

The Illegal, Unjust Trials of Jesus, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 26:57, 59–61

Code: 2389

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 26:57-66 is the record of the illegal, unjust trials of Jesus. I want to lay a foundation so we might understand how unfair they really were. In spite of their nature, those trials demonstrate Christ's perfect majesty.

A. The System of Justice

The Jewish people have prided themselves on their sense of fairness, equity, and justice--and rightly so. They have laid a foundation of justice that has benefited the world. The system of justice practiced in America traces some of its origins to the Judaic justice system, as do many other equitable systems around the world.

The Jewish system of jurisprudence was predicated primarily on one Old Testament passage.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 says, "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not distort justice. Thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a bribe; for a bribe doth blind the eyes of the wise and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." That is God's standard for judgment and justice: local judges judging the people with fairness and righteousness, never distorting what is true, never being partial, and never taking a bribes. Throughout the history of the Jewish people, that standard was the basis of their system of jurisprudence.

1. The Sanhedrin

To practically apply Deuteronomy 16:18-20, the nation formed local councils in any region where one hundred and twenty men served as heads of families. That large a community could support a synagogue as well. The local councils became known as Sanhedrin, which is a Hebrew transliteration of a Greek word meaning "sitting together." Each Sanhedrin was made up of twenty-three men who sat together to make judgments and decide civil and criminal issues. An odd number was necessary so that there could always be a majority in any close decision. The twenty-three men were chosen from the elders of the village, and they acted as judges and jury in all matters. (Figures come from Simon Greenleaf's Testimony of the Evangelists [Jersey City: Frederick P. Linn, 1888], p. 579).

2. The great Sanhedrin

a) Its attributesThe great Sanhedrin ruled in Jerusalem, the capital city and religious center of Israel. It was composed of seventy men plus the high priest. Twenty-four were chief priests, twenty-four were elders, and twenty-three were scribes. This council was the final court for appeal. Anyone who believed that a verdict rendered at a lower level was unfair could appeal to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Under the right conditions they could gain a hearing. The great Sanhedrin was the highest ruling body in Israel.(1) Wise justicesSome of the men who served on the court were chosen from the local councils on the basis of their wisdom. Others served their apprenticeships as pupils of Sanhedrin members. After first learning about court procedure they were then invited to serve as judges themselves.(2) Procedural guaranteesA person under prosecution had three guarantees.(a) The right to a public trialThere could be no secret trials. Every trial was to be held in public so no one

could be framed and then be penalized or executed. In that way the judges were constantly under the scrutiny of the populace, who were able to attend and know what was going on. All fair courts today have maintained the same procedure.(b) The right to self-defense There was to be a defender-- someone who provided a defense for the accused.(c) The right to hear witnesses No one could be convicted of anything unless proven guilty by two or three witnesses. A solid case could be built only on the evidence of more than one witness. Those basic rights remain with us today, and are guaranteed by our court system. Those rights are important to know as we examine the trials of Christ. As you will see, the Sanhedrin violated all three plus many others.

The Fate of a False Witness

Bearing false witness was a serious crime, and punishment for it was swift. Anyone who gave false testimony was punished with the very penalty the accused would have received. Suppose you came into the court as witness to a murder. When your false testimony was found out, you would receive the death penalty yourself. Deuteronomy 19:16-19 says, "If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong, then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, who shall be in those days; and the judges shall make diligent inquiry; and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother, then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother. So shalt thou put the evil away from among you." People were discouraged from giving false testimony by the penalty they would incur if they were caught.

(3) Prescribed executions In any case deserving a death sentence, the execution could not be carried out until the third day. (The first day was considered to be the day the sentence was rendered). The council would reconvene on the third day to reaffirm the death sentence and execute the accused that same day. The second day was necessary to be sure that all the evidence had been examined and that there was no further need of testimony. The witnesses whose testimony brought about the death penalty had to cast the first stones in the execution (Deut. 17:7). That was another reason the witness wanted to be certain his testimony was true. If not, he would be guilty not only of perjury, but also of murder. Our Lord had that in mind when the scribes and Pharisees wanted Him to make a judgment regarding a woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-5). He told them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (v. 7). That would have been the procedure at a criminal trial had she been found guilty. Those witnesses would have been responsible to cast the first stones. But Jesus gave them a condition: they could do it only if they had never sinned.

