

## 4. Judas' offer to betray Jesus to the authorities (26:14ff.).

In these four segments, Matthew puts together divine certainty, human audacity, deep love and unutterable duplicity. The program of God is pitted against human plotting. Baseness and hatred are contrasted with honest, deeply-felt love. Discipleship, for all its weakness and failure, is supremely treasured by God above all unbelieving scholarship and disenchanting cunning.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what context did Jesus predict His death this time?
2. What specific teaching had Jesus just completed before making this announcement of His impending death?
3. On what day of the Hebrew calendar does the Passover occur? Therefore, on what day did Jesus pronounce this prophecy of His suffering?
4. How often had Jesus predicted His death to His followers before this? On what occasions?
5. Does the expression, "after two days," mean "on the third," "on the second day" or what? Give Bible evidence to support your answer.
6. What facts indicate that Judas had not already agreed with the authorities to betray Jesus?

## SECTION 62

## JESUS IS PLOTTED AGAINST BY THE RULERS

TEXT: 26:3-5

3 Then were gathered together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas; 4 and they took counsel together that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. 5 But they said, Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. The Gospels recount numerous clashes between Jesus and the authorities before this Last Week. What are the immediate causes

of this present plotting, those elements which had not been so much factor prior to this Last Week?

- b. Why do you think they assembled in the high priest's court, rather than in the regular meeting place of the Sanhedrin?
- c. Why do you think they concluded that they must take Jesus by subtlety? Was guile or deceit the stated purpose of this august body of religious leaders?
- d. Why did these, the highest authorities in the nation, fear the people so? Were their fears justified?
- e. Their final conclusion to postpone Jesus' assassination until after the feast clashes with Jesus' private pronouncement concerning that event. What does this fact reveal about them? about Jesus?
- f. Why do you think Matthew put these two conflicting decisions together here in one context?
- g. If you were the highest religious authority among your people and thought you must deal with a blaspheming, rebellious teacher and false prophet worthy of death, what would you do? Would you brave the wrath of the nation in the name of righteousness in your pursuit of God's honor, or would you cower and plot, as do these? Are you sure? What does this problem tell you about the leaders? and about yourself?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The Passover celebration was not only two days away, the feast when the Jews eat bread without any yeast in it. The clergy, the theologians and the judicial rulers of the nation assembled at the residence of the high priest, Caiaphas. There they plotted together, looking for some cunning plan whereby they could ensnare Jesus and dispose of Him. Because they were afraid of the people, they kept saying, "Not during the Passover Feast, or the people may riot!"

### SUMMARY

The same day that Jesus predicted His own death at the Passover, the nation's rulers assembled to discuss the plan which would make His words reality. Contrary to His prediction, they determined it must not happen during the feast or even publicly.

## NOTES

## 1. THE ALLIANCE OF THE DESPERATE

26:3 Then were gathered together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas. Then, i.e. two days before the Passover (Mark 14:1). That Matthew does not mean "next in order, after the foregoing prediction," but "at the time just alluded to," is easily inferred also from Jesus' notice of the time (26:2). If so, at about the same time He prophesied that the supreme authorities of Israel would crucify Him during the Passover, they themselves were debating to put off their attempts until after the festivities. This timing is the more psychologically probable, if their fruitless sallies against Jesus and His exposures of their ignorance and hypocrisy occurred this same day, driving this resentful, embittered leadership to regroup to plot strategy.

How many previous consultations had been held to plot the demolition of the Nazarene's popularity? The opposition that now exploded as an obsession to kill Jesus had begun very early (John 5:16ff.; Matt. 12:14; John 7:1, 19, 25, 30ff.; 8:37, 40, 59; 10:31f., 39). But these sporadic, flailing attempts had aborted. The spectacular resurrection of Lazarus right under the nose of the leaders had gained new followers for Jesus (John 11:45). This daring miracle spurred the shaken authorities to instant action to combine forces in a concentrated, cooperative drive to stop the Galilean Prophet (John 11:47-54). Out of that plenary session of the Sanhedrin (*sunégagon . . . sunédrión*) came the determination to make Jesus a political scapegoat by death. From then on Jesus became a hunted man (John 11:57). But even so, no one came forward with interesting intelligence data, because Jesus was adroitly avoiding population centers by moving in out-of-the-way places like Ephraim (John 11:54) or travelling in the company of His admirers. This rendered secret capture impossible (Matt. 19:1f.; 20:29; John 12:19). So, because the prior conciliar decision had not procured the Galilean's elimination, and because He continued to wound the collective pride of the nation's leaders (see on 26:4), a fresh consultation must be held to establish which strategy would lead infallibly to decisive success.

