

JESUS: The Greatest Life of All

STUDY THIRTEEN

Analysis of a Courtroom Fiasco

Selected Scriptures

Jesus was condemned before He ever stood trial. There was brutality and prejudice against Him, but not once did Jesus lash out against His enemies.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIKE stalking lions, Jesus' enemies had been watching for a way to pounce. Judas' nighttime betrayal of Jesus in Gethsemane gave them the cover they needed to arrest Jesus and bring Him to trial—six trials, actually, all devised to convict Jesus and send Him to the cross.

In a brazen rush to judgment, Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane around 1 a.m., tried, found guilty, sentenced, and nailed to the cross at Golgotha by 9 a.m.—from capture to crucifixion in eight hours.

“It is safe to say,” states Pastor Chuck Swindoll, “that there has never been a more illegal, unfair, shameful set of trials conducted in the history of jurisprudence than the six trials that led to the crucifixion and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In these trials, however, is a divine paradox. Pastor Chuck continues,

From those acts of injustice, the justice of God was satisfied. God's wrath against sin was completely released upon Christ at the cross. As a result, the only thing that now separates lost humanity from God is unbelief.¹

Out of this polluted soil God grew the tree of eternal life—the means of salvation for all who come to Christ in faith. Only our God could bring such good out of such wrong. As we study the trials of Jesus in this *Searching the Scriptures* study and the next, keep your eyes on Jesus and His light of hope boldly flickering in the night.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

We have entered the final period of Jesus' earthly life known as the Passion. As you follow Jesus' agonizing journey, invite the Father to walk with you.

Father, the forces of darkness descended on Jesus through the injustices inflicted upon Him. The innocent One was condemned, but as a result, guilty sinners are set free. Deepen my faith in Christ and my affection for Him as I study the gospel accounts of His passion. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read John's account of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in [John 18:1–12](#). The priests and Pharisees were bitter adversaries. But their mutual hatred for Jesus magnetized these opposite poles as they united against Jesus.

Flanking Judas when he betrayed Jesus were temple guards and Roman soldiers—a regiment of hundreds possibly—as a show of force against any uprising. Despite having no sleep and being physically depleted from intense prayer (Luke 22:43–44), Jesus maintained complete control. How did He demonstrate that He was in charge, even while surrendering?

Jesus responded in submission, not to the soldiers, but to the Father's mission. From the moment they arrested and bound Him, He was no longer a free man.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Observation: The Jewish Trials

After His arrest, Jesus was tried before Jewish authorities in three trials, which we'll study in this *Searching the Scriptures* study. In the next study, we'll examine the three Roman trials.

The chart, "The Trials of Jesus," at the end of this study lists all six, including the officiating authority, Scripture passage, accusation, legality, type, and result. Also, you'll find the chart, "Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha," which lists the timing of events. Use these charts as guides as you follow Jesus from trial to trial in Jerusalem, beginning with Jesus' appearance before Annas at about 2 a.m.

Trial 1: Before Annas—John 18:13, 19–24

Annas was the patriarch of a family line of high priests who succeeded him. Still referred to as "the high priest" (Acts 4:6), he held tightly to the reins of control and was the wealthy kingpin of the moneychangers and merchants in the temple. Jesus' cleansing the temple was a direct challenge to Annas' authority.

What was Annas' relationship to Caiphas, according to *John 18:13*? _____.

Attempting to find grounds for prosecution, Annas asked Jesus "about his followers and what he had been teaching them" (18:19). How did Jesus assert His innocence in *18:20–23*? How did Jesus respond when the guard hit Him?

Unable to find any dirt on Jesus, Annas sent Jesus to Caiphas to dig deeper.

Annas knew the law but deliberately ignored it. When Jesus reminded Annas of it, the guard resorted to brutality. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Trial 2: Before Caiphas—Mark 14:53–65

Where was Jesus taken and who was there, according to *Mark 14:53–54*?