Peeking Inside the Courtroom

Simon Greenleaf was a famous professor of law at Harvard University in the last century. His book The Testimony of the Evangelists (Jersey City: Frederick P. Linn, 1881) edited by Simon Greenleaf contains a section written by an eminent lawyer of the French Bar on the Sanhedrin trial procedure. This excerpt will give us some indication of what should have transpired in the trial of Christ.

1. The witnesses

The lawyer writes, "On the day of the trial, the executive officers of justice cause the accused person to make his appearance. At the feet of the Elders were placed men who, under the name of auditors, or candidates, followed regularly the sittings of the Council" (p. 581). The council was audited by objective men, who scrutinized all procedures to verify that they conformed to justice and equity. The lawyer continues, "The papers in the case were read; and the witnesses were called in succession. The president addressed this exhortation to each of them: 'It is not conjectures, or whatever public rumour has brought to thee, that we ask of thee; consider that a great responsibility rests upon thee: that we are not occupied by an affair, like a case of pecuniary interest, in which the injury may be repaired. If thou causest the condemnation of a person unjustly accused, his blood, and the blood of

all the posterity of him, of whom thou wilt have deprived the earth, will fall upon thee; God will demand of thee an account, as He demanded of Cain an account of the blood of Abel, Speak" (pp. 581-82). That concept filtered down to present-day courts through the years. In U.S. courts the witness is required to place his hand on a Bible and to swear before God to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The Jewish courts laid the bloodguiltiness on the witness who brought false testimony against a man in a case deserving the death sentence.

Furthermore, the lawyer writes, "A woman could not be a witness, because she would not have the courage to give the first blow to the condemned person; nor could a child, that is irresponsible, nor a slave, nor a man of bad character, nor one whose infirmities prevent the full enjoyment of his physical and moral faculties. The simple confession of an individual against himself, or the declaration, however renowned, would not decide a condemnation" (p. 582). That's important to note: Jewish law stated that no person could testify against himself, and on the basis of that single testimony be held guilty. Similarly U.S. court systems protect against self incrimination. The lawyer adds that the Sanhedrin stated, "We hold it as fundamental, that no one shall prejudice himself. If a man accuses himself before a tribunal, we must not believe him, unless the fact is attested by two other witnesses" (p. 582).

The lawyer also writes, "The witnesses were to attest to the identity of the party, and to depose to the month, day, hour, and circumstances of the crime. After an examination of the proofs, these judges who believed the party innocent stated their reasons; those who believed him guilty spoke afterwards, and with the greatest moderation. If one of the auditors, or candidates, was entrusted by the accused with his defense, or if he wished in his own name to present any elucidations in favour of innocence, he was admitted to the seat, from which he addressed the judges and the people. But this liberty was not granted to him, if his opinion was in favour of condemning" (p. 582). Someone other than a judge could speak only if it was in behalf of the accused's innocence, and not in behalf of his guilt. They wanted to avoid an emotional response that could bring about a guilty verdict.

2. The judgment

The lawyer writes, "When the accused person himself wished to speak, they gave the most profound attention. When the discussion was finished, one of the judges recapitulated the case; they removed all the spectators; two scribes took down the votes of the judges; one of them noted those which were in favour of the accused; and the other, those which condemned him. Eleven votes, out of twenty-three, were sufficient to acquit; but it required thirteen to convict" (pp. 582-83).

3. The punishment

The lawyer continues, "If a majority of votes acquitted, the accused was discharged instantly; if he was to be punished, the judges postponed pronouncing sentence till the third day; during the intermediate day, they could not be occupied with anything but the cause, and they abstained from eating freely" (p. 583). The judges fasted, which indicates they would never hold a trial of this nature the day before a feast day, otherwise they would be fasting on a feast thus violating Jewish law. That was another violation in the trial of Christ. The judges were to refrain "from wine, liquors, and everything which might render their minds less capable of reflection" (p. 583).

