

## **The Gospel of John (107): The Jewish trial of Jesus**

### **Introduction:**

We read in John 18:12ff of our Lord's arrest and having been bound, then taken to be tried before the religious and civil authorities. In verses 12 through 29 we have recorded for us Jesus having been brought before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, "the high priest that year." In this account we also read of Peter's lapse of faith in that he denied having known Jesus. Here is the passage to which we give our attention today. As we read, take notice to the four sections of this episode which I have identified with a space separating them.

<sup>12</sup>Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. <sup>13</sup>And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. <sup>14</sup>Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

<sup>15</sup>And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. <sup>16</sup>But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. <sup>17</sup>Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?"

He said, "I am not."

<sup>18</sup>Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

<sup>19</sup>The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

<sup>20</sup>Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. <sup>21</sup>Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said."

<sup>22</sup>And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?"

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"

<sup>24</sup>Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

<sup>25</sup>Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?"

He denied it and said, "I am not!"

<sup>26</sup>One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" <sup>27</sup>Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed. (John 18:12-27)

John the Apostle has taken two events--Jesus before Annas, and Peter's denial--and has interwoven them in this episode that begins with verse 12 and continues through verse 27. These two events are told as though they were occurring simultaneously, in that the episode contains first the record of Jesus being arrested, bound, and taken to Annas (vs. 12-14), which is then followed secondly by the account of Peter's (first) denial of Jesus (vs. 15-18). And then third, the interrogation of Jesus by Annas is recorded (vs. 19-24). And then fourthly, Peter's further denial of Jesus is recounted (vs. 25-27). The narrative thereby alternates

between these two events, Jesus before Annas and Peter’s denials. The narrative structure of this episode may, therefore, be seen in this way:

A<sup>1</sup>  
B<sup>1</sup>  
A<sup>2</sup>  
B<sup>2</sup>

Here we see that A<sup>1</sup> and A<sup>2</sup> address Jesus before Annas, and B<sup>1</sup> and B<sup>2</sup> relate Peter’s denials of Jesus. Why this narrative pattern? One commentator described it this way:

This pericope contains a brief introduction (vs. 13-14) followed by an intercalation, a rhetorical technique that encloses of “sandwiches” one scene in the middle of a different scene, so that each scene affects the interpretation of the other. The framing scene and the framed (embedded) scene are placed on par with each other, with neither having logical or chronological priority. Either scene (the framing or the framed) may comment on the other by way of comparison or contrast. Fowler describes their function and relation well: “Intercalation is narrative sleight of hand, a crafty manipulation of the discourse level that creates the illusion that two episodes are taking place simultaneously. In an intercalation neither episode has begun until both have begun, and neither is concluded until both are concluded.” By means of the intercalation, the reader is expected to hear the denial of Peter at the very moment Jesus is placing His reputation on Peter’s witness.<sup>1</sup>

This is just one instance that reveals the literary sophistication of the biblical writers. Granted, they were guided and enabled by the Holy Spirit, but they were not wholly passive. These writers were very learned and skilled in their art of narrative writing.

Actually what this manner of relating Peter’s denials as Jesus is entering His trial(s) serves to illustrate and accentuate that Jesus faced His trial alone, with no support even from the one who seemed most resolved and courageous of His disciples. It also serves to show how weak and vulnerable the disciples were once they were separated from the presence of their Master. Thankfully, due to Christ’s death and resurrection, His ascension and enthronement, His giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to His people, they will never again be found to be in a place or situation without Him with them.

Here, then, is an outline to this episode:

1. Jesus was arrested, bound, and taken to Annas (vs. 12-14).
2. Peter’s first denial of Jesus (vs. 15-18).
3. The interrogation of Jesus by Annas (vs. 19-24).
4. Peter’s second and third denials of Jesus (vs. 25-27). . :

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### **I. Jesus was arrested, bound, and taken to Annas (vs. 12-14).**

We read of Jesus’ arrest when in the garden. **Verse 12** records, “*Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him.*” We saw last week that this detachment included both Roman and Jewish officers, ones that Judas had been gathered and then had escorted them in order to arrest Jesus in the garden. In our Lord’s privacy and security, in a place of rest and retirement, He was wrested from His own, and His trials soon after commenced.