By now, it was around 3:30 a.m. Caiphas, the priests, and members of the council (the Sanhedrin) were dressed and waiting. The whole charade was prearranged and designed to reach a guilty verdict before the public could rise up in Jesus' defense.

Jewish law required witnesses. What failed attempts did the prosecutors make to find witnesses against Jesus in *14:55–59*?

In frustration, Caiphas took over the prosecution. What did he ask Jesus, and how did Jesus respond in *14:60–62*? Write down the references of the Old Testament verses Jesus quoted, which you can find in the notes of your Bible. We'll look closer at these verses in *interpretation*.



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In [Mark 14:63–65](#), the religious leaders bared their fangs and attacked. What cruelties did they unleash on Jesus? What contrasts do you see between Jesus and those who judged Him?

No actual witnesses, no defense attorney, no evidence, no proof, no appropriate proceedings, no proper voting. It was a prejudiced court in the middle of the night. All of it, illegal. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Trial 3: Before the Sanhedrin—Luke 22:66–71

The third of the Jewish trials was a mere formality. How did Luke depict this sham trial in [Luke 22:66–71](#)?

The punishment for blasphemers was stoning ([Leviticus 24:14](#)), but the Romans did not give Jewish authorities the right to carry out the death penalty. So to kill Jesus “legally,” the religious leaders dragged Jesus before Pilate with a charge that would require execution under Roman law—treason.

We’ll continue with the Roman trials in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study. For now, let’s look closer at Jesus’ claims.



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Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Claims

When Caiphas asked Jesus, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61), he had in mind a human descendant of David who would free Israel and rule as God’s specially selected and empowered king. Jesus’ answer, however, was a claim to be much more.

Jesus said, “I AM. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:62)

By referencing three Old Testament passages, Jesus clearly communicated His identity to these Jewish scholars who knew their Scriptures. Read the verses that Jesus cited and write down who is the focus of each passage.

“I am” comes from *Exodus 3:13–15*.

“The Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand” comes from *Psalms 110:1*.



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“The Son of Man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven” comes from *Daniel 7:13–14*.

Based on Jesus’ response and the verses He referenced, who did Jesus claim to be? What authority did He claim to have?

The religious leaders should have fallen on their knees in worship, instead, they pummeled God’s Son with their fists. They were the true blasphemers deserving judgment, and yet, even in their contempt, they were playing a part in fulfilling God’s redemptive plan.



Correlation: The Purpose of Jesus’ Coming

Earlier, Caiphas made a statement that turned out to be prophetic. What did Caiphas say in *John 11:47–53*? How did Caiphas, without realizing it, declare the gospel?



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Jesus rules all creation and someday all people will stand before Him as their judge. First, though, He had to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). In so doing, Jesus endured the worst of humanity’s injustice and abuse. Through His suffering, He gives us hope.



Application: Our Hope When We Suffer Unjustly

When unfair treatment blindsides us, our whole world starts spinning in a blur of inequities. Everything solid turns to sand. The legal system fails us. Longtime friends eye us with uncertainty. Then there is the inner raging—anger steals away our sleep, thoughts of revenge sap our appetites, and doubt in God’s goodness darkens our soul. Finally, we cry out to God in desperation, “How long must I suffer?”

Our questioning inevitably leads us to the trials of Jesus. Having felt the sting of injustice Himself, Jesus looks upon our pain and confusion with understanding eyes. We can draw closer to Him now than ever before.

Has injustice struck you? In what ways?

How do the unjust trials of Jesus provide consolation and strength?



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What encouragement do you glean from *1 Peter 2:20–25*? What does it mean for you to leave your “case in the hands of God”?

Through your unjust suffering, it is possible to experience a depth of oneness with Jesus you’ve never felt before. Paul called it “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Philippians 3:10 NASB). Stand firm in the Lord who knows the truth about your situation and always judges fairly. He is your solid rock in shaky times.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through the lens of my suffering I see more clearly the suffering of Jesus—and admire His unbending resolve and deep peace. Fill me with His fortitude and draw me close to His side. I need His strength. I wholly lean on Jesus in this moment and entrust myself to Him for whatever may come. In His name, amen.