The lawyer details the following procedure: "On the morning of the third day they returned to the judgment seat. Each judge, who had not changed his opinion, said, I continue of the same opinion and condemn; any one, who at first condemned, might at this sitting acquit; but he who at once acquitted was not allowed to condemn. If a majority condemned, two magistrates immediately accompanied the condemned person to the place of punishment" (p. 583). They executed him on the same day they sentenced him. That was consistent with Ecclesiastes 8:11, which states that when there is swift punishment, there will be decreasing crime.

The lawyer continues, "The Elders did not descend from their seats; they placed at the entrance of the judgment hall an officer of justice with a small flag in his hand; a second officer, on horseback, followed the prisoner, and constantly kept looking back to the place of departure. During this interval,

if any person came to announce to the elders any new evidence favorable to the prisoner, the first officer waved his flag, and the second one, as soon as he perceived it, brought back the prisoner. If the prisoner declared to the magistrates, that he recollected some reasons which had escaped him, they brought him before the judges no less than five times. If no incident occurred, the procession advanced slowly, preceded by a herald who, in a loud voice, addressed the people thus: 'This man (stating his name and surname) is led to punishment for such a crime; the witnesses who have sworn against him are such and such persons; if any one has evidence to give in his favour, let him come forth quickly.'... At some distance from the place of punishment, they urged the prisoner to confess his crime, and they made him drink a stupefying beverage, in order to render the approach of death less terrible" (pp. 583-84).

b) Its abuses Once you analyze the procedure of a Sanhedrin trial, you could easily conclude that any individual accused of a crime was safe in the Sanhedrin's hands. They had a tremendous sense of justice mixed with mercy. Built into their system were safeguards to protect the innocent party. The accused had abundant opportunity to bring in new testimony. That bearing false witness was such a serious crime acted as a good preventative. Add to that the judges day-long fast and period of reflection makes a trial before the Sanhedrin appear to be a winning proposition for any wrongly accused individual. But the Sanhedrin never was a safe environment for Christ. In His trial the Sanhedrin violated every single law governing proper procedure in a criminal trial. As such the trial of Jesus Christ is the most unjust trial in human history. The great Sanhedrin condemned to death the only completely innocent person who ever lived. It was a mockery of justice. The axiom of the Sanhedrin was to save, not to destroy life. But that ideal was jettisoned in the case of Christ. No criminal trial was to be conducted at night, but Christ's trial was. Before condemning a criminal the judges were to fast a day before the execution, but those who condemned Christ didn't--they killed Him the same day. Witnesses were required to testify against the accused, but none were found who had truthful testimony against Christ. The accused had the right of defense, but that wasn't allowed in the case of Christ.

B. The Trials of Christ

1. Two trials

Jesus basically received two trials: a religious Jewish trial and a secular Roman trial. The Jews were an occupied people. Only Roman courts had the right to execute anyone--the Jewish courts couldn't. The Jewish leaders could condemn Jesus to death, but they couldn't execute Him. Whatever verdict they rendered in their religious trial had to be one recognized by the Romans. That is why there were two trials. The Jews had to present the evidence from their trial to the Romans. Before they would execute Christ, the Romans needed to examine the evidence against Jesus to determine if He indeed had committed a crime.

2. Three phases

The Jewish trial and the Roman trial each had three phases. So Jesus was actually involved in six different trials. The Jewish trial began when Jesus was taken to Annas. Annas sent Him to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin in the middle of the night. The third phase took place before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin just after dawn in an attempt to legitimize their evil. After the religious leaders were done with Christ, they sent Him to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. After Pilate questioned Him, he sent Him to Herod Antipas, who ruled over Galilee. Herod sent Him back to Pilate, who in turn condemned Him to death. Those were the three phases of the Roman trial. Both the Jews and Romans violated rules of justice, truth, equity, and fairness, committing horrendous crimes against an innocent man.

Those series of trials led to the execution of Jesus Christ. The Jews wanted Him dead, so they had to invent a means to bring about His death. They predetermined the sentence; they just needed a crime to fit it.

