

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are  
Most Surely Believed Among Us  
An Expository Study of the Gospel According to Luke  
Chapter 22- **Luke 22:63-71**  
337- Jesus on Trial- Part 1- The False Witnesses; the  
Destroyed Temple; and the Bringing in of a Better  
Covenant

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December 11, 2016

**Luke 22:63-71**

**63** Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him,

**64** and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophecy, who is the one who hit You?"

**65** And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming.

**66** When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council *chamber*, saying,

**67** "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "**If I tell you, you will not believe;**

**68** and if I ask a question, you will not answer.

**69** "**But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD.**"

**70** And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "**Yes, I am.**"

**71** Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

To the Glory of God

It is very important that we always remember that God is doing a whole lot more than we know about. At any moment of every day, God is doing ten thousand things, and we are probably only aware of about

three of them. The one, true, living God of the Bible is very busy, sovereignly *causing* certain things to come about, and sovereignly *allowing* others, so that His Will and Plan will come to pass *exactly* as He determined before the world was.

God never sleeps, He never forgets, He doesn't lose His place, He doesn't get tired. God is ever vigilant, always *pushing* and *pulling* and raising up and casting down people and events for one single end, so that the fame of His Name will be exalted and magnified and cherished and valued more than anything else in all of Creation.

God is great, and God is the single most beautiful and magnificent and lovely and important Being in the Universe, and nobody understands that more than God does. And so the very best thing that God can give to us is *not* a new car or good health or more possessions, but the single best expression of the Love of God is that He does whatever He needs to do, so that He may give you *Himself*.

And sin stops that from happening. And so, God, all by Himself, at great cost to Himself, the horrific death of His Own Son, forgave and removed our sin. And that allows God to give you the greatest Gift of all, Himself.

That is what Sovereignty is all about. God doing this all by Himself. And that is what Salvation is all about, removing sin so that you and I will have the high honor and the distinct privilege to know God, to love God, and to enjoy God forever. And that is what Love is all about, radically changing wicked rebels so that they will have both the will and the power to love God, Who is the greatest Commodity in the Universe.

O, how terrible it would be if all that God was interested in was giving us a "better life" down here! O, how base and shallow it would be if all God was interested in was loving *us*! O, how narrow it would be if all God was interested in was to elevate *our* importance. O, how damaging it would be if all God was interested in was our place in Heaven! God is interested in God, and that is why God's *primary* Concern, His chief motivating factor as to why He does what He does, is that He is known and feared and adored and wondered after. And in order for that to happen, there must be sinners to save and sinners to damn.

You see, there are certain manifestations of God's Personal Attributes that simply *cannot* be displayed when God is by Himself.

Before He made the world, before He made light or darkness, before God created the Heavens and the earth, all that was was God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And the three Persons of the one God enjoyed *perfect* Harmony, *perfect* Love, *perfect* Unity, and *perfect* Joy among themselves. They were not lonely and they didn't lack for anything. And, at that time, God possessed both Grace and Righteousness. Both of those Attributes were a part of God's Make-up then. And they were both full and glorious.

But God cannot manifest either Grace or Righteousness by Himself. God cannot display His Grace to Himself, precisely because He doesn't need Grace. God cannot display the various outflows of His Righteousness like Wrath and Vengeance and Jealousy and Retribution by Himself. So, in order for the magnificent Glory of God's Grace to be displayed requires that there be sinful people who need it. And, in order for the Glory of the various attributes of God's Righteousness to be displayed, requires unrepentant sinners to insult and belittle God's Glory.

And *that* is why God made Man. And *that* is why He allowed Man to fall, so that the Glory of God's Grace and the Glory of God's Righteousness would be displayed when He rescued them. Please turn with me to read what the Apostle Paul said about this in **Ephesians 1:3-6**:

**3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,**  
**4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love**  
**5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,**  
**6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**

Look again at verse 4:

**He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.**

Here the Apostle teaches that the Purpose of being chosen is *not* simply to be forgiven, but so that:

**... we would be holy and blameless before Him.**

We were chosen by God when it was just God, before the foundation of the world, before we were born, before we did anything good or bad, so that we would be two things:

1. *Holy*- meaning set apart
2. *Blameless*- meaning forgiven and made Righteous

We were chosen so that we would become holy and be forgiven and made righteous by what God did for us, all by Himself.

