
Christ Before Annas

*“So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year”
(John 18:12, 13).*

The trials of Jesus are ordinarily divided into six stages, with each stage being regarded as a separate trial. The first three were Jewish (or religious) in nature, and the last three were Roman (or civil) judgments. The first three—the trials before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin—are the most bewildering of all the trials in history. They remind us of the solemn truth that atrocious crimes are often committed under the guise of religion. Jesus’ condemnation and crucifixion were brought about by the most famous religious leaders of the first century. As John said, “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). Those who should have been the first to honor Him and proclaim Him as the Messiah and Lord were the first in rejecting Him! True religion is the greatest blessing that God has ever bestowed upon man, but false religion is the greatest corrupter of mankind.

The Gospel of John is the only Gospel that tells us of Jesus’ being brought before Annas. John inserted a fact that must be observed in the story of the passion: the role that Annas, the leading religious leader, had in the examination and killing of Jesus.

Annas was not the acting high priest at the time of Jesus’ arrest, but he apparently was the power behind the actual high priest, Caiaphas. He had held the high priestly office twenty years before, A.D. 7–14, but Gratus had replaced him after having disagreements with him. According to the Old Testament, the high priest was to hold his office until his death. Rome, however, had said, “Through your Sanhedrin you can

judge your own people, but we will make the decision about who your high priests are going to be.” Even though Annas had been removed from the office by Rome, the Jews must have continued to see him as the high priest (Luke 3:2). He had seen to it that his son Eleazar was chosen to follow him; and after Eleazar, he had managed to get his son-in-law Caiaphas in this position. He further arranged for four of his other sons to follow Caiaphas as high priests. These facts strongly suggest that no man in Jerusalem wielded as much influence in the Jewish hierarchy as this man. He must have been one of the most powerful men in Jerusalem at this time.

In addition to all of this, it is almost certain that he was *the* man who instigated the death of Jesus. With him, Judas most likely made his agreement to deliver Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Annas had power, money, and control. With his high priestly background, wealth, and tenure, he had come to occupy the strongest position of leadership in Judaism. If no one upset this balance, he and his family would control the Jewish nation for many years. The coming of Jesus, the Messiah, threatened to dismantle his affluence and his hold over the people. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah he wanted to see. He would cling to his power, prestige, profits from the temple, and domination of the Jews; he would not allow Jesus of Nazareth to interfere with his position and ambitions.

Since Annas was *the man* behind Jesus’ arrest, he would also be the one to decide what to do with Him following the arrest. He had

promoted the campaign against Him, was moving it forward as quickly as he could, and was determined to complete it. He had made the arrangements, given the commands, and worked out the plots. Therefore, upon being taken into custody, Jesus was presented to Annas.

Having decided that Jesus must be eliminated, Annas wanted to see Him so that he could devise a reason for condemning Him. As Jesus stood before him, he “questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching” (John 18:19). Both Old Testament and Roman laws were violated by what Annas was doing. Having brought Jesus to trial without an actual charge against Him, he began interrogating Him in an attempt to discover some crime for which he could prosecute Him.

The Prince of glory did not cower before Annas or fall into his devious schemes. He calmly said, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said” (John 18:20, 21). His response revealed what Annas was doing. Jesus implied that he had not handled this arrest with the dignity and justice that his position required of him. He could easily have learned all that Jesus had been saying and doing. It was inexcusable for him to ask such questions of Jesus, the one who had been arrested, without a just reason.

At this point in the narrative, the scene shifts to an officer who was standing beside Jesus during the interrogation. This man, seeking to recover some dignity for Annas, slapped Jesus and said, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?” (John 18:22). Jesus’ words once again calmly depicted the situation. He said, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?” (John 18:23). He put the inquisitors in the seat of the accused. In this rather short interview, Annas, in his own chamber, had been defeated by only a half dozen sentences from Jesus.

Annas, however, would not be deterred. The text reads, “So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest” (John 18:24). With fabricated charges and sinister designs, he sent Jesus to Caiaphas, insisting that the high priest join in building a case against Him. Thus Annas

took his place in history as the torch that ignited the crucifixion of Jesus, the Son of God.

What does this phase of our Lord’s trials teach us about dealing with the worst situations and schemers? *First, it implies that the biggest problem in this world is the sin in people’s lives.* A sin-dominated man leading sin-dominated associates crucified Jesus. If allowed, sin can turn the most influential religious leader into a vicious, conniving, selfish, and dishonest villain. It persuaded a pretentious servant of God to murder the true Servant of God.

Further, this scenario illustrates that retaliation is not an option, even in confronting one who has done the worst that can be done to you. Jesus taught us the true meaning of turning the other cheek. He responded to Annas with grace, not with revenge. He “committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:22, 23). Jesus answered Annas by calmly and respectfully telling him the truth.

On the most amazing level, the scene shows Christ to be the Savior of all men. He had resolved to give His life for our salvation, and He would not be turned away from that resolve. He could have spoken one word and ended this trial. With a nod, He could have immediately sent to hell every evil man who had lifted a hand against Him or spoken a wicked word to Him. However, He stood before this religious bigot, having made His decision to give Himself to be the atonement for the sin of the world.

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If all the facts are known to us, it can be said that Annas was the worst man in all of history—worse than Manasseh, who caused innocent blood to run through the streets; worse than Domitian, who persecuted Christians; worse than Hitler, who sent thousands of Jews to the gas chambers; and worse than Stalin, who starved his own people. What could be worse than orchestrating the unjust condemnation and execution of Jesus? Annas was not visibly leading the charge, but he was behind the scenes making it happen. What should be done about a person like this? Do not overlook what Jesus did: He died for him!