

# CONDEMNED

*Matthew 26:57-68*

## THE SETTING

*Matthew 26:57-58*

**57** Now those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together.

**58** But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome.

**(Matthew 26:57–58, 2022 LSB)**

Let's start by getting the political structure of Israel clear in our minds.

During the last 100 years of Israel's national existence, there were 31 high priests, which averaged 3.1 years for each man. Three of those high priests are mentioned in the New Testament: Annas, Caiaphas, and Ananias. Annas served for 10 years, Caiaphas for 19, and Ananias for 13; that's 42 years.

The final hundred years of the Temple's history were known as the Herodian-Roman period. During those years, the high priests were appointed by Herod the Great until his death and then by the Roman governors in Jerusalem. It's safe to say that the more the high priests cooperated with the Romans, the longer they kept their position.

The high priest led a ruling council known as the Sanhedrin, from the Greek verb that means "to sit together." The Sanhedrin consisted of 70 men, including priests, elders, and scholars, drawn from the religious parties of the Sadducees and Pharisees, and sometimes the Essenes and Zealots as well.

During Jesus' ministry, the high priest and Sanhedrin were responsible to the Roman procurator—Pontius Pilate—for maintaining peace and order in Israel. Their relationship was very reciprocal, and mutual cooperation worked to the benefit of both sides.

The bottom line is that the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus dead. Through the treachery of Judas Iscariot, they succeeded in taking Jesus into custody. Jesus was first taken to the house of Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest. Matthew ignores that episode and takes us directly to Caiaphas' house.

Just as Jesus had foretold, His disciples had abandoned Him when He was arrested. Peter, however, made his way back and followed the crowd to Caiaphas' courtyard, where he sat down, surrounded by the officials or servants who had arrested Jesus. Unquestionably, Peter's faith needed work, but there is no

question about his courage.

## FALSE WITNESSES

*Matthew 26:59-61*

**59** Now the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.

**60** And they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward.

But later on two came forward, **61** and said,

“This man stated, ‘I am able to destroy the sanctuary of God and to rebuild it in three days.’”

**(Matthew 26:59–61, 2022 LSB)**

Matthew 26:59 is blunt, isn't it? These men had been opposed to Jesus during His entire ministry. They were opposed to John the Baptist before Jesus arrived. The truth is that they were opposed to Yahweh Himself. Isaiah 48:1 describes men just like them as those **who are called by the name Israel and who came forth from the loins of Judah, who swear by the name of Yahweh and bring to remembrance the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness.**

The hatred of the Jews for Jesus had been at a murderous level for a long time, perhaps a year or more. The problem was they were not allowed to public execute anyone, even the worst criminals. Only the Romans had that right. But Pilate wouldn't condemn someone just because they asked him to; he needed a reason. And so they needed a credible accusation against Jesus that would justify an order of execution.

This so-called trial was really a fishing expedition. They **kept trying to obtain *false testimony* against Jesus so that they might put Him to death.** Don't miss this. They knew Jesus was innocent of any wrongdoing of any sort.

Their pursuit of *false* testimony against Jesus is proof of His holy, innocent, and pure character. If someone really wanted to accuse you or me of something, they wouldn't have to make anything up. All of us are guilty of *something*, even if it's only speeding or doing a 'California' stop. But Jesus was not just innocent; He was holy.

Notice that **many false witnesses** came forward, but they did not find *any* accusations against Him, even false ones. In fact, the Sanhedrin seems to have put out an open call: “Earn money in your spare time! Tell lies about Jesus of Nazareth!”

Hebrews 7:25 says Jesus Christ was and is today holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. His enemies in the council thought it would be easy to find someone to make

something up about Him. But He was so holy, innocent, and undefiled that even the smallest accusation was not believable.

We have no idea what lies they told, but since there were *many* false witnesses, we can be sure that they covered the spectrum: Jesus is a drunk! Jesus is a thief! Jesus is a brawler! Jesus tells dirty jokes! Jesus curses Yahweh! Jesus murdered His father!

