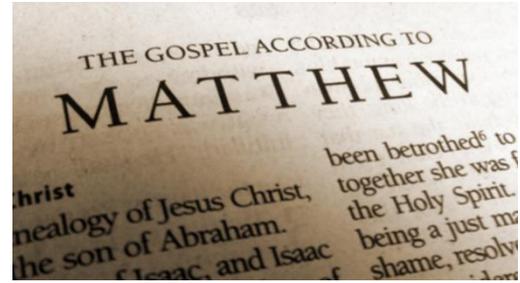


“Jesus on Trial”

Matthew 26:57-68

- All the gospel accounts contain the follow events of Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, trial, death and resurrection. They are not exhaustive in their retelling of these events. The writers selected key historical facts to emphasize particular points, just as any good historian or lawyer would do to tell the truth. Matthew and Mark are relatively similar in their accounts, both of which focus on these events happening at night when Jesus was put on trial.
- Chapter 26 opens by recording that the chief priests and the elders gathered with the high priest, Caiaphas, to figure out a way to kill him (vv. 3-4). Judas, one of the twelve, presented an opportunity. In love with money, he was willing to reveal Jesus’ whereabouts. They could arrest Jesus easily if Judas went with guards of the temple to the garden of Gethsemane in the late hours of, we call, Wednesday night, the Jewish 14th day of the month of Nisan.¹ There would be no crowds and no other witnesses but his disciples.



The Religious-Political Climate (vv. 57-58)

- Caiaphas led the political and religious ruling council as high priest over all Judaea.
- In 63 BC, the Romans, under the military leadership of Pompey, conquered Israel. During the life of Christ, Rome expanded its empire with each decade and allowed indigenous people groups to maintain a certain level of their own judicial process and administrative oversight. Under Rome, Israel’s law books were significantly restricted to mainly religious laws. Most legal matters, especially the wielding of the sword, were reserved for Rome.
- Annas, Caiaphas’ father-in-law, was supposed to be high priest, a position held for life. Rome had removed Annas and installed Caiaphas. In the Gospel of John, we read that, in the eyes of the Jews, Annas was still their high priest. The Jews were clearly skirting the official decisions of Roman occupation.
- The authorities who arrested Jesus had no concern for the disciples at this time. They could have arrested them, but expediency compelled them. They wanted Jesus. This commentary that Peter followed Jesus is simply proof of his witness to these events. Yet Peter stayed at a safe distance until they reached Caiaphas’ praetorium (his official residence).

The Jewish Trial (vv. 59-61)

- There had to be two stages to sentence Jesus to death: condemn Jesus on the Jewish stage and then have him killed on the Roman stage.
- Rome permitted councils throughout Judea to manage rulings, but the head council (Greek: *Sanhedrin*) resided in Jerusalem. The “whole council” doesn’t mean all were present but that there were enough present to make this a legitimate meeting.
- Matthew makes it clear that any testimony they provided was in truth, a false testimony. Since time was short between Judas presenting them the opportunity to seize Jesus and the opportunity to gain the ear of the Roman procurator Pilate early the next morning, this Jewish trial had to happen quickly.

¹ Christ was arrested and tried on the 14th Day of Nisan or Nissan (Hebrew for “Spring” or “Beginning”). This date coincides with March-April on the civil calendar. It was the first month on the Jewish calendar, known as the ‘Month of Miracles’ or ‘Month of Redemption’ because of the Jewish Passover.

- This was a cobbled together “trial.” Formally, the council met in the temple area, but this gathering in the high priest’s house was “offsite,” making it an informal assembly.²
- They had to secure two corroborating witnesses - not easy with a rushed trial (Deuteronomy 17:6).
- The Levitical law states, “Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him” (Leviticus 24:16). This is high treason.
- Given his fame, it was known to the council that Jesus had claimed to be equal with God:
 - “Before Abraham was, ‘I am.’” (John 8:58). Jesus called God his own Father (John 5:18), and “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). Jesus said he could forgive sins which only God could do (Mark 2:7).
 - Such statements were blasphemy if he were not God.
- This statement is misrepresentation (v. 61). They were liable for perjury (Deuteronomy 19:19).
- What Jesus actually said: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). John adds a comment that Jesus was referring to his body, not the physical temple.
- We also know that the temple in the Old Testament was temporary. Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24, that the temple would be destroyed one day (historically 70 AD by Rome). To this day, there is no Jewish temple in the spot of the original temple.