This private conclave is composed of *the chief priests*, of official clergy, "the scribes" (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2) or theologians, *and the elders of the people*, or national senate of Israel. *The chief priests* are not only the high priest actually in office as well as those who had

been dismissed from office by the political rulers, but also those priests in charge of the Temple administration in its various services. Together, these formed a priestly aristocracy quite distinct from their brethren, the common priests. Despite their political dismissal, these former high priests continued to exercise considerable influence, even if informally. (Consider the implications of Acts 4:6; 23:5 in the light of John 11:49, 51.) Modern attempts to free the orthodox Pharisees and *elders of the people* from guilt fail to prove these plotters were only Sadducean priests and their lackeys. (Cf. Flusser, *Jesus*, 85, 159ff.) The silence of the Gospel Passion narratives *in itself* proves nothing about Pharisean participation in the Passover plot, because they omit all mention of the Sadducees too. Each group is presented not under its party label, but in the person of those men whose official function as priests or scribes gave them this platform from which to attack Jesus officially. From this consultation on, then, party loyalties no longer count; just the final goal. Hence, the Gospel writers accurately picture Jesus' opposition as one united front composed of every section of their national religious and political leadership. (Cf. the apostolic preaching, Acts 3:17; 4:5, 8, 23; 5:21; 13:27.)

The theory that the godly Pharisees in the Jewish Senate disapproved of the Sadducean priesthood's political betrayal of Jesus to the Romans cannot be sustained by appeal to the silence of the Synoptics. It is said that the Evangelists could not credibly report the Pharisean protest against the Sadducees without appearing self-contradictory, since they desired to give an anti-Pharisean flavor to their pre-Passion stories (Flusser, *Jesus*, 85). The better hypothesis is that no concerted protest of the Pharisees ever rose to defend Jesus. What were the Pharisees doing in the arresting party in Gethsemane: protecting Jesus by reading Him His rights to a fair trial and warning him against self-incrimination (John 18:3)?! And, if they were alerted for the arrest, did they abandon their duty during the trials, if in fact they were pro-Jesus? And how explain the strange reappearance of the Pharisees to insure the tomb against imposture, if they had supposedly abandoned the Sanhedrin which brought about a victory for them (27:62)?

Granted, not all scribes are Pharisees nor are all Pharisees scribes. (Cf. Mark 2:16.) However, since the Pharisees had been ousted from

political power by John Hyrcanus (*Ant.* XIII,10,5-7) and Alexander Jannaeus (*ibid.*, 13,5), they utilized the scribe's role as interpreters of the Law to qualify themselves for positions of influence because of their accurate knowledge of tradition and its importance in legal interpretation. As opposed to the priesthood which was virtually, but not totally, closed to Pharisees (cf. Josephus, *Life*, §39), the Sanhedrin offered opportunities to implement their viewpoints at the highest level, whereinsofar their influence could command a majority of the elders that composed it. (See Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, Introduction. Cf. note at 8:19.) Thus, the combination, *chief priests and the elders of the people* along with the scribes (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2) combines the units that comprised the Sanhedrin.

Their gathering *together into the court of the high priest*, rather than in the Sanhedrin's usually assembly hall ("of hewn stone") may have several explanations:

1. Was this a night meeting at the close of their long day of disastrous debate with Jesus? Perhaps no night meeting of this sort could be held in the Temple.
2. This closed session emphasizes the selective nature of this assembly, as if the question of the Galilean Prophet could not be suitably handled in an open forum. Would such councilors as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea have been welcome or even informed of this scheming, if suspected of bias toward Jesus? (Cf. John 3:1; 7:50ff.; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50f.)
3. Perhaps even non-members of the Sanhedrin, whose astuteness could be pressed into service to promote the success of the conspiracy, could more easily be brought into the plot, if held outside the Sanhedrin's hall.

