

# 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 is 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.”](#)

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.”](#)
- [“Jesus's Trial, Part 3. The 5 Stages of Jesus's 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.”](#)

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 trial.

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.”](#)

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.”](#)

### **Biblical Text**

**19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. 20 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. 21 Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.” 22 When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?” 23 Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?” 24 So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.**