They first brought Jesus before Annas. **Verse 13** reads, “*And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.*” The identity and stature of this man, Annas, is interesting. He himself was at one time the high priest. He served from AD 6 to 15. Annas was

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 744.

one of the most revered of high priests. In the first century a total of 8 high priests were from His family.<sup>2</sup> He had five sons, each of them later served as high priests. “The family was noted for its greed, wealth, and power.”<sup>3</sup> The Roman governor had removed Annas from office about 15 years prior to this time. This must have been a real cause of objection and reaction on the part of the Jews. It is said of the turnover of high priests that it was frequent in the first century.

The office of high priest was inherited according to the Old Testament, but Hellenistic kings were accustomed to removing and appointing priests as political favors or in response to bribes. Herod the Great and his Roman successors changed high priests with some frequency—there were twenty-eight from Herod to AD 70.<sup>4</sup>

John declared that Caiaphas, the son-in-law to Annas, was high priest that year. Actually Caiaphas served as high priest from AD 18 until 36. This was the longest reign for a high priest in the first century. Why, then, was Jesus first taken to Annas? It may be that the Jews continued to look to Annas as a man of great authority, perhaps even as the more legitimate high priest, for a high priest once appointed, was to serve for the remainder of his life. The high priests also served as the leader of the 70 Jewish men of the Sanhedrin, the governing body over the Jews. Herod would replace these high priests in order to maintain control over them, who had authority over the Jewish people.

Interestingly only John records our Lord having been brought before Annas. Although his name is mentioned by Luke, it is in this fourth Gospel in which Annas is shown most regard. Luke mentioned him once in His Gospel and once in the book of Acts. There he sets Annas and Caiaphas as if they were high priests serving side-by side. Of course there could be only one legitimate high priest recognized at any one time. Here are Luke’s references to Annas:

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup>*while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests*, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. (Luke 3:1f)

And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, <sup>6</sup>as well as *Annas the high priest, Caiaphas*, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. <sup>7</sup>And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:5-7)

Notice that in the passage in Acts, which records events some weeks after the events of John 18, Luke identifies Annas as the high priest, and Caiaphas is mentioned after him. This may suggest that though Caiaphas was the official high priest, the people still regarded Annas as the legitimate high priest. [We will also later see in John 18 that this was probably the case.]

After John had mentioned Caiaphas, he explained that he had referenced him earlier in His Gospel. We read in **verse 14**, “*Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.*” This is a reference to what is recorded back in John 11. There we read the following:

Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. <sup>46</sup>But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. <sup>47</sup>Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 565.

<sup>3</sup> **NET Bible, Full Notes Edition** (Thomas Nelson, 1996, 2019), p. 2056.

<sup>4</sup> Everett Ferguson, **Backgrounds to Early Christianity**, third edition (William B. Eerdmans, 1987, 1993, 2003), p. 565.

signs. <sup>48</sup>If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.”

<sup>49</sup>And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, <sup>50</sup>nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” <sup>51</sup>Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup>and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. (John 11:45-51)

God had given authority to the high priests over His nation of Israel. But when Jesus died and rose, God took away their position and entrusted (spiritual) Israel’s leadership to His apostles (cf. Matt. 19:28-30; 21:33-43). The twelve apostles are now ruling over the (spiritual) twelve tribes of Israel. But when Caiaphas served as Israel’s high priest, God used him as an instrument through which He communicated this prophecy to His people, as John 18:4 records, “Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.”

Now these armed brigands had bound Jesus and brought him before Caiaphas, but John did not yet record the interrogation that Annas gave to Jesus. Instead, we read beginning with verse 15...

## II. Peter’s first denial of Jesus (vs. 15-18).

<sup>15</sup>And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. <sup>16</sup>But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. <sup>17</sup>Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?”

He said, “I am not.”