*The court of the high priest (tèn aulèn toû archieréos)* is the identical place where Peter denied Jesus, being the courtyard within which the men awaiting the outcome of Jesus trials had built a fire (John 18:15). The courtyard itself is surrounded by the buildings of the palace proper. It would appear from the denial accounts that both Annas, the old patriarch among the chief priests, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law and high priest then in office, lived in different apartments in this same palace complex. (Cf. John 18:13, 24 and notes on Matt. 26:57.)

Because *aulè*, by extension, seems to refer to the entire palace in some contexts (cf. Mark 15:16 - pretorium; perhaps also Luke

11:21; 1 Macc. 11:46), some argue that this insidious plot occurred, not where servants could overhear in an open courtyard, but in some large room of the high priest's apartment, as if he were a king in his "court." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 120f.; Rocci, 302.) Besides the lack of evidence that *aulè* refers to the house itself (cf. Moulton-Milligan, 92), may it not be assumed that the chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas, would have servants like their masters, of if not, could order them to leave during the deliberations, thus actually insuring their privacy?

So it was to Joseph *Caiaphas* they came. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII, 2,2; 4:3.) This past master of Roman-Jewish diplomacy succeeded in retaining his office from 18-36 A.D. in an epoch when the high-priesthood was almost a yearly turnover, having become the unfortunate victim of Herodian politics continued by Rome. (Josephus [*Ant.* XX,10,1] counts 28 high-priests in 107 years, an average of 3.8 years for a function that should have been for life!)

## 2. THE ATROCITY DETERMINED

26:4 and they took counsel together that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. All their sectarian differences and private animosities are sublimated by their shared, intense bitterness that goads them to recognize and destroy their common enemy. What recent events demanded this urgent plotting? Had not Jesus encountered opposition from these same leaders before? Why so brutal and why *now*?

1. They were genuinely alarmed at their losses sustained after Jesus raised Lazarus (John 12:10f., 19).
2. They were envious of His wide popular acceptance witnessed in His Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11; esp. Luke 19:39f.; John 12:19).
3. The priesthood was especially stung by His furious denunciations of their Temple monopoly (21:12-17).
4. They launched futile attacks against Him only to find themselves publicly humiliated, exposed as incompetents and unable to defend themselves against His incisive brilliance and devastating accusations (21:23—22:46).
5. They stood defenseless before His scathing exposè of their hypocrisy (23:1-39).

6. Perhaps their greatest, most fundamental motivation is their unwillingness to repent. Rather than turn to Him, they turn on Him. Resentment, not repentance, is their reaction.

This assembly is not gathered to decide *what* should be done about Jesus, because this is already a foregone conclusion. Rather, their unscrupulous pondering is to determine *how* (*tò pòs*, Luke 22:2) He could be eliminated most certainly and quietly. Jesus' judicial murder is premeditated.

They determine to act *by subtlety* (*en dòlo*). This contrasts with the public police arrest they had attempted earlier without success (John 7:32, 45ff.). Because *subtlety* has the flavor of deceit, cunning and treachery, it suggests that the leaders of the nation deliberately abandoned all conscience to seek out unashamedly deceitful means to trap Jesus. But this expression may not at all represent what those rulers thought they were doing. Rather, they were seeking some stratagem, some cunning plan, to arrest Jesus which would not compromise their public image or cripple their authority. From their point of view, they were working on strategy. They probably argued, "This must be done *discretely*." Jesus later exposed their underhandedness to their face (Luke 22:52f.; John 18:20ff.).

### 3. THE ATTACK DELAYED

26:5 **But they said, Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people. But they said** (*èlegon dè*, better: "they kept saying") graphically pictures a nervousness that firmly insisted on postponement. This verb stands out in elegant contrast to Jesus' prophecy (26:2). All urgency implied in their dedication and determination to destroy the Nazarene, must be subordinated to this prime consideration.