But in spite of **many false witnesses** coming forward, not one had an even remotely believable story.

Finally, two men came forward and said that Jesus had stated, “I am able to destroy the sanctuary of God and to rebuild it in three days.” (Matthew 26:61). They are referring to an incident in John 2:13-22, but they twist Jesus’ words. He actually said, speaking of His body, “Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19).

The false witnesses twisted Jesus’ words into, “I am able to destroy the sanctuary of God and to rebuild it in three days.” It isn’t much. It certainly isn’t worthy of the death penalty. They couldn’t go to Pontius Pilate and say, “This man claimed to be able to destroy and rebuild the Temple in three days,” and expect him to sentence Jesus to death.

Jesus was so holy, innocent, and undefiled that even His worst enemies couldn’t find anything against Him. The many false witnesses had utterly failed to land even one blow. No one, not even Jesus’ worst enemies, believed the nonsense they spouted. So, the high priest tries to get Jesus to incriminate Himself.

## IT ALL COMES DOWN TO JESUS

*Matthew 26:62-64*

**62** And the high priest stood up and said to Him,  
 “Do You not answer? What are these men testifying against You?”  
**(Matthew 26:62, 2022 LSB)**

The only thing Caiaphas can do is act as though undeniable evidence had been presented against Jesus and try to get Him to say something they can use against Him.

But Jesus kept silent.  
**(Matthew 26:63a, 2022 LSB)**

That must have been really frustrating for Caiaphas and the rest of the council. They had Jesus in their clutches but were unable to take it to the next step. So, Caiaphas demanded that Jesus help them condemn Him:

And the high priest said to Him,  
 “I put You under oath by the living God,  
 that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”  
**(Matthew 26:63b, 2022 LSB)**

This sort of oath had to be answered. A refusal would result in punishment. Jesus, who could not lie because God cannot lie, must answer truthfully, knowing that His true answer will result in His crucifixion.

There are several different answers to the question, Why was Jesus crucified?

The *biblical* reason is that He died for sinners.

There are *social* reasons, like “He offended the religious leaders of His time.”

There are *political* reasons, such as “Pontius Pilate was already under pressure from Rome to keep the Jews happy; refusing to crucify Jesus might cost him his position.”

There are certainly prophetic reasons, like Isaiah 53:5, “He was pierced through for our transgressions.”

To these, we can add a simple answer: Jesus was crucified because He told the truth, which happened to be a truth these men would never accept.

In John 10:17-18 Jesus said that He had the authority to lay down His life:

**17** “For this reason the Father loves Me,  
 because **I lay down My life so that I may take it again.**  
**18 No one takes it away from Me, but from Myself, I lay it down.**  
 I have authority to lay it down,  
 and I have authority to take it up again.  
 This commandment I received from My Father.”  
**(John 10:17–18, 2022 LSB)**

We know, of course, that Jesus did lay down His life on the cross. His death on the cross was fully within His control. He yielded up His own spirit (Matthew 27:50) when He was ready, which was when atonement had been fully accomplished.

But He also laid down His own life at His trial. They had no legitimate reason to crucify Him, and they couldn’t find an illegitimate reason to crucify Him. He spoke the words that led Him to the cross.

**64** Jesus said to him, “You yourself said it;  
 nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see **THE SON OF MAN**

SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER  
and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”  
(Matthew 26:62–64, 2022 LSB)

Is all of this true? Yes, absolutely. Jesus quoted from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14, which speak of His relationship to the Father and His eternal authority.

This was exactly what Caiaphas wanted to hear.

## INNOCENT YET CONDEMNED

*Matthew 26:65-66*

65 Then the high priest tore his garments and said,  
“He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses?  
Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; 66 what do you think?”  
They answered and said, “He deserves death!”  
(Matthew 26:65–66, 2022 LSB)

Scholars debate just what “blasphemy” Jesus committed here, trying to figure out what precepts of the Law Jesus violated. But it’s actually very simple. There *was* no blasphemy. The high priest and the Sanhedrin started this process by looking for *false* testimony. That fact alone is evidence that even His worst enemies could find *nothing* against Him, *nothing*. He was holy, innocent, and undefiled, as Hebrews 7:26 says. What they didn’t comprehend was that the reason Jesus was holy, innocent, and undefiled is that, as Hebrews 7:26 goes on to say, He was separate from sinners and exalted above the heavens. Jesus was not only not a sinner; He was God the Son in human flesh.