<sup>18</sup>Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

All four Gospels record both our Lord’s prediction of Peter’s defection<sup>5</sup> and the account of his denial.<sup>6</sup> What is perhaps most unsettling about Peter’s failure is that not only had he done so after the Lord had specifically and directly warned him of the danger before Him and that he would deny Him, but that Peter was a true disciple of Jesus when he failed in so egregious manner. This is clear in John’s account in at least two ways. First, in verse 15 Peter is described as “followed Jesus” after He had been arrested. That is what a disciple is and that is what a disciple does: he *follows* Jesus Christ. There are a number of places where this pronounced. Perhaps one of the most notable is what Matthew records our Lord’s words. Jesus declared,

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:25-27)

It is interesting that the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels present Peter a little differently, for Peter is described as being somewhat distant in his following Jesus. Matthew and Mark both record, “But Peter followed Him *at a distance* to the high priest’s courtyard” (Matt. 26:58; Mark 14:54). And Luke more simply stated, “But Peter followed *at a distance*” (Luke 22:54). But John seems to have described Peter more directly as a disciple, “Simon Peter followed Jesus.” Again, that is what disciples are, and what disciples do—they follow Jesus.

Another way in which John showed Peter to have defected from Christ as a true disciple of Jesus Christ is in the manner that his companion is described. The author of this Fourth Gospel wrote, “And

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34; John 18:15-18, 25-27

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 13:36-38

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did *another* disciple.” Peter was a disciple of Jesus Christ, and so was this other one who had accompanied him.

And so, what is very disconcerting about Peter’s failure is that he was a true disciple of Jesus Christ when he denied his Lord, and that he did so three times, even after our Lord had warned him and had exhorted him that he pray so that he would not enter temptation. When in the garden Jesus had told all of his disciples, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt. 26:41). This should serve to show you and me, that though we may be true Christians, true followers of Jesus Christ, we are capable of the grossest of failures before our Lord and others. Just as Peter was all too proud, self-sufficient, and prayerless, even sleeping when he should have been praying for God’s mercy and grace toward him, presuming on his love and commitment to Jesus, so it is that any one of us are quite weak, even when we are following Jesus. And we might say, we are in more danger when we are following Jesus “at a distance”, when we are not readily identified by others as His disciples.

One question that must be asked, who was this that John described as “another disciple” (v. 15) who was with Peter? Of course we would accept the understanding that John the Apostle was referring to himself. John never referred to his own name throughout his Gospel. Most often he refers to “the one whom Jesus loved.” When recounting the events of the last supper, John referred to himself in this manner:

<sup>21</sup>When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” <sup>22</sup>Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke.

<sup>23</sup>Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. <sup>24</sup>Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke.

<sup>25</sup>Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” (John 13:21-25)

Later, when John was relating Jesus on His cross, he again referred to himself in this same way. He wrote, “When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and *the disciple whom He loved* standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’” (John 19:26). And after the resurrection, John wrote of himself in this veiled way:

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup>Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to *the other disciple, whom Jesus loved*, and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” (Jn. 20:1 NKJ)

And then later in Galilee, John wrote of identifying the risen Jesus walking on the shoreline: “Therefore *that disciple whom Jesus loved* said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea” (John 21:7).

John gave his last reference to himself in this way at the conclusion of this Gospel when he wrote of our Lord telling Peter that Peter would one day die for his testimony of Jesus. Here is John 21:17ff:

Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. <sup>18</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” <sup>19</sup>This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

<sup>20</sup>Then Peter, turning around, saw *the disciple whom Jesus loved* following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” <sup>21</sup>Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”

<sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”

<sup>23</sup>Then this saying went out among the brethren that *this disciple* would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”

<sup>24</sup>This is *the disciple* who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. (John 21:17-24)

It is interesting that John did not receive the same treatment as Peter. Granted, maybe those singled out Peter to be a disciple of Jesus because he stood out when he cut off the ear of one of the mob who had come to arrest Jesus. But it is also the case that John might have passed possible scrutiny because of his familiarity with the family of the high priest. We read in verses 15 through 17 once again, but focusing on “another disciple” who was with Peter:

<sup>15</sup>And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. <sup>16</sup>But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. <sup>17</sup>Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?”

While the brigands escorted Jesus under arrest, John had apparently followed Jesus somewhat closer than had Peter. John had “went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.” Peter did not venture in, but John did so. He was known by those of the household of the high priest, for he knew the family of the high priest and had, I would suspect, visited there before. It was John who had gained admittance for Peter. It was his word to the servant girl at the door that allowed Peter to enter the courtyard. But Peter entered with an unfamiliarity that John possessed.