... now look again at verses 5-6:

**5 In Love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,  
6 to the praise of the glory of His grace...**

So here Paul teaches that God “**predestined us to adoption**”, meaning that He determined before He created anything that wicked sinners, people who insult God’s Glory all day long, would become a part of God’s family, to one end, to one single end:

**... to the praise of the glory of His grace...**

So, God’s Grace has a “glory” to it. And, so that the Glory of His Grace would be displayed and seen and marveled at, He saved us. In other words, the wondrous Glory that shines forth from God’s Grace testifies to the Wisdom and the Power and the Kindness of God. And God desires that all the nations behold the Glory of His Grace as it is displayed through the rescuing of unworthy sinners, so they will praise it, and so they will praise Him.

But, in order for that to happen, Jesus has to die. And, in order for Jesus to die, He has to stand trial and be found guilty and be put to death, which on the surface is utterly ridiculous, because Jesus is the

only sinless Man Who ever lived. And so, it will be completely *impossible* for any of these people to find any legitimate guilt in Jesus. And yet, if they don't, they will have to let Him go and He won't die and the Glory of God's Grace in rescuing unworthy sinners will never be displayed.

And so, even at this moment, when things look like evil is triumphing, God's Sovereignty is busy at work to *assure* that His Will is carried out *exactly* as God determined it would be, before He created anything. God is moving passively here to sovereignly *allow* evil men to *not* find Jesus innocent, even though He really was. And that is because it is God's Will that evil triumph at this moment, so that an infinitely greater Good will come about.

The evil actions of these evil men are real and true, but they are not decisive. God is decisive. And God's Will is decisive. And it is God's Will to display the Glory of His Grace by saving unworthy sinners by what He alone does for them. And the way that this Will of God is carried out is by God allowing evil choices and evil actions of evil men to temporarily triumph. In **The Acts 4:27-28**, the Apostle Peter led the other disciples in a prayer as they were being persecuted and they prayed this way:

**27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,  
28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.**

Let me re-phrase what Peter just said. God's Sovereignty was manifested here in *allowing* evil men to carry out, without hindrance, the evil that was already in their hearts, so they could conduct a phony trial, for the express purpose of finding a completely innocent Man guilty. And, in so doing, the Jews will violate almost every Law that God gave them, and the Romans will sin against their own jurisprudence which, at that time, was one of the most advanced in the world.

So, over the next several sermons, I will demonstrate at least three things to you:

- ✓ Jesus is totally innocent of every charge these people make against Him.
- ✓ Jesus will be found guilty by both the Romans and the Jews.
- ✓ In order to find Jesus guilty, they will condemn themselves.

Jesus is going to have to be very careful during this trial, because if He says or does too much, they will have to let Him go. But Jesus doesn't *want* to be let go, He doesn't *want* to continue to live. Much to the dismay of the eleven remaining disciples, Jesus has no intention of prolonging His life. Jesus fully intends to let evil men murder Him.

Now it is very important for us to remember why Jesus is so serene here. It is very important for us to remember how Jesus came to the place of humbling Himself to God's Will to die. And it is important for us to remember, because the way that Jesus came to this place is the very same way that you and I will come to the place of fully surrendering to God's Will in our lives, through prayer.

Jesus has just spent several hours crying out to God in prayer, to the point of sweating blood. And the Power to fully surrender to God's Will for Him to die for the sins of the world, the ability for Jesus to gladly and joyfully allow Himself to be made sin and to have God depart from Him, was gained through this time of serious, deep, agonizing prayer.

Because Jesus is not afraid to die. That wasn't His struggle. His struggle was that by surrendering to God's Will, all of the sins of all of God's elect had to be placed on Jesus, and at that moment, God the Father would have to withdraw His Presence from Jesus that He and Jesus had enjoyed since before God created the Universe. And then God was going to pour the full Fury of His Righteous Anger against those sins on Jesus, and Jesus would literally become a Curse.

