

Matthew 26:57-58

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-26/matthew-2657-58/>

Jesus is brought to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, for His Night-Time Trial in this narrative transition from the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter secretly follows from a distance to see the outcome and waits in the courtyard of the high priest's home.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 14:53-54, Luke 22:54-55, and John 18:24.

- Note: Throughout this portion of commentary, each time a Jewish law is 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](#).

Matthew continues his narrative of *Jesus's* final night before His crucifixion.

This passage transitions the narrative from the Garden of Gethsemane—where *Jesus* submitted to arrest and all the disciples fled (Matthew 26:47-56)—to what happened next. This transition functionally tells us two things:

1. *Jesus was led away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and elders were gathered together to try and condemn Him (v 57).*
2. *Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in...to see the outcome (v 58).*

Matthew will later narrate what happens with each of these historical plotlines in the sections that follow. He narrates what happens with *Jesus* in Matthew 26:59-68; and he narrates what happens with *Peter* in Matthew 26:69-75.

The events of this transition in Matthew: *Jesus's* transfer from Gethsemane to *Caiaphas*; and *Peter's* following *Him* as far as the courtyard most likely took place on the night of Nisan 15 (sometime during the dark morning hours on Friday by Roman reckoning).

To learn more about the timing and sequencing of these events: See the Bible Says, [“Timeline: Jesus's Final 24 Hours.”](#)

This commentary will focus first on Matthew's primary historical plotline of what happened to *Jesus* before turning attention to his secondary historical plotline concerning *Peter*. However, before directly commenting on the specific text of this scripture it would be helpful to outline and explain several things about *Jesus's* religious trials.

There were a total of three religious trials that *Jesus* underwent between His arrest in the early morning hours and being handed over to Pilate shortly after dawn (Matthew 27:2). These three trials were:

1. *Jesus's* Preliminary Trial in the home of Annas, the former *high priest* (John 18:12-14, 19-24)
2. *Jesus's* Night-Time Trial in the home of Caiaphas, the sitting *high priest* (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54; John 18:24)
3. *Jesus's* Sunrise Trial before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71)

John alone describes the first trial. Matthew and Mark describe the second, while Luke and John mention or allude to it. And Luke describes the third trial with Matthew and Mark providing short summaries of it. No single Gospel narrative describes all three religious trials in detail. But together the Gospel narratives complement each other to provide a complete picture of what happened to *Jesus* following His arrest and before He was handed over to the Romans for His civil trial.

To better understand the sequence of these events, please see The Bible Says' Article, [“Jesus's Trial, Part 3. The 5 Stages Of Jesus's Religious Prosecution.”](#)

As previously mentioned, this passage is Matthew's transition from Gethsemane to *Jesus's* Night-Time Trial before *Caiaphas*. In the previous verse, Matthew reports that once it became clear that their Rabbi *Jesus* was actually submitting to arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, “all the disciples left Him and fled” (Matthew 26:56).

Then those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together (v 57).

Matthew's transition skips over *Jesus's* Preliminary Trial in the home of Annas (John 18:12-14, 19-24) [Rule 5: Illegal Timing; Rule 6: Illegal Location] without mentioning it at all. A possible reason Matthew neglected to mention the Preliminary Trial was because little came of it. The former *high priest* was unable to find or take something *Jesus* said and twist it into a charge that could be used to condemn *Him* [Rule 2: Neutrality; Rule 12: Improper Prosecution] before Annas sent *Jesus away to Caiaphas*.

To learn more about *Jesus's* first religious trial see The Bible Says commentary page for [John 18:12-14](#) and [John 18:19-24](#).

Matthew (and Mark) instead chose to focus their readers' attention on the second trial in the house of *Caiaphas* [Rule 6: Illegal Location]. It was at this Night-Trial [Rule 5: Illegal Timing] where the priests, *scribes, and elders*, through *Caiaphas's* intervention were able to manufacture a charge they would use to sentence *Jesus* to death [Rule 2: Neutrality; Rule 12: Improper Prosecution].

The illicit and secretive gatherings of *Jesus's* first two trials in the dead of night in the homes of Annas and *Caiaphas* would be tantamount to justices of the Supreme Court secretly accepting, hearing, and ruling on a case in the middle of the night in the living room of the chief justice.

The third trial at sunrise before the Sanhedrin was an official formality. According to Luke (Luke 22:66-71), it simply repeated the arguments that were crafted in the second trial to hastily condemn *Jesus* to death. It was a “show trial” with a predetermined outcome.

Luke details the third trial while Matthew and Mark briefly summarize it (Matthew 27:1-2; Mark 15:1). The purpose of this third trial was so the priests, *scribes*, and *elders* could claim a semblance of legitimacy, as night time trials were illegal. Because the third trial technically occurred after sunrise, and was conducted in the proper location, it had the appearance of legitimacy.