LESSON

I. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONFRONTATION (John 18:12-13, 19-24)

Matthew 26:57 says, "They that laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled." While it's true that Christ was led to Caiaphas, Matthew doesn't discuss the phase of the trial that occurred first. John 18 details what happened in that first phase--the initial arraignment.

A. The Significance of the Hearing Before Annas (John 18:12-13)

"Then the band [Gk., speira--the Roman cohort, as many as six- hundred men] and the captain [Gk., chiliarchos] and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, and led him away to Annas first."

The gospels offer us a composite of the life of Christ. In a sense they are like four different paintings, each of which emphasizes different features of His life.

1. Typological

Psalms 118:27 says, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Every sacrifice was in a sense a type of Christ. He was bound even as Isaac was bound to be sacrificed (Genesis 22:9). Christ was bound as a criminal. He was about to be offered as a sacrifice for all mankind.

2. Political

The reason Christ was taken to Annas first is that apparently Annas was the brains behind the leaders' scheme to kill Christ. He despised Jesus because He was a threat to his security, power, and prestige. He resented Jesus' holiness because he was so utterly unholy. He resented Jesus' perfection because he was utterly vile. Everything about Jesus caused him anger. Of course Satan was directing Annas's plan. Annas was just one in a cast of characters being manipulated by hell. The soldiers took Jesus to Annas's house. That was illegal because it happened at night and in a house instead of the Judgment Hall. Annas had been high priest for about a five- year span, but that had been twenty years before. His son-in- law, Caiaphas, was the official high priest that year (John 18:13).

B. The Sequence of the Hearing Before Annas (John 18:19-24)

1. Annas's circumvention of proper legal procedure (v. 19)

"The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine."

Annas wanted to know what Jesus taught, how widespread His movement was, and who followed Him. Annas violated all sense of justice with his questions. When a person was arraigned in a court of law, he was to be told the crime of which he was accused. But Annas asked general questions about Jesus' movement in an attempt to uncover a crime. He already had a sentence; he just needed a crime to match it. This was an illegal and unjust hearing, and Jesus' answer affirms that.

2. Christ's call for proper legal procedure (vv. 20-21)

"Jesus answered him, I spoke openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, where the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why asketh thou me? Ask them who heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said."

If Annas had a case, he should have presented witnesses and not asked Christ. According to the law, Jesus couldn't incriminate Himself. Here He called for proper legal procedure. He exposed the evil injustice of Annas. Everything Jesus taught was said openly and publicly. Plenty of people had heard Him; Annas only needed to call them as witnesses.

Annas was embarrassed and frustrated. His intentions had just been unmasked. He was no match for the infinite mind of Jesus Christ. When the tension in the air gets so thick you can cut it with a knife, someone will eventually break it, as we now see happening here.

3. An officer's conflict with proper legal procedure (v. 22)

"When he had thus spoken, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?"

Jesus had unmasked Annas as a violator of the laws of justice. This officer--in his desire to defend

his master, who had just lost face--slapped Jesus across the face.

4. Jesus' affirmation of proper legal procedure (v. 23)

"Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

The Lord offered no emotional retaliation, in contrast to when Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23. Paul testified that he lived with a clear conscience before God (v. 1). That upset the high priest so he had one of his servants slap Paul on the mouth. Paul retorted, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (v. 3). That sounds like something I might say! But Jesus didn't react that way. First Peter 2:23 says, "When he was reviled, [He] reviled not again." The hour of His death was at hand, and He was resolute to go to the cross. He already had settled that issue back in the garden. There was nothing to be gained with an angry retort. That's why He said, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" There is no answer to that question. Jesus always knew the right thing to say.

5. Annas's concealment of proper legal procedure (v. 24)

"Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas, the high priest."

Annas was finished. What could he do? It was the middle of the night. We know it was 3 [sc]A.M. since the period of cock crow ended at that time, and Peter hadn't yet denied Christ. Annas attempted a clandestine arraignment and couldn't accomplish a thing, except be embarrassed. So Jesus was sent to Caiaphas without an indictment.

The confrontation with Annas was illegal and unjust. What was illegal about it? It took place in the middle of the night. There were no witnesses. There were no charges. Annas had no legal authority--he wasn't even an official prosecutor. And his home was an improper place to hold an arraignment.

II. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONVENING (Matthew 26:57)

"They that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled."

Caiaphas was equally as wretched as Annas. He was possessive, power- hungry, and greedy. He hated truth, righteousness, and holiness. That's why he hated Jesus Christ. In the dark of night Jesus was transported from the house of Annas to the house of Caiaphas, which was located near the temple.

A. The People

The scribes and elders had been gathering together at Caiaphas's place while Jesus was at the house of Annas. Mark 14:53 says all the scribes and elders were there. However, based on Luke 23:50- 51, I suggest that at least one of them wasn't present. Now that doesn't violate the use of "all" in Mark. They were all gathered in the sense that a great number of them were present. I believe Joseph of Arimathaea was not there. Luke 23:50-51 says Joseph "was a member of the council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action)" (NASB). He was never there to vote. But apart from Joseph the vast majority of council members, and perhaps all the rest, were prepared to convict Christ. I'm sure some of them didn't even realize what was going on. They were the pawns of Satan.

B. The Place

Luke 22:54 says they met in the house of Caiaphas. Verse 55 tells us there was a courtyard as part of the grounds. Men like Caiaphas lived in large houses because they were very wealthy. So Christ was taken across the courtyard into a large room adjacent to it.

In the courtyard some soldiers had gathered around a fire (v. 55). Matthew 26:58 says, "Peter followed him [Christ] afar off unto the high priest's court, and went in, and sat with the guards, to see the end." Peter was caught between cowardice and curiosity. He wasn't brave enough to step out for Christ, but he was concerned enough to stand in the background. It is in that environment that he denied Jesus Christ. While in the courtyard he no doubt could look through the doors or windows of

the large room to see what happened as Christ was confronted by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. The law of Israel stated that no one was to be tried in any place other than the Hall of Judgment, which was located in the Temple complex. Also trials were to be held during the day. And they were to be public. The Sanhedrin did hold a brief trial at dawn in the Hall of Judgment to present some form of legal procedure to such illegal proceedings.

C. The Purpose

The Sanhedrin had to originate charges against Jesus. But that was a violation of law because the Sanhedrin could act only as judge and jury, not as prosecutor. They were supposed to investigate charges previously brought against the accused. Since Christ's session with Annas failed to exact a charge, they had no case to judge. So they had to act as prosecutors first and invent a crime before they could try it. The one thing they did have was a sentence--they just needed a crime to go with it. Everything about the trial of Christ was illegal. It was not supposed to take place at night, or in the house of the high priest. There was no crime. The Sanhedrin was not supposed to act as prosecutor. No one was to be tried on a feast day. And bribery was not to be tolerated, yet that is how Jesus was betrayed by Judas. All the illegalities of the trial before Annas were compounded in the convening of the Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas.

III. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONSPIRACY (Matthew 26:59-61)

A. The Search for False Witnesses (vv. 59-60a)

"The chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death, but found none; yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none."

The council didn't want to find out the truth; they wanted to put Him to death. The only way an innocent man could be killed was to find people to lie about him. They had to be liars to convict Jesus, who was a perfect man--God in human flesh. Perfection violates nothing. There never was a crime.

So the council sought liars to do the very thing their law condemned with such ferocity. Their passions were controlled by hatred and dominated by Satan and his demonic forces. The predetermined plan of God was that Jesus die for the sins of the world, and these men were unknowingly swept up in that plan. They were actually seeking the testimony of false witnesses--the very thing they had spent their lives trying to protect people from! It is unthinkable that judges would do that, but they did. Jesus never received a fair trial. He was not condemned because of something He had done; He was condemned out of hate.

Not surprisingly, no one could give a plausible testimony. There were many people who wanted to, and I'm sure hell generated all it could, but nothing made sense. Worse than that, they couldn't find any two to agree. It is difficult for liars to agree since they have no facts to deal with. Mark 14:56 says, "Many bore false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together."

B. The Selection of False Witnesses (vv. 60b-61)

"At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."