The Testimony of Jesus (vv. 62-64)

- Why does Jesus not clarify what he said? That would simply dismiss the false witnesses.
- His silence here accomplishes two things: he must receive the death sentence; and he must fulfill the extent of (1) the prophets (Isaiah 53:7) and (2) the law. Jesus’ silence forces the cunning hand of Caiaphas to have him speak by the oath of testimony.
- Jesus testifies when invoked by the living God. For Christ cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13)
- Caiaphas knows to claim to be God, yet not actually be God, is blasphemy. This would be breaking the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me.” And genuine blasphemy is a death sentence (Leviticus 24:16). This is the epitome of Covenant law-breaking.
- Jesus makes it clear what Son of God means by drawing from Daniel (7:13-14) and the clear theme of kingship in the Psalms (e.g. 110:1-2). Jesus essentially says, “But I tell you, from hereafter, you will see me, as I see you now, with all power over heaven and earth because I am the King, your Messiah. I am God.”

The Response of the Council (vv. 65-66)

- When a priest rightly tore his garments, he visibly demonstrated the sheer horror of committed sin.
- Caiaphas’ heart is the furthest from the truth. Yet such a spectacle would garner the immediate support of the council. It all looked so genuine (*pace* Joel 2:13).
- Can you think of a more degrading act than to spit in the face of Christ Jesus? To slap him on the face and then, in vain sarcasm, mock his Messianic status by putting the Lord your God to the test, “Who is it that struck you?” (cf. Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7).
- Do you not openly mock God when you break the first commandment? Do you know sin is shameful, despicable, heinous, but do it anyways? Do you publicly shame Christ by an indifference to the gospel and its implications on your life?

The Real Trial

- Knowing that every charge laid against Jesus was false, it is important to remember who was really on trial. It was ultimately not Jesus.
- It was Caiaphas. It was the present council of men. And they stood before God’s holy tribunal.

² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 680.

- Did they believe that Jesus was the Messiah? They didn't even search the Scriptures. It is not that they didn't have enough information. They knew.

Matthew's Facts from the Hebrew Scriptures (OT)

- He was born in Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah (Micah 5:2; Genesis 49:10)
 - He was of the line of David, of Jacob, of Isaac, of Abraham (Matthew 1).
 - He was the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 13:15, 17:8, 19; cf. Galatians 3:18-19)
 - He was born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; 8:8, 10)
 - He would take flight to Egypt (Hosea 11:1)
 - By him a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and weeping (Jeremiah 31:15)
 - He was preceded by a voice calling in the wilderness (Malachi 3:1)
 - He was a light to Galilee, Zebulun and Naphtali (Isaiah 9:1)
 - He rode into Jerusalem on foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9)
 - He was betrayed by a friend who ate his bread (Psalm 41:9)
 - He was betrayed for thirty shekels of silver (Zechariah 11:12)
 - He made the deaf hear, the blind see, and he cleansed the sick (Isaiah 53:4)
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- Before them stood the greatest prophet who prophesized with all authority
 - Before them stood the eternal King who would show them all his authority in heaven and on earth and whose reign had already begun.
 - And before them, stood the greater High Priest - he was the sacrificial Lamb, led to the slaughter, his body was the greater Temple, and he was the cornerstone that the builders rejected.
 - The problem is not that they didn't have enough information.
 - Who is Jesus to you? It is not that you need more facts about him. They had Moses and the Prophets. You have your conscience.
 - You have sin in your life and the wages of sin is eternal death. But Jesus came not to condemn you, but to give you life (John 3:16-18).