

SECTION 71

JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY THE FULL SANHEDRIN

(Parallels: Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66—23:1; John 18:28)

TEXT: 27:1, 2

1 Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: 2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think that the early morning hour of this consultation held by the authorities of Israel exposes their intentions as evil? Why?
- b. What relationship is there between this consultation and the others held during the night? If those were definitive, why bother to hold another now?
- c. Is there any evidence that the *entire* decision-making body of Israel was not assembled in plenary session to deal with Jesus? If so, give the proof.
- d. How does this hearing resemble the earlier, night sessions as to strategy? How does it differ? What is repeated? What is omitted?
- e. Why do you think the Jews did not kill Jesus outright themselves? After all, they stoned Stephen. Why take Him to Pilate now?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Very early, that is, as soon as morning came, the national council of the elders was immediately convened so, all the chief priests and theologians led Jesus away from there to their council chamber. This entire Sanhedrin held a consultation to decide the best procedure for getting Jesus executed.

“If you are the Christ,” they demanded, “tell us so!”

But His reply was, “If I tell you, you will not believe me. If I ask you a question, you will not answer. But from now on I, the Son of man, will be seated at the right hand of Almighty God!”

Then they all asked, “Are you God’s Son, then?”

He said to them, “You said it. I am!”

“What further testimony do we need?” they asked. “We have heard it ourselves from his own mouth!”

At this, the whole assembly rose, tied Jesus' hands and led Him from Caiaphas to the Praetorium and turned Him over to Pilate the governor. It was still early.

SUMMARY

To ratify the results of the night hearings, a brief show-trial is held before a hastily convened full Sanhedrin. Only the principle issue guaranteed to produce a unanimous verdict of guilty was raised: Jesus' allegedly false claim to be God's Son, hence, to be deity despite His obvious humanity. The tactic succeeded in its intent and a relatively united senate sentenced Him to death. To accomplish this, they must work through the Roman governor, to whom they now go.

NOTES

27:1 **Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.** It was Friday *morning*, Nisan 15. The Synoptics picture the plotters as astir at daybreak as soon as possible (*Proiās genoménes*; Mark 15:1: *euthùs proi*; Luke 23:1: *hos egéneto heméra*). Even after a hurried-up morning session, their arrival at Pilate's headquarters could still be described as "early" (John 18:28: *proi*). Contrary to the opinion of some, their haste is not dictated by the supposed need to complete everything before the afternoon slaying of the Paschal lambs which had actually taken place the day before. (Cf. on 26:17.) Rather, it was to dispose of Jesus speedily before His supporters could get wind of it and block everything by a riot (26:5).

And the chief priests and the elders of the people. (For terminology see notes on 26:59.) Mark's expression (*kai hòlon tò sunédrión*) is simply explanatory, "even the entire Sanhedrin." Perhaps because Matthew had already named the entire Sanhedrin, he left it to the discernment of the reader to deduce that the same authorities who began the trials would certainly conclude them (26:59, 65f. = Mark 14:55, 63f.). However, the full Sanhedrin is explicitly named (Mark 15:1 *hòlon tò sunédrión*: Luke 22:66 *eis tò sunédrión autòn*). Mark's expression confirms the impression that this is no mere sectional interest or party tribunal but a plenary session of the national Sanhedrin itself. Luke's explicit "the assembly of the elders of the people . . . led him away to their council" (Luke 22:66) excludes the supposition

that there is a contradiction between John and the Synoptics as to the location or participants of the morning trial. (See below on 27:2.)

The brevity of this *pro forma* session must not lead to discount the importance of what did or did not occur there. Here again all respect for legal conventions was subordinated to what these leaders judged a higher consideration: the speedy removal of the Nazarene. If judgments of Jewish capital crimes must be unanimous, who heard the objections of Joseph of Arimathea and probably of Nicodemus (Luke 23:50f.)? Further, the arguments that (1) the unanimity must be obtained by a quorum of 23, not necessarily all 71 members, and that (2) they could have hand-picked the jury without informing some of the meeting, are obviated by Mark who unequivocally declares that the priests, elders and scribes present constituted "the whole Sanhedrin" (Mark 15:1; cf. Luke 2:66: *tò presbutérion toû laou*; Acts 22:5). The absence of a few notable councillors does not alter the criminal responsibility of the resounding majority vote against Jesus. This determination of Jesus' death by the supreme council of Israel harmonizes precisely with His many predictions (16:21f.; 20:17ff.).

That the perfunctory questioning of Jesus at the morning consultation was in some details similar to that of the night meetings, is to be expected. Those former hearings were preliminary. This is the formal trial to keep up the appearance of justice (two hearings in serious criminal cases; day-time sentence, etc.). Thus, because the night sessions would not be considered final, even though the previous testimony of Jesus counted against Him, the main issue of His claims would be repeated for confirmation in the daytime session.

