

# THE TRIALS OF JESUS AND PETER

Mark 14:53-72

With Judas' help, the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel, accomplished its goal in Gethsemane, arresting Jesus for the purpose of killing Him (14:1-2, 43-50). Jesus was lead to the home of Joseph Caiaphas, high priest and head of the Sanhedrin.

## JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (14:53)

Mark 14:53 (ESV)

<sup>53</sup> And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.

The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 members, but only 23 were required for a quorum. Undoubtedly most members were present. This "informal" trial took place around 3AM on Nisan 15 (Friday, April 3), 33 AD; it required a "formal" ratification after dawn as recorded in 15:1.

Why wasn't the trial held the next day? The trial was held that night because: (1) In Jewish criminal law it was customary to hold a trial immediately after arrest. (2) Roman legal trials were usually held shortly after sunrise so the Sanhedrin needed a verdict by daybreak in order to get the case to Pilate early. (3) With Jesus finally in custody they did not want to delay proceedings, thereby arousing opposition to His arrest.

John Mark breaks from Jesus' trial to report that Peter followed Jesus inside the courtyard of the high priest's residence.

## PETER IN THE COURTYARD (14:54)

Mark 14:54 (ESV)

<sup>54</sup> And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.

John Mark wants us to know that while Jesus was facing His accusers upstairs, Peter was facing his in the courtyard. John Mark masterfully juxtaposed Peter's experience with Jesus'. Peter's story is picked up in verse 66.

Upstairs, Jesus was seated in the center of a tiered semi-circle of seats. His accusers, too, sat in the center facing the presiding high priest flanked by court clerks to his left and right. The information in this section probably came from one or more Sanhedrin members who were secretly sympathetic to Jesus or who came to believe in Him after the resurrection (Acts 6:7).

## IN SEARCH OF EVIDENCE (15:55-61a)

Mark 14:55-61a (ESV)

<sup>55</sup> Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. <sup>56</sup> For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. <sup>57</sup> And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, <sup>58</sup> "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" <sup>59</sup> Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. <sup>60</sup> And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus,

**“Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?”<sup>61</sup> But he remained silent and made no answer.**

This was not about justice; the verdict was death. Some evidence had to be found to legitimize the court’s action. The Law of Moses required at least two credible witnesses to justify a death sentence (Numb. 35:50; Deut. 17:6, 10:15). Somewhat comically, the Sanhedrin’s phony witnesses failed to coordinate their stories; their testimony crumbled under cross examination.

Jesus had made a statement about destroying the Temple that provided an opportunity. In the ancient world, destruction of a place of worship, such as the Jerusalem Temple, was a capital offense. Jesus had said, “ I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.” (John 2:19), but He was referring to the “temple” of His physical body (John 2:20-22).

Try as they did, again the testimonies didn’t agree and the accusation had to be dismissed.

Throughout these false accusations, Jesus remained silent, refusing to defend Himself. He fulfilled what was written of Messiah in Isaiah 53:7.

**Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)**

**<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.**

Lack of evidence and Jesus’ silence brought the proceedings to a standstill. In frustration, the high priest took matters into his own hands.

### **JESUS’ TESTIMONY (14:61b-62)**

**Mark 14:61b–62 (ESV)**

**<sup>61</sup> ...Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”<sup>62</sup> And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”**

The high priest asked Jesus straight out if He is the Messiah. Both “Christ” and “Son of the Blessed” are messianic titles based on the Old Testament. Jesus unequivocally answered “I am”. Then, applying Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 to Himself, Jesus predicted they will one day be judged by Him! On that day it will be unmistakably clear that He is the Messiah.

This was what the high priest was looking for.

### **THE VERDICT (14:63-65)**

**Mark 14:63–65 (ESV)**

**<sup>63</sup> And the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further witnesses do we need?  
<sup>64</sup> You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death.<sup>65</sup> And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” And the guards received him with blows.**

By tearing his clothes, the high priest showed that he regarded Jesus’ statement as blasphemy. To him, Jesus’ words dishonored God by claiming rights and powers

belonging exclusively to God. His reaction also expressed relief since Jesus' self-incriminating answer removed the need for more witnesses.

The high priest called for a verdict from the Sanhedrin; they all condemned Jesus as deserving of death. To spit in someone's face was a gross personal insult. Blindfolding, striking and demanding He prophesy who hit Him was based on a Rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 11:2-4 that the Messiah could judge such matters without the benefit of sight (Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 93b). But Jesus refused to submit to their test and remained silent (Isa. 53:7; 1 Peter 2:23).

While Jesus stood firm before His accusers upstairs, Peter was crumbling in the courtyard below.

### **PETER DENIES JESUS (14:66-72)**

**Mark 14:66–72 (ESV)**

<sup>66</sup> And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, <sup>67</sup> and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." <sup>68</sup> But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. <sup>69</sup> And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." <sup>70</sup> But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." <sup>71</sup> But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." <sup>72</sup> And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

This account probably came directly from Peter. Facial recognition must have been a factor, but Peter's accent also gave him away. Galileans had a distinct dialect. The servant girl wouldn't let up; eventually other bystanders joined in. Out of fear for his safety, Peter denied any association with "this man" even refusing to say Jesus' name.

Peter's third denial was "immediately" punctuated by the rooster's second crowing. This time Peter remembered Jesus' prediction of his denial (29–31) and overwhelmed, he broke down and wept. Peter's remorse opened the way for true repentance and restoration to Jesus as we will see in Mark 16:7.

In order to legitimize the action of the court, the Sanhedrin had to wait until it was officially morning to declare their verdict.

### **SANHEDRIN'S FORMAL VERDICT (15:1)**

**Mark 15:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.

Though the Sanhedrin could pronounce a death sentence it could not exercise capital punishment while under Roman rule. A condemned prisoner had to be turned over to the Roman authorities. The Roman governor could either ratify or rescind the Sanhedrin's death sentence. Since the charge of blasphemy was not punishable by

Roman law the Sanhedrin substituted a charge of treason. They argued that by claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus was openly rebelling against Roman rule and seeking to establish Himself “the King of the Jews” (15:2). They were confident that a Roman court could not ignore such a charge.

Clearly we see the contrast between Jesus and Peter; Jesus remained steadfast, Peter fell apart. In Jesus we learn how to endure suffering and unjust treatment; in Peter we are comforted that Jesus’ unconditional love covers our failures.

Years later, Peter made a specific application from Jesus’ trial.

### **FOLLOW JESUS’ EXAMPLE WHEN TREATED UNJUSTLY (1 PETER 2:13-25)**

**1 Peter 2:13–25 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

<sup>18</sup> Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. <sup>19</sup> For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The only way we will be able to follow Jesus’ example is if 1) our desire is to do God’s will above all else and 2) we have a settled confidence that God is with us and caring for us in and through our suffering. Jesus had submitted completely to the Father’s will in Gethsemane and as Peter affirms, Jesus Himself “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” In so entrusting Himself He was able to accomplish our salvation. In so entrusting ourselves who knows what great things God will accomplish through us?