So Jesus will not be found guilty in this trial because He actually is guilty, but simply because it is the Father's Will for Him to die. So it is my intention to say that the so-called "trial" of Jesus Christ is a farce, a sad joke, and a travesty of justice. That whether you look at this from the standpoint of either Jewish or Roman law, Jesus' accusers don't have a leg to stand on.

It is also my intention to say that it is patently dishonest, as is commonly taught even today by Jews all over the world, for anyone to say that Jesus was merely a Jewish rabbi, who was found guilty by a

jury of His peers, and executed for breaking both Jewish and Roman law. That simply isn't true and is an evil re-write of history that bears no resemblance to the facts as presented by the only Record that anyone has of this trial, and that is, the four Gospel Accounts.

Now, one of the first things we need to understand about this so-called "trial" is that the outcome of it was a foregone conclusion. The religious hypocrites that initiated this trial already condemned Jesus way before this night. And the only reason they had waited this long was to try to develop some type of strategy as to *how* they could find Jesus guilty, not *if*.

So, the entire exercise of this trial is demonstrated here for only one reason, for the very same reason they prayed long drawn-out prayers in public, for show, to appease their own guilty conscience, and was not, in any way, an attempt to discover the Truth about Jesus.

And this is the same reason why many people, even in our day, engage Jesus Christ. Many people who ask questions about Jesus and who conduct research about Jesus and who look for information about Jesus have no intention of honestly seeking the Truth about this Man, so that they might worship and serve Him. No, the bulk of all the examination that is carried out and the questions that are asked in our day about Jesus are for one reason, the very same reason that these men put Him on trial, for show. It is a public exercise in hypocrisy, to try to assuage their own guilt as to why they simply do not bow before Jesus and obey Him. And the result will be the same as it was for those who actually put Jesus on trial, they are sealing their own doom.

You see, there is only one correct response to Jesus Christ, and that is to fall on your face and worship Him. And every Muslim and every Jew and every Humanist and every Agnostic and every Atheist who looks at the inspired and infallible Record of the Life, and the Works and the Actions and the Teachings of Jesus Christ, and does not call Him "God" and adore Him, is, by definition, a liar and a hypocrite.

So, not say there isn't enough data for you to repent and believe, because there is. Do not say there isn't enough proof or that Jesus didn't perform enough miracles or speak enough Truth. That is hypocrisy at its worst. No, there is only one reason why people who examine the record do not adore and follow Jesus, and that is because they don't want to. And the reason they don't want to is because God

has done nothing to cause them to want to and is leaving them to themselves. So, there are many things being done here, all at once:

- ✓ Jesus is gladly surrendering to His Father's Will.
- ✓ Jesus is fulfilling several Old Testament Prophecies about the Messiah.
- ✓ Evil men are allowed to carry out the evil in their hearts, thus dooming them.
- ✓ God is bringing an end to the First Covenant.

... and all of this is being carried out so that the Glory of God's Grace will be displayed on the unworthy sinners who are chosen to be saved from before the foundation of the world, and the Glory of God's Righteousness will be displayed on the unrepentant sinners, whom God leaves to themselves.

Now those of you who have traveled with me on this multi-year "journey" through the Gospel of Luke have noticed that this Gentile medical doctor has been meticulous in gathering data and information about Who Jesus is and what Jesus said and what Jesus did during His three-year Ministry. The good doctor opened this Gospel Record with these words:

#### **Luke 1:1-4**

- 1** Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,  
**2** just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,  
**3** it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;  
**4** so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Now we know that part of him "compil[ing] an account of the things accomplished among" them by Jesus was this multi-year effort:

**... having investigated everything carefully from the beginning ...**

And so, Luke was commissioned by the Apostle Paul to:



**... write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;**

... and he did all of this:

**so that you [Theophilus and everyone else who reads this Record] may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.**

And part of that effort was engaging in interviews with remaining eyewitnesses who were there during the Birth, Life, and Ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, including Mary, the mother of the Lord.