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The Trials of Jesus						
Trial	Officiating Authority	Scripture	Accusations	Legality	Type	Result
1	Annas, former high priest AD 6–15	John 18:12–23	No specific charges brought.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No jurisdiction • Held at night • No charges • No witnesses • Abused during trial 	Jewish and religious	Found “guilty” of irreverence and sent to Caiaphas.
2	Caiaphas, high priest AD 18–36, and the Sanhedrin	Matthew 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; John 18:24	Claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, which they deemed blasphemy.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held at night • False witnesses • No formal charge • Abused during trial 	Jewish and religious	Declared “guilty” of blasphemy and held for sentencing until morning.
3	Sanhedrin	Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66–71	As a continuation of the earlier trial before the Sanhedrin, the charges remained the same.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accusation changed • No witnesses • Improper vote 	Jewish and religious	Sentenced to be turned over to Romans for execution.
4	Pilate, governor of Judea AD 26–36	Matthew 27:11–14; Mark 15:2–5; Luke 23:1–7; John 18:28–38	Charged with treason and sedition against Rome.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found “not guilty,” yet kept in custody • No defense representation • Abused during trial 	Roman and civil	Declared “not guilty” and pawned off on Herod Antipas to find a loophole.



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The Trials of Jesus <i>continued</i>						
5	Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee 4 BC–AD 39	Luke 23:8–12	No specific charges brought. Questioned at length by Herod.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No jurisdiction • No specific charges • Abused during trial 	Roman and civil	Mistreated, mocked, falsely accused, and returned to Pilate without a decision made.
6	Pilate	Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25; John 18:39–19:16	As a continuation of the earlier trial before Pilate, the charges remained the same.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declared “not guilty,” yet condemned. 	Roman and civil	Declared “not guilty” but sentenced to be crucified to mollify the angry mob. Simultaneously, a man guilty of murder, treason, and sedition was released.

Chart adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 263. Copyright © 2020 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha		
Event	Scriptures	Approximate Time
Prayer and agony in Gethsemane	Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46; John 18:1	1:00 a.m.
Betrayal by Judas and arrest of Jesus	Matthew 26:47–56; Mark 14:43–46; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:2–12	1:30 a.m.
Irregular, unauthorized interrogation at Annas’ residence	John 18:12–23	2:00 a.m.
Illegal trial at Caiaphas’ residence	Matthew 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; Luke 22:54, 63–65; John 18:24	3:00 a.m.



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Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha <i>continued</i>		
Formal but illegal meeting of the Sanhedrin to confirm capital sentence	Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66–71	6:00 a.m.
First interrogation by Pilate at his residence	Matthew 27:1–2, 11–14; Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–7; John 18:28–32	6:30 a.m.
Audience before Herod	Luke 23:8–12	7:00 a.m.
Final judgment of Pilate	Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25; John 18:33–40	7:30 a.m.
Scourging in Praetorium, mocking by soldiers, and public condemnation	Matthew 27:26–31; Mark 15:15–20; John 19:1–16	8:00 a.m.
Walk to Golgotha and nailing to the cross	Matthew 27:32–35; Mark 15:21–24; Luke 23:26–33; John 19:17–18	9:00 a.m.
Events at the cross, climaxing in darkness over the land	Matthew 27:36–45; Mark 15:25–33; Luke 23:34–44; John 19:19–27	9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Jesus’ final words, death, and earthquake	Matthew 27:46–56; Mark 15:34–41; Luke 23:45–49; John 19:28–30	3:00 p.m.

Chart adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 271. Copyright © 2020 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, as quoted in the Bible-study guide, *A Look at the Book: Traveling the Original Route 66*, co-authored by Lee Hough and Bryce Klabunde (Anaheim, CA: Insight for Living, 1994), 108.

