

Easter Teaching No. 6

2. The Trial before Caiaphas

In this part of the trial of Jesus, 16 Sanhedrin laws were violated and I will point these out as we go along

Luke 22:54 tells us that Jesus was led to the house of Caiaphas.

Rule 6: *Sanhedrin trials could only be conducted in the Hall of Judgement of the Temple Compound*

There were 71 members of the Sanhedrin but only 23 were required in a trial. There are no references as to how many attended this trial but the trial was being held in secret, at night and in a personal household.

Mark 14:55-56 tells us

'The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death but they couldn't find any. Many testified falsely against him but their statements did not agree'

In Jewish law, if a person was found to be a false witness in court, then the punishment that would have been meted out should the accused have been found guilty of that crime upon the false statement, then that same punishment was meted out to the one who gave false witness. That did not happen here, as the religious leaders were so desperate to find someone to accuse Jesus.

Rule 7: *During the trial, the defence had the first word before the prosecutors could present the accusations*

This is the other way round to our judicial system. Note there was no defence lawyer to help Jesus who had to represent himself.

It is written in the verse in Mark quoted above, that all the Sanhedrin were seeking to find him guilty, and this is in violation of the next law:-

Rule 8: *All could argue in favour of an acquittal but all could not argue in favour of a conviction*

Finally two witnesses came forward who seemed to give the same testimony but again, this proved not to be the case:

Mark 14:58 the witness told that Jesus had said He will destroy the temple and in three days build another

Matthew 26:61 the witness told that Jesus had said I am able to destroy the temple and in three days build another

Both sound similar, but they are essentially different; one was a statement of intention and one of claiming to be able to. Again at this point Jesus should have been released as the witnesses did not agree.

Rule No. 9 There were to be two or three witnesses and their testimony had to agree in every detail

Caiaphas then demanded that Jesus answer the accusation that the men brought against him

Rule No. 10 There was no allowance for the accused to testify against himself

And as this was against their law - Jesus refused to testify and said nothing so Caiaphas put him under an oath, an oath that demanded an answer by law:-

Matt 26:63 Caiaphas: 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God'

Jesus answered 'You have said so'. This sounds rather a tame reply to us but in Greek this was an emphatic YES.

Caiaphas reacted by tearing his garments, but this show of emotion was not permitted by Sanhedrin law

Rule No. 11 Based on Leviticus 21:10, the High Priest was forbidden to tear his garments

Caiaphas was almost relieved and said 'what further need have we of witnesses, we have heard his blasphemy'.

The witness statements had not accused Jesus, rather he was accused by answering the oath presented by the High Priest, therefore the charge was brought by a judge in violation of Rule 12.

Rule No.12 Judges could not initiate charges, they could only investigate charges brought to them

Rule No.13 The accusation of blasphemy was only valid if the name of God was pronounced

Jesus had not done this, he had merely claimed to be the Messiah. With no witnesses against him and not speaking the name of God he should have been released. Again, his rights were ignored. The law did not permit a man to be condemned solely by his own words, that is why the two or three witnesses had to be present. Jesus however was convicted on his claim to be the Messiah.

Rule No.14 A person could not be condemned solely on the basis of his own words

Trials had to be carried out in public during the daylight hours, it would be assumed that if it was night, then everyone must have had a long day in court, so proceedings would need to be reconvened at next daylight, refreshed and with a clear mind before potentially condemning a person.

Matthew 26:66 tells us that those present at the trial said 'He is worthy of death' So Jesus was convicted of blasphemy and also given a sentence of death.

Here five laws were violated:

Rule No.15 The verdict could not be pronounced at night

It was still in the small hours of the morning and still dark.

Rule No.16 In the case of capital punishment, the trial and guilty verdict could not occur at the same time but had to be separated by at least 24 hours

At Jesus trial he was found guilty within moments of his conviction. They agreed unanimously that he was guilty of the death penalty immediately, and the sentence of death was passed at the same time. This violated the next three laws:-

Rule No.17 Voting for the death penalty had to be done by individual count, beginning with the youngest, so that the young would not be influenced by the elders

Rule No.18 A unanimous decision for guilt showed innocence, since it is impossible for 23 to 71 men to agree without plotting

Rule No.19 The sentence could only be pronounced three days after the guilty verdict

Jesus should have been released once the unanimous decision had been reached of his guilt, this law was in force because it was believed that no case would have a unanimous vote for guilt without a conspiracy. See the irony! And the 19th law would allow time for potentially more evidence to be brought back to court which may indeed help prove the innocence of the one accused.

Matt 26:67 tells us that the religious leaders then spat in Jesus face, struck him with their fists and slapped him and mocked him asking

'Prophecy to us Messiah, who hit you' Luke 22:63-65 tells us they blindfolded him and spoke many other things to him and reviled him and beat him. This was in violation of the next two laws:

Rule No. 20 Judges were to be humane and kind

Rule No. 21 A person condemned to death could not be scourged or beaten before his execution

We will also mention the last of the Sanhedrin's own laws that were violated during this mockery of a trial.

Jesus' trial took place between the first night and the first day of Passover. This was in violation of the last of the 22 Sanhedrin laws that were ignored

Rule No.22 No trials are permitted on the eve of the Sabbath or on a feast day

It is at this point in the events that Peter made his three denials of Christ and if you would like to read more of this, it is recorded in Matt 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54b-62 and John 18: 25-27

It had been a long night and was beginning to get light, the day was breaking, it was time for Jesus next trial.