Luke gives us several testimonies from different witnesses as to the Truth about Jesus, including:

- ✓ Zacharias and Elizabeth
- ✓ Mary and Joseph
- ✓ Shepherds
- ✓ Kings from the East
- ✓ Anna and Simeon
- ✓ Several recipients of miracles
- ✓ John the Baptist
- ✓ The Apostles

... in addition to these people, Luke, also, gives us testimony from:

- ✓ The Angel Gabriel
- ✓ God the Father
- ✓ God the Holy Spirit

So the Gospel of Luke is not a book of superstition written by a religious fanatic, as so many people in our day claim, but rather a very well researched and documented legal record of the Life and Ministry of Jesus the Christ. Luke is a collection of historical Facts, backed up with credible testimony from several different sources who all attest to the same things:

- Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy concerning the Jewish Messiah.

- Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
- Jesus is the only Savior of sinners.
- Jesus is God Almighty in human flesh.
- Jesus is the Temple.
- Jesus is the Mediator of a "Better" Covenant.

This goes along with a Principle that God gave to the Jews under the Mosaic Law about establishing the Truth about serious matters through the verbal testimony of two or three reliable witnesses. For example, when a person was accused of idolatry, which under the Law was punishable by death, there had to be at least two reliable witnesses to his crime before the death penalty could be invoked. But, Dr. Luke went far and beyond what was required of him and offered Theophilus, and us, many more than two or three. This shows an amazing effort on his part to arrive at facts that could be either repudiated or verified.

And this is the way it is with Christianity, in general. We are not asked to believe in emotional experiences or in mystical utterances, we are given reliable, historical, and verifiable facts about the Life and Ministry of Jesus so that our faith would not stand in jeopardy, but would be based in reality.

And so, in order to assure that serious matters would be adjudicated based on Truth and not lies, or even opinions, God gave Moses very harsh penalties for witnesses who were false. For example, **Deuteronomy 19:16-20** says:

**16 "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing,  
17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days.**

**18 "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely,**

**19 then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.**

**20 "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.**

And so, whatever the penalty was for the guilty party, that same penalty would be administered to the one giving false witness. And, of

course, this goes back to the eternal Divine Law that God gave to Moses in **Exodus 20:16**:

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

And this section of God's Law is eternal, and is in force today under the glorious New Covenant, because God is a God of Truth. In fact, this is one area where God Himself is unable to carry out. The Apostle Paul was moved along by God the Holy Spirit to tell Titus, the young past of the Church on the island of Crete:

**... God... cannot lie ...**

It isn't that God *should not* lie or even that God *does not* lie, but the Bible teaches that God *cannot* lie. The God of the Bible is *unable* to utter falsehoods. So, even though God is Omnipotent, and is in total control over everything that has been made, God does not possess the ability or power to think or act contrary to His Own Pristine Righteousness.

And this means that we can trust what God says. It means that everything that comes out of God's Mouth is true and reliable and trustworthy, which means whatever God says, is *worthy* or *deserving* of our trust.

But here, the Jewish rulers didn't follow this Divine Principle at all, but put on a show trial that was *not* based in verifiable facts, it was not based in reliable and trustworthy witnesses, but was based in the prejudice and wickedness of the rulers themselves.

Another aspect of both Jewish and Roman law was that all trials had to be public, with witnesses, who could attest to the fairness and accuracy of the proceedings. But, the trial of Jesus was secret and was at night.

Another aspect of both Jewish and Roman law was the issue of "self-incrimination". A person cannot incriminate himself, especially about serious crimes where death was the punishment. There must be other witnesses to verify the facts. Yet, in **Luke 22:71**, those in charge of this trial said:

**What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.**

Now what exactly did they hear out of Jesus' Mouth that made them say this? In verse 70, they asked Jesus point blank:

**... Are You the Son of God, then? ...**

... and He answered them,

**Yes, I am.**

Now keep in mind that the phrase "Son of God" meant that Jesus was of the very same substance or Essence as God Himself, which, in effect, made Jesus to be equal with God. And for any mere mortal to say that was the worst sort of blasphemy punishable by death. But, Jesus was, in fact, God Almighty in human flesh, and so His statement was not blasphemy but Truth.

