**John 18:19-24**

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/john/john-18/john-1819-24/>

The Preliminary Trial of Jesus.

John describes the first of Jesus’s three religious trials. It takes place in the home of Annas, the former high priest. Annas questions Jesus about His teaching. Jesus respectfully reminds Annas that He has always taught openly for everyone to hear and that if there is something He said that was against the law, it was Annas’s obligation to cite and prove it before arresting or interrogating Him. The high priest’s servant strikes Jesus for speaking this way to the former high priest. Jesus mercifully replies that if he said something wrong, it should be pointed out, not met with violence, while offering that what he said was actually true. Having found nothing to accuse Jesus of doing, Annas passes his prisoner onto Caiaphas, the sitting high priest.

 There is no apparent parallel Gospel account for this event.

* Note: Throughout this portion of commentary, each time a Jewish law was broken by the chief priests and elders as they prosecuted Jesus, we identify that rule by means of brackets—i.e. [Rule 2: Neutrality]. The numbering of these rules in according to The Bible Says series about the Religious Prosecution of Jesus.

For a complete listing of the broken rules, see The Bible Says Article:  
“[Jesus's Trial, Part 1. The Laws Broken by the Religious Leaders: A Summary.](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/the-religious-prosecution-against-jesus-part-1/)”

After informing his readers about Peter’s first denial in the courtyard (John 18:15-18), John shifts the scene back to the illegal preliminary trial of Jesus in the home of Annas, the former high priest [Rule 6: Illegal Location].

Previously, John informed us that Jesus was taken to Annas first (John 18:12-13), following His submission to arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1-11). John also indicated how the religious trial was rigged against Jesus to find Him guilty and sentence Him to death (John 18:14) [Rule 3: Rigged Trial].

The trial John describes for us here is Jesus’s preliminary religious trial. John is the only Gospel writer to explain it for us, and this is the only trial of three religious trials that John’s Gospel covers. Matthew and Mark explain Jesus’s second religious trial in the home of Caiaphas (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65). Luke explains Jesus’s third and last religious trial which took place at sunrise before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71).

To better understand the sequence of these events, please see:

* “[Timeline: The Final 24 Hours of the Life of Jesus.](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/a-timeline-of-jesuss-final-24-hours/)”
* “[Jesus’s Trial, Part 3. The 5 Stages of Jesus’s Trial.](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/jesuss-trial-part-3-the-5-stages-of-jesuss-trial/)”

All three of these trials violated multiple laws, which rendered them illegal and illegitimate.

At the outset Jesus’s preliminary trial was illegal because it violated the following judicial principles:

* Rule 1: Conspiracy—The judges had plotted to kill Jesus.
* Rule 2: Neutrality—The judges hated Jesus.
* Rule 3: Rigged Trial—The outcome was predetermined.

Additionally, it broke the following Jewish laws of legal practice the instant it began:

* Rule 4: Bribery—The trial was based on a bribe.
* Rule 5: Illegal Timing—No part of a trial involving a capital offense could occur at night.
* Rule 6: Illegal Location—The home of Annas was not an authorized location for a trial.

Concerning Jesus’s preliminary trial, John wrote: The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching (v 19).

The high priest, whom John is referring to, was Annas, the father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was high priest that year (John 18:13). In our commentary for John 18:12-14 we pointed out that Annas was the patriarch of a priestly dynasty; and that in addition to being a leading benefactor to the scheme to extort worshipers through sacrificial sales and the temple tax, he was notorious for being a skilled slanderer and seasoned accuser.

To learn more about Annas and/or Caiaphas, please see the Bible Says’ article:  
“[Jesus's Trial, Part 2. The Jewish Law and the Political Actors who Condemned Jesus](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/jesuss-trial-part-2-the-jewish-law-and-the-political-actors-who-condemned-jesus/).”

The high priest’s actions of questioning Jesus, the defendant, were illegal because the judge could not act as an advocate for or against the defendant [Rule 12: Improper Prosecution]. Moreover, in cases involving capital crimes, such as this one, the trial was to begin with a statement on behalf of the defendant. Jesus’s preliminary trial began with an interrogation [Rule 8: Lack of Defense]. Throughout His religious trials, the Bible gives no indication that anyone offered any defense on Jesus’s behalf. In fact, it suggests all were against Him: “they all condemned Him to be deserving of death” (Mark 14:64b).

The reason Annas questioned Jesus was because the priests and elders did not have any evidence that Jesus broke a law that was punishable by death [Rule 9: Lack of Evidence]. This also meant Annas did not have any crime to accuse Jesus of committing [Rule 7: Lack of a Charge]. Without evidence or a charge there could be no legitimate trial.

The former high priest questioned Jesus about two things: 1. His disciples and 2. His teaching.

Annas was attempting to trick Jesus to incriminate Himself. His attempt failed. But even if it had worked, it would have been invalid because it was unlawful to use a defendant’s testimony about himself in trials involving capital punishment [Rule 13: Forced Self-Incrimination].