*Not during the feast* means not during the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread that began with the Passover proper but continued another week. Originally two separate feasts, these naturally came to be treated as one, since anyone who came for the one must remain for the other. The celebration of national liberation from bondage naturally lent itself to stirring the patriotic spirit and potentially set the stage for nationalistic uprisings. That Jesus was Galilean, believed to be the long-awaited Messiah by those who came from Galilee, the hot-bed of liberationist terrorism, was reason enough for the authorities to conclude to wait another ten days before acting. That the feast

involved three days of solemn rest would not have stopped them, only calculating prudence.

*Lest a tumult arise among the people.* Their determination to postpone all action is based on several considerations:

1. Their chief danger does not lie with Jesus Himself. Apparently, something in His demeanor convinces them that He would not utilize His miraculous power in self-defense. Otherwise, would they have dared strike out at the unpredictable, awesome supernatural might He could bring to bear?
2. "His unjustified popularity with the crowds" constituted their principle preoccupation, because, during a feast attended by thousands of Jews from all over the world (cf. Acts 2:5-11), He would be surrounded by sympathetic Galilean supporters who hailed Him as their Messiah (Luke 21:37f.). Should the rulers make their move publicly, they risked open insurrection, if not civil war.
3. Consequently, the Jewish rulers had no doubt that an untimely insurrection would try the patience of the Roman authorities whose decisive reaction would reduce still further the already painfully minimal authority of the Sanhedrin (cf. John 11:48). In this tension we hear the cunning voice of Caiaphas repeatedly cautioning, lest his own careful diplomacy, that walked a long political tight-rope between Jewish loyalties and cooperation with Rome which gave him his high-priesthood, be wrecked by avoidable civil disorder and rioting.
4. The only factor that was not a consideration for their postponement was the high holiness of the feast. Had they thought that they could murder an innocent Man during the feast, nothing would have hindered them from so desecrating it, if they could but achieve their unholy purpose. They only fear that an insurgent, enraged populace would impede the plot. These rulers knew their people and had good reason for caution, because of all the tumults and seditious precedents they could have cited. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XX,5,3 = *Wars* II,12,1,4; the Passover tragedy under Archelaus, *Ant.* XVIII, 9,3; 10, 2,9.)

But this careful deliberation was to come to nothing because of the unsuspected presence of a traitor in Jesus' own following. Rather than follow their own carefully chosen counsel of caution, their burning desire for vengeance overpowered their reason. The stupidity of Satan defeated him: too quickly he moved his pawn, Judas, into



conjunction with the religious and political hierarchy, forcing him to sacrifice caution for temporary advantage and risk long-term failure. Notwithstanding Caiaphas' worries and the council's precautions, they were all forced to deal with Jesus *publicly at the feast*. These high councilors are an integral part of a higher plan of which they have no knowledge. Earlier, when they wanted to capture Jesus, He could not be touched. Now when they are unwilling to do it, because of personal considerations, He decided it against their will—and won. Further, despite the fact that they were forced to kill Jesus during the Passover, no one rioted. Literally everyone miscalculated Jesus' voluntary submission to death. This gauged just how seriously so many misunderstood the will of God, and how truly Jesus comprehended and obeyed it.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. On what day did the authorities assemble to plot Jesus' judicial murder?
2. Explain the various names used for the Jewish national feast: why do Mark and Luke call it "the Passover" and "the feast of Unleavened Bread"?
3. Is this plotting by the authorities the first of its kind, or had they done this before? If so, when?
4. List the Jewish national leaders that formed this consultation against Jesus. Explain the historic political or religious position of each group, showing their party's interest in silencing Jesus.
5. Where did this meeting occur? Who presided over the meeting?
6. Explain the authorities' fear of an uproar if Jesus were to be arrested during the feast.

### SECTION 63

#### JESUS IS ANOINTED BY MARY OF BETHANY

(Parallels: Mark 14:3-9; John 11:55—12:8)

TEXT: 26:6-13

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7 there came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at