Took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. For a skeleton transcript of the central issue, see Luke 22:67-71. Because His fate is already determined, this brief, formal session is held to plot the most effective means of executing their sentence. No mention is made of witnesses or testimony, because the fiasco of the previous night must not be repeated (26:59-61). Because only Jesus' self-incrimination as divine Messiah could swing the jury against Him, this is the exclusive tactic followed by the morning questioning. And yet, because blasphemy would not be a criminal offense in Roman jurisprudence, all their night-time activities would accomplish nothing until Pilate approved their judgment. Therefore, the most persuasive way of stating the case must be found that would convince Pilate to cooperate in confirming their verdict to execute Jesus. They faced the live possibility that Pilate would not simply ratify their verdict, and demand to try Jesus' case himself. From the results of their deliberations, it appears

that they were unable to establish a clear case (John 18:29f.), hoping that turning Him over as an evil-doer to Pilate would have been sufficient bluff to convince Pilate to rubber-stamp their verdict without opening the case. If pressed, they would emphasize the political impact of Jesus' religious pretenses. So, to make Jesus out to be a threat to the Roman political machine, the trumped up charges decided upon are (1) perverting the nation; (2) forbidding to give tribute to Caesar; and (3) claim to be an anointed king (Luke 23:2, 5; John 18:14, 19:12).

27:2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him to Pilate the governor.

When the Jews rejected as king over all Palestine the wicked Archelaus, latest scion of Herod the Great, they sought direct Roman intervention (*Ant.* XVIII, 13,1-3; *Wars*, II,6,1; 7,3; 8,1). Procurators were appointed as civil and military *governor* of Judea and Samaria with their usual residence located at Caesarea, the Roman administrative capital of Palestine. (Cf. Acts 23:23, 33; 25:1, 4, 6, 13.) This latest, Pontius *Pilate*, ruled from 26-36 A.D. (For further study on *Pilate*, see Josephus *Ant.* XVIII,3,1-2; 4,1-2; 6,5; *Wars* II,9,2-4; Tacitus, *Annals* XV,44; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* I,9,10; II,2,5,7 Philo, *De Legationem ad Caium*, c. 38.) However, because of the extremely highly volatile concentration of people of Jewish feasts when nationalistic sentiment ran high, Roman troops accompanying the governor rolled into Jerusalem to preside personally over the maintenance of order. Although Jesus had been sentenced to death, Israel's authorities did not at this time possess the right to execute the death penalty (John 18:31; cf. *Ant.* XX,9,1; *Wars* II,8,1). So, the decision of the Sanhedrin to hand Jesus over to Pilate was, politically, a foregone conclusion. To avoid having to stone Jesus publicly and risk civil war with His massive popular following, the remaining obstacle to carrying out their plan consisted in convincing Pilate.

When *they delivered him to Pilate*, as John has it, "they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium," i.e. from where Caiaphas' authority as God's high priest was supreme (*apò toû Kaià*) to the Praetorium (*eis tò praitòion*), the Roman jurisdiction of Pilate (John 18:28). Unless the high priest's palace were the temporary meeting place of the Sanhedrin, they did not depart from Caiaphas' *palace* (as many read John's wording), because they already left his palace that morning to take Jesus into their council for the final trial (Luke 22:66: *sunéchthē tò presbutériub toû laou . . . kai apégagon autòn eis tò sunédriion autòn*).

However, it is also possible that the Sanhedrin met in Caiaphas' Palace and walked from it to the Praetorium. There are cryptic Jewish reports that the Sanhedrin did not meet in its rightful meeting place for forty years before the fall of Jerusalem. (Cf. *Y. Sanhedrin*, 1,18a,34; 7:24b,41; *Abodah Zarah*, 8b, cited by Barrett, *John*, 445.) Was this due to the curbing of the Sanhedrin's power by Rome, or by Herod earlier, or both? In that political environment possibly a large room in the palace of Caiaphas was utilized more or less regularly in this capacity. In this case, Luke's language (22:66) means that Jesus was led away from His overnight prison to this *ad interim* meeting place of the full Sanhedrin in the high priest's palace. Either way, however, John does not confuse trials, locations or contradict the Synoptics, as he has been charged.

So, this confirmatory session occurred in the relatively normal chamber for such decisions, the meeting place of the Sanhedrin. In a body (Luke 23:1) they walked from the council to the Praetorium. Even this impressive display of moral force may be intended as part of a bluff to impress Pilate with the gravity of trying the rabble-rouser they bring before him.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what time of day did this consultation occur?
2. Who attended it? Specify who constituted this council.
3. Where was this session held? Prove your answer.
4. Explain why the chief priests and elders would need another session, if they had already sentenced Jesus to death the night before.
5. Why would questions that were already answered the night before be repeated at this session?
6. What specifically was the council deciding about Jesus? On what charge(s) was He arraigned before them?
7. Was their decision unanimous concerning Jesus? (Cf. Luke 23:50f.; John 19:38)
8. What action did they take immediately?
9. Who was Pontius Pilate? Why did the Jews deliver Jesus to him when they themselves had pronounced His death sentence?