Unlike the “other disciple”, he was not accustomed to entering the headquarters of persons in high society, and the unfamiliarity of these surroundings added to the general sense of uneasiness that made him lose his nerve. For all the confidence with which, in the upper room, he had declared his readiness to lay down his life for His Master (13:37), the event was to prove that his Master knew Peter better than Peter knew himself (13:38).<sup>7</sup>

This first portion of John’s account of Peter’s denials concludes with Peter standing by the fire alongside the very ones who had arrested Jesus. **Verse 18** records, “*Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.*” Although Peter was perhaps but a few dozen yards from Jesus who had been taken indoors, Peter now stood at a distance from Him, and failed to own Jesus as His Lord and Savior. May the Lord not allow any of us to be so removed from fellowship in His presence that we would fail to own Him before others who deny Him and are opposed to Him.

Now after having related this first of three denials of Peter, John recorded...

### III. The interrogation of Jesus by Annas (vs. 19-24).

<sup>19</sup>The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

<sup>20</sup>Jesus answered him, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. <sup>21</sup>Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.”

<sup>22</sup>And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?”

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?”

<sup>24</sup>Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

The first question to answer is who is this “high priest” that is mentioned in **verse 19**? There we read, “*The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.*” We saw earlier that Annas was the father-in-law to the high priest (v. 13). But when Jesus was arrested, they escorted him to the house of

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<sup>7</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 345.

Annas. And then here in verse 19, the writer of the Gospel began to relate the interrogation of Jesus by the “high priest.” We should understand that this is also a reference to Annas, even though technically he was not high priest, but rather his son-in-law served in that role at this time. But it does betray the fact that the Jews probably continued to regard Annas as the legitimate high priest. We know that this is Annas, for we do not read until later in verse 24, “Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.”

Annas essentially asked Jesus two questions, one about His disciples and the other about His doctrine, or what it was that He taught. We should understand this question to inquire what distinguished Jesus, what Jesus Himself would regard as His central message that He was proclaiming to His disciples. Actually, it is quite a good question to initially ask of someone who claims to be a Christian and who speaks to others regarding the Christian faith. “Who are your followers or with whom do you walk?” And, “What is the central, primary message that you are attempting to make known and convince people to embrace?” One capsulated Annas’ inquiry:

The *high priest* (here surely Annas; cf. notes on v. 13) questioned Jesus about two matters, *His disciples and His teaching*. The former question may have dealt with the size of His following and the potential for any possible conspiracy, the latter question suggests that the fundamental concern of the Jewish authorities was theological, even though they presented the case to Pilate (being Roman) as primarily political (cf. 19:7, 12). At the core of their concern was Jesus’ claim as to Who He was (19:7), and consequently their fear that He was leading the people astray, into apostasy (cf. 7:12, 47).<sup>8</sup>

Others described Annas’ concerns this way: “He really wanted to know just how influential Jesus had become and how large a following He had gathered. This was of more concern to Annas than the truth or falsity of Jesus’ teaching.”<sup>9</sup>

Jesus refused to answer Annas directly. Instead, He stated that He had taught openly and widely, that there were those who had heard Him that were available to testify as legitimate witnesses of what He had taught them. **Verses 20 and 21** record Jesus’ answer to Annas:

***“I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. <sup>21</sup>Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.”***

Jesus refused to say anything directly regarding His disciples. He stated that there were many who had heard him publicly and repeatedly teaching in the synagogues and the temple. His message was no secret message. He had spoken openly, frequently, and clearly. He must have taught so clearly and frequently that just about anyone who had heard Him could relate what He had taught them. He had taught His disciples the same things as He taught in public.

But what Jesus had said to them (His disciples) in private was of a piece with what He said in public. He did not maintain one message for public consumption and another, more dangerous one for a secret group of initiates. His private discourses further unpacked what He said in public, or extrapolated His message a little farther according to His perception of His followers’ willingness and capacity to understand and obey. But the heart of what He preached was in the public arena, the result of teaching *in synagogues or at the temple*. Therefore there was little point in questioning His disciples, any of the countless thousands who had heard Him would do.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 583f.