But as far as they were concerned, Jesus had committed horrific blasphemy and should be stoned to death. Yet their own law and the Principles that God Himself gave them required that they have other reliable witnesses besides the ones presiding over the trial to testify against Him. And once again, their hatred for Jesus allowed them to ignore this part of their law.

There are several other aspects of how Jews conducted trials that went to great lengths to assure that impartial Justice was actually being carried out that are really amazing, such as younger judges would vote guilty or innocent first so their vote wasn't influenced by their respect for older judges.

Here are several other aspects of how trials were supposed to be conducted such as:

- ✓ No criminal trial could be held at night.
- ✓ No trial could begin in the afternoon so they would hurry through it before time ran out.
- ✓ The property of the condemned was given to his family and not confiscated.

- ✓ If the Sanhedrin voted unanimously for a guilty verdict, the accused would be set free because the Court had demonstrated a lack of Mercy.

There was no jurisprudence system like it anywhere in the world. It *always* erred on the side of Mercy, because these men were taught from the time they were children that God was a God of Mercy. And they also knew that the way they conducted trials, especially with the guilty, was a reflection of their own character and morality. And so, all trials were to be conducted with the highest of Principles as the best way to arrive at Truth.

And everybody there that night knew of all this. And yet, on this night every single one of these men violated it all. They absolutely threw every vestige of dignity and Truth to the wind, and were guilty of conducting a kangaroo court to condemn the most innocent Man Who ever lived.

Now, as I told you last week, there is a lot of confusion surrounding the Trial of Jesus, and one reason is because the various Gospel writers only recorded certain aspects of it. And so as we go through this, we're going to jump back and forth through all four Gospel Records so we can get the full picture.

But this morning I want to at least give you a *summary* of the Trial of Jesus because we only have one more Sermon in Luke this year before the Message on the Incarnation on December 25. And then, we're going to take a short "vacation" from Luke to begin 2017 with a Sermon Series on what Sanctification looks like, and how it is supposed to work in our lives.

So we need to understand that the Trial of Jesus was actually an all-night series of several smaller trials that took place sometime right after midnight until early Friday morning. And there are six of these smaller trials, three conducted by the Jews and three conducted by the Romans. And the reason the Romans were involved is because the Jews were not allowed to carry out the death penalty without Roman approval.

So first, Jesus was brought before Annas, who really wasn't even a High Priest. Caiaphas was the High Priest at that time. Now, as we found out last week, Annas *used* to be the High Priest and had probably

developed many connections, both political and religious, and so he was the real power while Caiaphas was his son-in-law.

And we also found out last week that Annas' and Caiaphas' houses were joined in the middle by a common courtyard. And it was in that courtyard where Peter and John were. And it was when Jesus was being moved between standing before Annas and Caiaphas, through this courtyard, when Peter denied that he even knew Jesus and confirmed his denial with a vow, and it was at that very moment when the cock crowed and Jesus looked at Peter and Peter was brought under genuine, Holy Spirit conviction.

Jesus was brought to Annas immediately after being brought out of the Garden of Gethsemane. And the point of this was because the Jews had no crime with which to charge Jesus. And so Jesus is brought before Annas to try to drum up some fictitious charge against Him. Now, in our terminology, Annas would have been acting as a Grand Jury, and so he was the one who had to come up with an indictment against Jesus that would stick and that would pass through the examination of the Roman authorities, so they could murder Jesus.

Jesus stands before Annas first to have a false criminal charge levied against Him, sometime after midnight. And this didn't take very long. In fact, what took more time was the fact that they beat Jesus. That took longer than inventing a fictitious charge against Him.

And then from Annas, Jesus is sent to Caiaphas. And when He comes to Caiaphas, He meets with Caiaphas and the entire Sanhedrin, who have by this time been assembled. And this is still in the middle of the night.

Then in the morning after they've already had their trial in the darkness, violating their own principle, they have this mock public trial which is a performance for show to make it look legitimate, and they repeat everything they did in the night trial.

And that's the first three smaller trials that constitute the Jewish portion of it.