Jesus was not legally obligated to respond to His interrogator’s questions, but He respectfully answered him anyway. Instead of taking the bait, Jesus answered him, “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” (v 20).

Jesus politely explained to Annas that He had nothing to hide. The things He said, He had spoken openly to the world. None of His teachings or claims were a secret. The things He taught were always in public, such as in synagogues and the temple.

Synagogues were the local community centers and places of worship in each town. A synagogue was where the scriptures were taught and expounded upon by Jewish rabbis. Synagogues were run by the Pharisees. The temple was the holy place of worship in Jerusalem. It was often referred to as “the House of God.” The temple was where all Jews came to offer sacrifices and to worship God as they celebrated His everlasting mercies. The temple was run by the priests under Annas’s influence.

Jesus had just spent the past several days teaching in and around the temple courtyard (Matthew 21:12-16; 21:23-25:46). If there was anything regarding Jesus’s teaching or His disciples that potentially violated a law, it would have been public for all Jews, including religious scribes and lawyers, to hear or witness.

Jesus then civilly exercised His rights according to Jewish law. Jesus requested Annas to produce witnesses and present evidence, as he was legally required to do before arresting and interrogating Him,

“Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said” (v 21).

If the former high priest really wanted to discover if Jesus’s teaching broke the law, he could (and legally should have) questioned any number of those who had heard what He spoke—including many Sadducees, the priestly order which Annas led—who knew exactly what He said (Matthew 26:55).

For politely insisting on His rights and respectfully challenging the former high priest to follow his own laws, Jesus was struck.

When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?” (v 22).

The Greek word referring to one of the officers is a form of ὑπηρέτης (G5257—pronounced: “hoop-ay-ret-ace”). It literally describes an under-rower of a galley ship. In this context it means a subordinate or attendant of the former high priest. This officer struck Jesus on the former high priest’s behalf. Apparently, despite Jesus’s respectful response, the officer was offended that a humble prisoner like Jesus would have the audacity to request someone as revered as Annas to follow the law.

The irony in this violent reaction is that this officer had just struck **THE** High Priest. As the Messiah, Jesus was the supreme High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:5-10; 7:1-28). This officer, unwittingly fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah:

“We ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.”  
(Isaiah 53:4b)

But Jesus, in obedience to His Father’s will (Luke 22:42) and in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, remained gentle and did not strike back,

“He [the Messiah] will not cry out or raise His voice,  
Nor make His voice heard in the street.  
A bruised reed He will not break  
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish.”  
(Isaiah 42:2-3a)

Jesus trusted God, knowing that: “He who vindicates Me is near” and none could “contend with” Him (Isaiah 50:8), for “the LORD God helps Me” (Isaiah 50:7, 9).

Jesus mercifully did not respond in kind according to this officer’s insolence. Instead of punishing him as he deserved for striking the Person of God, Jesus offered the gentlest rebuke.

Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?” (v 23).

It was inappropriate for one of the officers to strike a prisoner for speaking wrongly. According to Jewish law, prisoners were to be treated fairly and humanely by those who judged them. When the officer struck Jesus, he broke this law [Rule 10: Abuse]. It would be the first of many such infractions over the next several hours.

Jesus first attested to the inappropriate violence done against Him when He calmly instructed the officer to testify of the wrong which Jesus was alleged to have spoken, instead of immediately hitting Him. Then Jesus offered the other possibility for the officer to consider:  that He had spoken rightly. And if Jesus had spoken rightly, He asked the officer, why do you strike Me?

Jesus had spoken rightly. And He did so with the utmost patience, respect, and love for Annas and the officer—both of whom bore His divine image (Genesis 1:26-27) and were His personal creations, fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). It was apparent that Annas and his officers hated Jesus. They regarded Him as their enemy. Jesus’s merciful response to their violent hatred was an application of His teaching to His disciples:

* “Do not resist an evil person”/turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:29)
* “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35)
* “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36)

Annas wanted to know what Jesus’s teaching was, and he was getting a beautiful, front row display of His teaching through Jesus’s merciful response to this officer.

But Annas was not interested in such things, especially at this late hour. The former high priest only wanted to discover something about Jesus that he could twist into an accusation that would be sufficient to murder Him.

Unable to find anything sufficient for this dark purpose, Annas decided it was time to move Jesus along, and concluded the preliminary trail.

So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest (v 24), where the Sanhedrin had been gathered to condemn Jesus at His night-time trial. This was Jesus’s second religious trial. Its events are described in Matthew 26:57-68 and Mark 14:53-65.

For a detailed explanation of the principles that were broken during Jesus’s trial, see The Bible Says Article:  
“[Jesus's Trial, Part 4. The Judicial Principles that were Violated.](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/jesuss-trial-part-4-the-judicial-principles-that-were-violated/)”

For a detailed explanation of the other laws that were broken during Jesus’s trial, see The Bible Says Article:  
“[Jesus's Trial, Part 5. The Laws of Practice that were Violated](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/jesuss-trial-part-5-the-laws-of-practice-that-were-violated/).”

**Biblical Text**

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