

## **Exegetical Notes, Matthew 26:57-68**

### **“Light vs. Darkness”**

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kyllies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

## **Matthew 26:57-68**

### **Verse 57**

***Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled.***

- Following his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, the guards took Jesus to the house of Caiaphas who was Israel’s high priest.
- Assembled at this place were the leaders of the kingdom which formed the high court of Israel, the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin had 71 members. The high priest presided over it. In Roman times it had sweeping authority but could not impose the sentence of death.
- The Sanhedrin had probably gathered at Caiaphas’ house to meet in secrecy. As this meeting was after dark, therefore, it was not official.
- This marks the second stage of Jesus’ trial before the religious leaders of Israel. John records a preliminary meeting with Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law to Caiaphas. See John 18:12-14, 19-23.

### **Verse 58**

***But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.***

- If this was a secret meeting, Peter’s ability to enter the very place where the meeting was happening is problematic. That his intention was to watch the proceedings to see the outcome shows the power of the Sanhedrin. They did not need to be careful of what they were doing even if it violated their own rules, as this meeting did

### **Verse 59-60**

***The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.***

- The purpose of this “trial” was not to determine Jesus’ innocence or guilt. The chief priests had already determined that he was guilty of something and needed to die. See Matthew 26:3-5. The purpose of this “trial” was to determine the case against Jesus. Since the Sanhedrin could not sentence him to death, they would have to present a case against him which would cause the Romans to condemn Jesus to die. Therefore, the court was not interested in the truthfulness of the charges brought, just in the outcome of the trial before the Roman authorities.
- The Jewish law required that at least two witnesses must agree in all details as to the charges before a person could be found guilty. Apparently, there were many people who, wanting to help the Sanhedrin, were willing to accuse Jesus. However, their testimony did not agree in the details. Therefore, the charges they brought could not stand.

### **Verse 61**

***Finally, two came forward and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”***

- Jesus had said something of this sort. He said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” (John 2:19). The Bible clearly tells us that he was speaking of his own body (John 2:20-22). However, those who heard him clearly misunderstood his words believing that he spoke of Herod’s Temple.
- What the witnesses said that Jesus said was clearly not what Jesus said. Scholars debate whether this misunderstanding was deliberate or accidental. It could be either. However, the quote is inaccurate. But the two witnesses agreed thus presenting a case that would stand up in court.
- The problem is that this issue was not of such magnitude as to warrant the sentence of death in a Roman court.

### **Verse 62-63a**

***Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent.***

- The high priest apparently realized that the “trial” was going nowhere. Apparently, he hoped that, in making his defense against the charges brought by these two witnesses, Jesus would say something that could be used against him. Therefore, he encouraged Jesus to answer the charges that had been brought.

- Jesus realized that he need not respond to the charges and so remained quiet.

### **Verse 63b**

***The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”***

- Note that the Sanhedrin is meeting secretly at night, a violation of its rules, seeking false evidence by which to accuse Jesus. The many witnesses cannot agree and when at last two do agree their words are inaccurate. However, Jesus is charged under oath to tell the truth.
- The word, “charge,” literally means that the high priest “commanded” Jesus to answer this question. While Jesus could not be required to testify against himself according to Jewish law, the high priest commands him to do so. This command puts Jesus in a bind. If he does not answer, he must defy the authority of the high priest. If he answers this question truthfully, his words will be used to condemn him.
- The high priest’s question goes to the very heart of the matter. This is the issue. The leaders of Israel are offended because Jesus is being called the Messiah, the Christ, by some of the people. They believe that because of this he must die.

### **Verse 64**

***“Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”***

- In response to the high priest’s command, Jesus confesses that he is the Messiah, the Son of God.

### **Verse 65-66**

***Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered.***

- The high priest was forbidden by law (see Leviticus 10:26 & 21:10) to tear his garments.
- The high priest calls the judges to be the witnesses against the accused while they remain his judges. This is illegal.
- The high priest defines the charge as blasphemy. Blasphemy is the sin of defiling the name, majesty, or authority of God. See Leviticus

24:10-18. Breaking this law is a capital offense. The one found guilty is to be executed by stoning.

- By breaking the laws of Israel, the high priest has manipulated the situation to the place he desires it to be. The Sanhedrin has convicted Jesus of a crime that requires his death. However, under Roman law, they are powerless to impose the sentence of death.

**Verse 67-68**

***Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"***

- The members of the high court, all noble, refined gentlemen, mocked Jesus after they found him guilty of blasphemy. Their behavior is predicted in Isaiah 50:6 and 52:14.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Light vs Darkness*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)