Then comes the three smaller trials from the Roman side. Back during the night, after Jesus stood before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, He is sent over to Pontus Pilate. And from Pilate, Jesus is sent to Herod. And from Herod, He is sent back to Pilate, who finally rules on the death sentence because he's intimidated by the Jews.

And all six of these smaller illegal trials that violated every aspect of both Jewish and Roman law took place in just a few hours under the cover of darkness.

And then by noon on Friday, Jesus is crucified. And by three o'clock He is dead. And before sundown, Jesus is buried and everybody goes home and everybody involved thinks that this is the end of it, and that nobody will ever know, and now they can resume their hypocritical lives with no one the wiser.

These men had successfully killed the Prince of Life. And they thought that was going to be the end of it. But even though these men had acted on their own and had *voluntarily* chosen to do this wicked deed, the Bible says that what they did was *predetermined* by God to be done. So even though they did what they *wanted* to do, God was completely sovereign over their evil choice and actions. And even though these men were fully accountable for the evil that they did, God was the One Who had sovereignly allowed Jesus to be killed. Jesus, Himself, said in **John 10:17-18**:

**17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.**

**18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."**

So these men had fulfilled the Prophecy of Jesus that He gave them in **John 2:19**:

**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**

So what really happened is that these men had successfully torn down the Temple of God. And Jesus has told them that if they did this, that three days later He would raise it back up! And so early on Sunday morning, the First Day of the Week, the Spirit of Life from God entered back into Jesus' dead body, and He rose from the dead by the Glory of the Father and everything changed! And all of their hypocrisy and all of their wickedness was brought to light, and now whoever believes may be saved!

Now why did Jesus say this? Why did He equate Himself with the Temple? Now most people read this and draw the conclusion that Jesus was equating the destruction of the Temple with His Own Death, and rebuilding the Temple with His Resurrection. And that would be it. But I think there is more here than that, and I think it has a connection, not only with Jesus, but also with the issue of false witnesses and the way this Trial is conducted.

And, in order to get this, we need to read what Dr. Luke wrote about this in **The Acts 6:8-15**, so please go there with me.

**8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.**

**9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, *including* both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.**

**10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.**

**11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God."**

**12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.**

**13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law;**

**14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."**

**15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.**

Now there are some questions I want to try to answer from this inspired Passage. And the first comes from verse 14. These Jews accuse Stephen of saying:

**This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.**



That is their accusation. So, my first question is: *Did Jesus actually say this? Did Jesus say that He would destroy the Temple?* The next question is: *Did Stephen mean the same thing that Jesus meant?* Because there is a difference in the way that Jesus and Stephen talked about the destruction of the Temple? So, why the difference?

Next, did Dr. Luke agree with what both Jesus and Stephen had said? And, if so, why did he say in verse 13 that the people set up “false witnesses” to say that Stephen said these things? Because if Stephen and Jesus really said that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the customs of Moses, how were these witnesses “false”?

Now before we tackle these three questions, there is one other, just by way of introduction, namely, *Does any of this really matter? Is this a vital issue? Should we care about any of this?* And as we ponder that, I want you to consider three things:

1. Stephen died for this Truth. In fact, he chose to go on speaking this Truth when he knew that it would cost him his life. He *chose* to die rather than *not* speak about Jesus' destruction of the Temple and His changing the customs of Moses. And verse 10 says that Stephen spoke with wisdom and with the Spirit. So, he was no fool to choose to die for this Truth. And, by default, that means we would be fools to *not* be willing to die for it, too.
2. The Jewish leaders killed for this Truth. They saw this Truth to be so threatening that it was better to kill a godly man than to let this Truth about the destruction of the Temple be taught and believed.
3. When Luke recorded Stephen's defense in chapter 7, he gives this more space than any other speech or message in the whole Book of the Acts.