<sup>9</sup> **NET Bible, Full Notes Edition** (Thomas Nelson, 1996, 2019), p. 2056. In this quotation I changed the word “that” to “than”, because I think it probably corrects an error in the editing of the comment by the printers. The word “that” makes no sense in this clause.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 584.

One of the officers reacted to Jesus' words, interpreting His words as disrespectful and dishonoring of Annas. We read in **verse 22**, "*And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, and 'Do You answer the high priest like that?'*" Can you imagine the horror of this man on the Day of Judgment when He stands before His Judge, Jesus Christ, the one that he had struck?

It might be good at this point to affirm that the entire proceedings of the trial(s) of Jesus were unjust and illegitimate. It was a travesty of justice—Jewish justice. Several centuries later when the Jewish **Mishna** was written and published, it included the nature of a just trial conducted by Jewish authorities. Now granted, it was two centuries after this event recorded before us, but it must have reflected long held and practiced judicial procedure. **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) wrote,

It is regularly pointed out that in the tractate *Sanhedrin* of the Jewish Mishnah it is stipulated that in the capital cases there were to be no night trials, that the proceedings had to extend over at least two consecutive days, and that provision was made for the private interrogation of witnesses.

Similarly **George Beasley-Murray** (1916-2000) recorded,

The observation has often been made that the procedure of the Jewish authorities in the trial accounts is in crass contradiction to the rules laid down in the tractate *Sanhedrin* concerning the trials for capital offenses. No less than twenty-seven deviations from the latter have been reckoned in the synoptic records!<sup>11</sup>

The Reformation Study Bible gives a few specific transgressions of the Jewish authorities in their trial of Jesus.

Judging from the description of rules for trials found in the *Mishnah* of some two hundred years later, the proceedings here were marked by serious irregularities and violations of Jewish law. The Sanhedrin was not supposed to meet at night; the death penalty could not be declared on the day of the trial; there was false evidence, and false witnesses were used (Matt. 26:59, 60); Jesus was exposed to blows from attendants during the trial (v. 22; Mark 14:65). In addition to all this, it was illegal for the Sanhedrin to meet for a capital case on the eve of a Sabbath or a feast day. These violations show that Jesus' condemnation by the Jewish authorities was a travesty of justice.<sup>12</sup>

Similar to what happened to Jesus being struck before a high priest, the Apostle Paul also experienced the same injustice. When Paul had stood before the Jewish high priest, he did not recognize him as such. We read of this in Acts 23:1ff.

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."<sup>2</sup> And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.<sup>3</sup> Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

<sup>4</sup>And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

<sup>5</sup>Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:1-5)

Now Paul had reviled the high priest and as a result was smitten. But in his response he confronted them with having violated the law in having smitten him: "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?" Of course Jesus did not revile the high priest; rather, in His response He was essentially calling for a legitimate legal proceeding of interviewing witnesses.

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<sup>11</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 302.

<sup>12</sup> Sproul, R. C., gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 1699.



In any court inquiry among Jews the correct procedure was to call witnesses, not to question the accused. (so Bornhaeuser: “Jewish judges did not enquire of the accused, but of the witnesses. On their testimony everything depended. If two witnesses agreed on essentials, then the accused was doomed, no matter what he might say in his defense,” *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, 98.) Jesus accordingly was justified in objecting to the procedure and demanding a proper trial. Moreover, the questions of Annas about Jesus’ disciples and His teaching are likely to be linked with the tradition perpetuated in the Talmud that Jesus was convicted of being a false prophet (note the citation from *Sanhedrin* 43a cited on p. 319). The mark of the false prophet is that he “secretly entices” or “leads astray” the people to apostatize from the God of Israel, the punishment for which is death (see Deut. 13:1-10). It looks as if Annas was endeavoring to make Jesus incriminate Himself on this issue. Jesus sees through this attempt and declares that His teaching of the people has been in public places, in the temple, and in synagogues, not in secret with a view of promoting apostasy among the people (observe that the charge that Jesus “leads astray” the people appears earlier in the Gospel, e.g. 7:12, 47).<sup>13</sup>

The reaction and response of Jesus to having been struck is found in **verse 23**, “*Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’*” It would seem that this brought an end to the inquiry of Annas. What is suggested is that Annas’ effort had failed. to incriminate Jesus, to find a charge that he may relate later to the Sanhedrin.