So these men condemned Jesus and delivered Him over to Pontius Pilate for crucifixion for being who He was. They did not condemn Him for any things He had done, but for being the Son of God.

Yahweh required every sacrifice to be without blemish. Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel, carried out the most detailed, excruciating examination any sacrifice ever endured, and found Jesus of Nazareth to be so much without blemish that even false accusations could not be found. In the end, Jesus was condemned for being the holy, innocent, undefiled Son of God.

Peter wrote in First Peter 1,

18 you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold  
from your futile conduct inherited from your forefathers,  
19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.  
(1 Peter 1:18–19, 2022 LSB)

John wrote in First John 3:5 that Jesus was manifested to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. Paul wrote that God made Him who knew no sin – Jesus – to be sin on our behalf, so that we would become the righteousness of God in Him (Second Corinthians 5:21).

## THE HOLY LAMB ABUSED

*Matthew 26:67-68*

**67** Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him,  
**68** and said, “Prophecy to us, O Christ; who is the one who hit You?”  
**(Matthew 26:67–68, 2022 LSB)**

Those of us who love the Lord Jesus find these words hard to read. He did no harm to anyone. During His life, He was the embodiment of godly humanity, as no one else ever was. He was, and is, Yahweh, God the Son.

I think it's at least possible that they were fulfilling a specific point of the Levitical law here:

**3** If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd,  
 he shall bring it near, **a male without blemish;**  
 he shall bring it **near to the doorway of the tent of meeting,**  
 that he may be accepted before Yahweh.  
**4** And **he shall lay his hand on the head** of the burnt offering,  
 that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.  
**(Leviticus 1:3–4, 2022 LSB)**

Jesus Christ was a *male without blemish*.

All this took place not in the Temple but *near the Temple*, at the home of Caiaphas.

And they laid hands on Him, didn't they? They beat Him with their fists and slapped Him, which certainly implies striking Him on the head.

## BRINGING IT HOME

First, let's worship our God for saving us by His grace and making us know that He loves us. Every sinner is capable of the kind of hatred these men expressed for the Lord Jesus. It is by the grace of God that we love Him, honor Him, worship Him, and desire His glory.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of this text is the holiness and purity of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15 says that

He faced every kind of temptation that we face and did so without sinning. Hebrews 7:26 says that Jesus Christ is **holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and exalted above the heavens**. Jesus' own testimony is that the Father was always with Him because **I always do the things that are pleasing to Him**. (John 8:29). Peter, probably drawing on His own observation of Jesus' trials, wrote that Jesus **did no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth**, and when He was **being reviled, was not reviling in return**, and **while suffering, He was uttering no threats** (First Peter 2:22-23).

It is not merely the Bible's claim that Jesus was holy, innocent, and undefiled; His own enemies had to admit His holiness. They began His trials without a single piece of evidence of *actual* wrongdoing, and they were even unable to make up a lie that would stick. They condemned Jesus for being exactly who He was: the holy, sinless Son of God. That is what made Him the perfect Savior for sinners. Jesus is both the Son of Man and the Son of God. As the holy Son of Man, He could take the place of sinful people on the cross and die in their place. As the Son of God, He could bear the eternal judgment of God without being destroyed.

Jesus did this to please the Father; He always did what pleased the Father. And why did the Father send Him to die as a substitute for sinners?

John 3:16 tells us.

For God loved the world in this precise way: He gave His only begotten Son to live in holiness and die as a substitute so that all those believing in the Son would not perish under His judgment but receive and possess eternal life.

Let's pray and then give thanks to our God for His amazing grace!