## **1. Did Jesus say that He was going to destroy the Temple?**

Both **Matthew 26:61** and **Mark 14:58** tell us that at Jesus' Trial, “false witnesses” came forward and said:

**This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'**

And when the High Priest asked Jesus to make an answer to the charge, Jesus said nothing. But evidently, people believed this because both **Matthew 27:40** and **Mark 15:29** tell us that the crowds who passed by the Cross while Jesus was dying mocked Him by saying:

**You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."**

Now, the Apostle John is the only one who actually recorded what Jesus said. And **John 2** tells us that after He had just driven the sellers out of the Temple, the Jews asked him:

**John 2:18**

**What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?**

And it was then that Jesus answered:

**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**

But they came right back at Him and said:

**John 2:20**

**It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?**

And then John himself commented:

**John 2:21**

**But He was speaking of the temple of His body.**

Okay, here's the problem. Jesus never said that He was going to destroy the Temple. Jesus said, "[If you] destroy the Temple, and in three days I will raise it up". Now since we know from what John tells us that destroying the Temple referred to His Death, it is very likely that when Jesus said this He meant exactly what He was accused of saying. But, if that is true, how were these witnesses "false"? Yet the Bible says that the witnesses that said this were "false witnesses", which means they weren't telling the Truth.

So, when Jesus said this, did He simply mean that He would die and then rise again? Because, if that's all He meant, why did He say words like that while He was standing in the Temple? Because He had to know that most people would take Him to mean the Temple Building, which would cause people to think exactly what these witnesses were saying. Yet the Bible says these witnesses were "false".

I think the answer is that both for those who had ears to hear, and for those who thought this through after His Resurrection (like Stephen did!), Jesus meant: When I die, the Temple dies. When I am destroyed, the Temple is destroyed. This whole Old Covenant System, with all these sacrifices and all this blood and the Levitical Priesthood ministering around the Holy Place where God's Presence dwells, all of this ends when I die. You destroy Me, and in dying, I destroy the Temple and everything it represents.

And this is why the curtain in the Temple tore in two when Jesus died. It was a token of the utter annihilation of that entire religious system. And, since that time, the way into God's Presence does *not* involve Jews going to Jerusalem and entering the Temple, it involves God making a way for both Jews and Gentiles to abide in Jesus. And so Jesus Himself was taking the place of everything in the Temple!

And because Jesus *Himself* became our one and only High Priest, Who lives forever to make intercession for us, the Levitical Priesthood was "destroyed." And because Jesus offered *Himself* once for all to make an Eternal Redemption, all the animal sacrifices of the Temple are "destroyed." And because Jesus made *Himself* the Mercy Seat and made *His Own Blood* to be the Blood of the New Covenant, the Glory of God, the old "shekinah glory" of the Temple came down and rested on Him and raised Him from the dead. Peter said:

### **1Peter 1:21**

**... God raised him from the dead and gave him glory...**

Jesus is, as James says (2:1), "**the Lord of glory.**" And so the Temple is no longer the place where you go to see the Glory of God, Jesus is. Destroyed and in three days raised up, Jesus is where you go to see the Glory of God!

And so, in killing Jesus, these men destroyed the Temple. Because in His Death and Resurrection, we have a new Temple and a

new High Priest and a new Sacrifice, and a new Access to Glory and Fellowship with God. So, when John, the Apostle, has a vision of Heaven in **The Revelation 21:22-23**, he says:

**22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.**

**23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.**

So, what Jesus meant when He said, "**Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up,**" was that *He Himself* was taking the place of the Temple, by dying for sin once for all, and by rising from the dead to reign as the everlasting Priest and Lord of Glory. So, Jesus meant, *"When I die, the entire Temple system dies. And when I rise, I am now the Temple. I am the Sacrifice for sins. I am the Priest and the Mediator between Man and God. I am the Presence and the Radiance of God's Glory. And so when I die- the Temple is finished!"*

So my answer to the first question is, "Yes!" Jesus said that He would destroy the Temple.

2. Did Stephen mean what Jesus meant when he carried this Teaching on into the early Church?

And the reason I ask this is because **The Acts 6:14** *seems* to imply that Stephen was saying that the destruction was still to occur at some point in their future, yet Jesus had said the destruction would happen *immediately*, and the rebuilding would take place in just three days.