We then read in **verse 24**, “*Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.*” It is very possible that Annas and his son-in-law lived in the same palace, but that their living quarters were separated by a common courtyard.

#### **IV. Peter’s second and third denials of Jesus (vs. 25-27).**

<sup>25</sup>Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, “You are not also one of His disciples, are you?”

He denied it and said, “I am not!”

<sup>26</sup>One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” <sup>27</sup>Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

Even though it seems some time had passed since his first denial, it does not appear that Peter had not been felt remorse for that initial defection. According to the Synoptics, he did so when the rooster crowed at which time he remembered his Lord’s warning and prediction. Then he was struck with shame and remorse. But here we read that he “warmed himself” even as His Master was being abused in His interrogation. Peter denied the Lord two more times, making three, and then in accordance with Jesus’ word, “immediately a rooster crowed.”

Of course even in Peter’s defection from and denial of Jesus, Peter’s salvation was never in danger. He was not as Judas who had betrayed the Lord and perished in his sin, being “the son of perdition.” Peter was weak in faith, but not void of faith. Even in his denial and in his bitter weeping and remorse, Peter still had the grace of saving faith in His Savior and Lord. How do we know this? It is not clear from John’s Gospel, but it is from the account in the Synoptics. When our Lord had warned Peter of the spiritual danger he was in, He had told him that satan was behind it all, who had desired to extinguish faith in Peter. But Jesus had prayed for Peter, that his faith would not fail. This is recorded for us in Luke’s account of our Lord’s prediction to Peter.

And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup>*But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.*”

<sup>33</sup>But he said to Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.”

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 324.

<sup>34</sup>Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.” (Luke 22:31-34)

We have addressed this before, but it is such an important lesson for us it bears repetition. We read of poor Peter. He was very proud, confident of his faith and love toward Jesus. He believed that he was more spiritual and courageous than any others who followed the Savior. His pride preceded his “destruction”; his haughty spirit portended his “fall” (Cf. Prov. 16:8). The trial would come from Satan, but the spiritual benefit or fruit that would result would be due to the intercession and authority of Jesus Christ. Only after Peter experienced this great trial of faith, was he truly ready for spiritual leadership among the people of God. And in order to maximize the benefit of this sifting work in Peter’s life, the Lord in very clear manner, predicted the exact time at which Peter would deny that he even knew Him. Jesus saw the danger that Peter as in (22:31). ***Sometimes those more mature than we see the precipice before us long before we take the great fall.*** Satan was after Peter.

From these words we could conclude a number of things. ***First, we see that Satan had to ask permission to do harm to Peter.*** Satan is, and always has been subject to God’s sovereign rule. God lets him have his way frequently so as to bring judgment on persons. Satan had to ask permission to do harm to Peter. Satan is, and always has been subject to God’s sovereign rule. God lets him have his way frequently so as to bring judgment on persons. Satan would have his way with Peter in a measure, but only to the degree that the Lord Jesus would permit.

***Second, we read that the devil desired and intended to destroy Peter’s faith, but the Lord told Peter that He had prayed for him*** (22:32a). Jesus Christ is the High Priest of His people. He cares for His people and their well-being. In their need, He comes to the Father interceding on their behalf. “He presently is praying for His people that they would stay and stand in true faith in Him. “He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Here we see the need for, and the effectual nature of, the prayer of Jesus for His own. What Jesus asks of the Father is always granted to Him. He prays that you (the true Christian) will be kept in the hour of trial, and that trial cannot overthrow your faith, even though the devil in all his fury is vented against you. Christ prays for His own with effectual prayers. Our requests are not always granted to us. If we ask with wrong motives, if we have rebellion in our heart, if we pray for things not according to the will of God, our requests remain unanswered. But all of our Lord’s prayers are effectual. He in essence told Peter, “*Satan wants you, Peter, but I have prayed for you.*” See how dependent we are upon our Lord Jesus! Forces all too subtle and powerful would ravage us if it were not for our Lord’s intercession on our behalf. And so, if you are a Christian, the Lord Jesus intercedes for you in praying to His Father. He will see to it that your faith will not fail, though it will most certainly be tested and refined (cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-8).

