symbolic display designed to convey horror in the face of a terrible crime against God. Caiaphas thought he was being dramatic, in truth, he was doing far more than that!

Leviticus 21:10 says, **"And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes."** When Caiaphas ripped his garments, he was disqualifying himself from his office. He didn't realize it, but he had just stepped aside in the presence of One superior to himself. Caiaphas had declared his own unworthiness to remain the High Priest of Israel.

The One standing before him was qualified for that office! This High Priest would make atonement with His Own blood on the cross. He would rise from the dead, ascend back to Heaven to redeem His bride, and He would ever occupy a throne at God's right hand to intercede for His people. Caiaphas was merely stepping aside to make way for One Who is vastly superior and qualified to be our great High Priest!

Listen to what the Bible says about our High Priest, **"For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came**

***after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.***” Hebrews 7:26-28.

- B. **Their Decision** v. 64b – The whole council renders their verdict, “***Guilty!***” They declare Jesus to be worthy of death and they condemn Him to that fate.
- C. **Their Damnation** v. 65 – After Jesus is condemned the true nature of these men comes out. These educated, refined, religious leaders turn on Jesus like a pack of rabid dogs. They spit in the Savior’s face! They covered His head and hit Him, demanding that He tell them who had done it. When the leaders attacked Jesus, the servants followed suit, slapping Him in the face with the palms of their hands. What a horrible sight!

But, it is the fulfillment of prophecy!

- **Isaiah 50:6, “*I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.*”**

Outside, Peter was watching this, and he never forgot it. In his first letter, he tells us that we are to remember that scene and take heed to it, for Christ was our example:

- **1 Peter 2:23, “*who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.*”**

This is how Christians are to respond when they are falsely accused, when they are unjustly vilified and abused. Instead of retorting and trying to justify ourselves, Peter says, we are to return good for evil, revile not in return, but commit ourselves to him who is able to judge things justly -- God himself.

Those who judged Jesus that night stood at the judgment seat of God and they came up short. They were weighed in the balances and found wanting. They rejected Jesus, and as a result, they came under the awesome judgment of God.

Whether you know it or not, you also stand before Jesus in judgment. Like those religious Jews, you must decide whether you will believe Him or reject Him. If you believe Him, He will save your soul. If you reject Him, you condemn your soul to Hell.

What’s it going to be for you? When you see Jesus one day, and you will, will you see Him as your Lord and Savior? Or, will you face Him as your Judge?

Will you embrace Him in gratitude for the price He paid to redeem sinners? Or, will you spit in His face like the Jews did?

You’ve heard the message, now it is time for you to decide where you stand in regard to Jesus. Is He a liar to be mocked and killed? Or, is He the Lord Who is to be loved and obeyed?