So how should we understand this? What Jesus meant was that the *basis* of the Old Testament sacrificial, priestly, worship system, which focused on the Temple, was destroyed when He died. And the word "destroyed" signifies the way a shadow is destroyed when the reality of light shines on it and takes its place. Jesus removed the very *basis* of the Temple system by laying Himself down as the Reality of Light that all the shadows were representing. So, in *that* sense, the "destruction" was completed in one day, and three days later Jesus rose as the new Temple for all who trust in Him.

But what Stephen had to deal with was the reality that the *dismantling* of the old Temple system did not happen overnight. It was

happening *gradually*. So what Stephen meant when he said that Jesus "will destroy" the temple, is that, just as Jesus had immediately taken away the basis of the old System with His Death, so now Jesus will go on to dismantle its practices that were still in operation until it is finally no more.

So Stephen and Jesus are in perfect harmony on this great issue. The Temple is forever done for. Jesus has destroyed it and will continue to destroy every vestige of it until it is clear to all that He alone is the one and only Sacrifice for sins, the one and only High Priest to God, and the one and only Habitation of the fullness of the Glory of God.

3. Did Dr. Luke agree with what both Jesus and Stephen were saying?

And I ask this because Luke says in **The Acts 6:13** that the people set up "false witnesses" to say that Stephen said these things. So, in what sense, were these witnesses "false"? The witnesses here in The Acts 6 were accurately reporting what Jesus and Stephen said. So how are they "false"? Was Luke not aware that both Jesus and Stephen had said that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the customs of Moses?

No, the evidence from **The Book of the Acts** is that Luke knew very well that Jesus was changing the customs of Moses. And Luke understood perfectly that Stephen and the others were preaching these kinds of things and telling the Jewish people that the Temple system was over, and that, therefore, several customs of Moses belong to the past. They had served their purpose in making Israel distinct, but now the people of God are no longer just Israel. The New Covenant is that people from every tribe and tongue and nation, will trust in Jesus.

So what did Luke mean by saying the witnesses were "false" when they said that Stephen spoke against the Temple and the Law, and that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the customs of Moses? What he meant was that the witnesses were putting a "false spin" on a true statement. And that was true with the witnesses at Jesus' Trial. They heard Jesus say things that were true, and they spun it so that it seemed to be something that it wasn't.

Because make no mistake about this, dear friends, it is absolutely true that Stephen and all the Apostles and Deacons and Elders were preaching and teaching that Jesus would destroy the Temple and

change some of the customs of Moses. But it is *not* true that this was as verse 11 says, "**blasphemous words against Moses and against God.**"

What the false witnesses did not grasp at all was that the kind of "destroying" that Jesus was doing was a *fulfilling* of everything that God and Moses had promised in the Law, the forgiveness of sins, a personal priestly advocate with God, and the Presence and Accessibility of His Glory. So Stephen was not *against* Moses or God. And he wasn't even *against* the Temple and its customs. He understood that they had their place as a forerunner for Jesus. But now that Jesus had come and died and risen from the dead, all these shadows and types had been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

So, Jesus destroyed the Temple the way the rising sun destroys the need for streetlights and headlights. He destroyed the Temple the way a bright light drives away shadows.

If the Messiah is coming down from Heaven with Forgiveness and Advocacy and Glory, and the Light of God shining upon Him, then the first thing that will be seen is His Shadow on the earth. And so it was in the sacrifices and priestly service of the old Temple. But as the reality of that light gets closer, the shadow becomes smaller. And when the reality of light is here, the shadow is swallowed up entirely and is no more.

That does not mean that the reality was *against* the shadow, or that it *blasphemed* the shadow. No, it *fulfilled* the shadow. And in that sense, it *destroyed* the shadow.

And so, today we have the Reality and not the shadow. Jesus Christ has come into the world to forgive sins once and for all, to be our Mediator forever, and to reveal to us the glory of God.

And this is what Stephen died for. And this is why Jesus was on Trial. May God help us to see this the way Dr. Luke saw it, and cherish Jesus as our new Temple more than anything in the world.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729 [www.covenantofpeace.net](http://www.covenantofpeace.net)

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.