All they could come up with was "this fellow said." That's nothing but a generalization. Mark 14:57-58 says, "There arose certain, and bore false witness against him, saying, we heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Look at the difference between those two testimonies. The one in Matthew claimed Jesus said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." The one in Mark's record claimed He said, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Even they don't agree. What did Jesus actually say? John 2:19 tells us: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Verse 21 tells us He was referring to "the temple of his body." The false witnesses twisted what Jesus actually said, and of course what He meant.

The testimony of those two witnesses should never have been admitted. As mentioned earlier, a witness had to know the year, month, day, hour, and location of the supposed crime. Also, there were strict rules regarding the limitations of disagreement that could be tolerated between witnesses.

CONCLUSION

If I didn't know Jesus Christ was perfect and absolutely sinless, and that He was the Son of God as He claimed, this incident alone would convince me He was. Hell is running the show. Satan entered Judas. It was the hour of darkness. The braintrust of hell--Satan and his most powerful and resourceful demons--were after an accusation against Jesus. So were the Jewish leaders. When all earth and all hell, energized by supernatural resources and intelligence, couldn't find something against Jesus Christ, I know there isn't anything to find. The trials of Christ are a great apologetic for the perfection of Jesus Christ found anywhere in the pages of Scripture. If Jesus had ever done anything wrong, they would have found it. But there was no crime. Jesus was God in human flesh, and no less.

The trials were illegal. Witnesses were bribed and they misrepresented what Jesus said and meant. Jewish law never allowed for the execution of a man accused based on what he said. Jesus was allowed no defense. He suffered through an illegal confrontation with Annas and an illegal convening and conspiracy of the Sanhedrin. In spite of all that hell and the world tried, they couldn't find one thing He did that was wrong.

What a blessed Savior we have! He is perfect, and found to be so at the tribunal of evil men. Who actually was on trial that day were those who accused Jesus. They revealed themselves to be wretched, wicked, sinful, unjust men. Christ, by His very presence, identifies those who side with Satan.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What verse was the Judaic justice system predicated on? Explain it.
2. How did the Jewish people put that verse into practice?
3. Describe the composition of the great Sanhedrin.
4. How were judges chosen to serve on the Sanhedrin?
5. What guarantees did the Sanhedrin offer every accused person?
6. What happened to any false witness once he was caught giving false testimony?
7. Why was there a delay of three days before executing a convicted criminal?
8. Who served as the executioners?
9. Give a synopsis of the procedure that was followed in a typical criminal case heard by the Sanhedrin.
10. In what ways did the Sanhedrin violate proper procedure in the case of Christ?
11. How many trials did Christ go through? How many phases? Explain.
12. What was the typological significance of Christ's being tied up when He was arrested?
13. How did Annas violate proper legal procedure in his questioning of Christ (John 18:19-21)?
14. Why did the officer slap Christ (John 18:22)?
15. Describe how Jesus responded to being hit (John 18:23).
16. Who may have been absent from the gathering of the Sanhedrin? Why (Luke 23:50-51)?
17. Where was the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin held? Why was that illegal?
18. What did the Sanhedrin have to do first before they could judge Christ?
19. What was the only way the Sanhedrin could come up with a crime against Christ (Matt. 26:59)?
20. What false testimony was admitted as an accusation against Christ? Explain how it disagreed with what Christ actually said (cf. Matt. 26:60-61; Mark 14:57-58; John 2:19).
21. Why should the testimony of these two witnesses never have been admitted?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Judaic justice system was designed to protect the rights of any accused individual. Yet in the case of Christ, most if not all His rights were violated by the Sanhedrin. Make a list of as many violations as you can find. How many times have you had your rights violated? Make a list of those occasions. Compare your two lists. Based on your comparison, who suffered more? The next time your rights are violated, how will you respond?

2. The life and conduct of Joseph of Arimathea is an example to follow. Look up the following verses: Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38. Joseph is usually remembered for his kind deed of obtaining Jesus' body and putting it in his own tomb. But what other things does Scripture say about him? How is he characterized? What was his attitude toward the Sanhedrin's trial of Christ? What would you have done had you been Joseph? There will come a time in every believer's life where he will be called on to take his stand with Christ, even when it means opposing his peers. Are you prepared to do it? Ask God to show you how you might strengthen and prepare yourself for that day.

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