The Lord’s prayer for Peter did not remove the trial or his failure, rather, it reversed the outcome so as to render spiritual benefit for Peter rather than harm. There may be two people, one a Christian and one a non-Christian. They experience identical calamity, but one is ultimately helped by it, when the other may be destroyed by it. This is due to the sovereign work of God’s grace in the matter. Being a Christian will not necessarily spare you from tragedy, but it does assure you that tragedy will not destroy you, but rather the Lord will use it to produce in you that which is truly good and right.

Notice that both the Lord and the devil are in the “sifting” business. He told Peter, ***Satan wants to “sift you as wheat.”*** Here “wheat” is an emblem of ***faith***. Satan wants to so blow the winds of adversity upon you so that your faith will be blown away and only chaff remains. What Satan wanted Peter to do was to apostatize from Christ, to stop believing and ceased to follow Him as His Lord and Saviour. But notice that ***the Lord Jesus is also in the sifting business.*** But he uses the wind to blow the chaff away so only the pure grain of faith remains.

By the way, notice that our Lord Jesus, even while on earth, was informed of events occurring in heaven. He knew of Satan’s designs. He did not employ His divine nature often when He was ministering on earth, but from time to time we see it displayed. Here is one of those instances.

Thankfully, ***through the prayer of Jesus, the works of the devil are thwarted.*** We emphasize a great deal the matter of perseverance in faith and obedience, for there is no salvation promised to one who does not persevere in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. We do so in order to drive home our responsibility to be watchful and to employ the means God has given us to stand. But this emphasis may result in a timid soul

becoming fearful because he is so aware of his weakness and sinfulness. But be assured of this: The Lord has prayed that your faith will fail not. The same prayer that upheld Peter will uphold all true believers steadfast to the end. The grace of God will see us through trials which would destroy a person who lacks saving grace. But our Lord gives sufficient grace to all His own.

**Third, we see the presumption of Peter** regarding himself in Luke 22:33: **“But he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.’”** In this event in Peter’s life we have a wonderful illustration of divine provision even in the midst of human ignorance and folly. The only reason Peter would *not* be sifted is due to the grace of God, but he thought himself all sufficient in and of himself to withstand any trial. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:12: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” This was not a statement of faith by Peter; it was foolishness. Peter was sincere, but all too secure in his the estimation of himself. He had too **high** view of himself. He had too **little** a view of Satan. He had too **low** a view of Christ. Peter said in effect, “Though prison threaten me, though death stares me in the face, Lord, I, even I, will stand with you.” And in a few hours it would not be a rack or a point of a sword that would shrivel his valor, but the flippant tongue of a young maid. But Peter learned a valuable lesson here in the nature of faith: ***faith is not presumption that I am able to stand, but rather confidence that He is able to keep me.***”

But **fourth**, in this event we see **the preparation of Peter for future service.** **“Jesus said to him, when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren”** (22:32b). If only we would learn only through instruction. If only we would simply read the Word of God and apply it in a diligent manner, we would save ourselves a whole lot of grief. But Peter would not take to heart the instruction until it was driven home to his heart through **experience**. This event cured Peter of his presumption. Never again would Peter be known as the boastful, patronizing, disciple. He was cut down in a night. And as a result he became a fit leader of the people of God. Through this trial using the devil, the Lord made Peter into a rock, a pillar, even the foundation, on which the church could rest. He would become a real cause of “strengthening of the brethren.” Thereafter, when believers became **arrogant** and **self-sufficient**, Peter would warn them, “be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). When believers would become **careless** in their walk, **unwatchful respecting Satan** they could see his words: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). When believers were later be **shaken from their steadfastness**, they could read in his writings, “But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet. 5:10). And in so writing, Peter strengthened and has strengthened many brothers and sisters in Christ over these many centuries.

May our Lord enable us to always be ready and able by His grace to give a faithful witness of Him and His Words when the opportunity is set before us. May He fill us with the Holy Spirit to give us courage on those occasions and words that our hearers will in no way be able to disregard or forget. And may our Lord forgive and restore us when we do fail, as Peter had failed, for none of us have been or will be perfect witnesses of Jesus Christ, as He deserves to be declared before others.

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But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,  
after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.  
To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10f)

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