However, *Jesus*’s third religious trial was just as farcical as the previous trials. [Rule 1 Conspiracy; Rule 2: Neutrality; Rule 3: Rigged Trial; Rule 4: Bribery; Rule 5: Illegal Timing; Rule 8: Lack of Defense; Rule 9: Lack of Evidence; Rule 12: Improper Prosecution; Rule 13: Forced Self-Incrimination; Rule 15: Ignoring the Evidence; Rule 16: Faulty Verdict; Rule 17: Hasty Sentence; Rule 18: Murder].

The reason all these trials may seem convoluted or confusing is because the entire process was as chaotic and disorganized as it was illegal.

It seems apparent that none of the religious leaders were ready or expecting to try *Jesus* on this night.

Matthew previously reported that they were plotting to wait until the Passover/Feast of Unleavened festival was over before launching their attack on *Jesus*, in order to avoid a riot (Matthew 26:2) [Rule 1 Conspiracy]. When *Jesus*’s disciple Judas agreed to betray *Him* to them, they began looking for a good opportunity to arrest *Him* (Matthew 26:16) [Rule 4: Bribery]. The night of Passover was almost certainly not the opportunity they had in mind.

But *Jesus* forced their hand when He identified Judas as His betrayer during His celebration of the Passover with His disciples (John 13:26-27). Judas then “went out immediately” and informed the chief priests (John 13:30). This likely alarmed them greatly, not only because their plot was spoiled, but more importantly because they risked being exposed to the people for trying to murder the Man many hoped and believed was the Messiah. If the truth of this spread, they would be ruined. For the conspirators it was either arrest and silence *Jesus* now, or risk their reputation, their careers, their lives, and their nation (John 11:48-50).

Therefore, they acted quickly and quietly. Despite not being prepared to conduct a legitimate trial, the *high priest*, *Caiaphas* requested a *Roman cohort* from the governor Pilate to arrest *Jesus*. His request was granted. And *Jesus* was detained in Gethsemane. From there it appears that they improvised.

First, *Jesus* was sent to Annas’s house (John 18:12-13) [Rule 5: Illegal Timing; Rule 6 Illegal Location], where the former *high priest* failed to find a sufficient charge [Rule 2: Neutrality; Rule 12: Improper Prosecution] to condemn *Him* to death. Meanwhile, the priests and *elders* gathered from all over Jerusalem throughout the night to the home of *Caiaphas* where they hurriedly prepared for the impending trial [Rule 5: Illegal Timing; Rule 6 Illegal Location] which it appears none of them were anticipating would occur in the dark morning hours after Passover.

By the time *Jesus* arrived at *Caiaphas's* courtyard for His second trial that night, the priests still had no evidence [Rule 9: Lack of Evidence], much less a firm accusation [Rule 7: Lack of a Charge] with which to charge and condemn *Him*.

Now that we've discussed the overall picture about what was going on during *Jesus's* religious trials, we turn our attention to a few details regarding what Matthew said in this transitional passage:

Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together (v 57).

Matthew mentioned three persons or groups of people who *were gathered together*.

The first and most notable person he mentioned was *Caiaphas, the high priest*.

John tells us that *Caiaphas* was the son-in-law of Annas, the former *high priest* (John 18:13). His mentioning of this fact implies that it was *Caiaphas's* relationship with Annas that gave him this position. Annas remained influential (Luke 3:1; Acts 4:6).

As *high priest, Caiaphas* held the highest religious office in the land. This position was first held by Moses's brother, Aaron. In addition to overseeing all that the priest, the Temple, and the sacrifices offered there, the *high priest* mediated between God and the people. He was to offer sacrifice on behalf of the nation of Israel (Leviticus 16:20-22). Under the Roman occupation of Israel, *the high priest* was the leader of the Sadducees and essentially the most influential Jew in Judea.

Jesus had been on *Caiaphas's* radar as a threat to be eliminated ever since He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:47-50). *Caiaphas* prophesied that *Jesus* would die for the life of the nation and gather God's people together (John 11:51-52). *Caiaphas* appears to have been involved in the plot to kill *Jesus* since the priests and *elders* met in his court to scheme (Matthew 26:3-5) [Rule 1 Conspiracy].

Caiaphas also would have been quickly informed of Judas's offer (Matthew 26:14-16) [Rule 4: Bribery]. And as *the high priest, Caiaphas* was almost certainly the one who authorized the temple officers to go arrest *Jesus* in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:47). And it was probably *Caiaphas's* request that procured the Roman cohort to accompany the arresting party (John 18:3). *Caiaphas's* personal servant, Malchus, may have overseen the operation as he was probably standing next to *Jesus* when *Peter* cut off his ear (Matthew 26:51; John 18:10).

The fact that *those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest* at such a strange hour and that *Jesus* was sent from his father-in-law Annas (John 18:24) reveals that *Caiaphas* was expecting *Jesus*. Also, *Caiaphas's* house must have been quite large since it was able to host such a sizable gathering.

All of this demonstrates how *Caiaphas, the high priest* was intimately involved in the scheme to murder *Jesus*, the Messiah.

The second group of people Matthew says *were gathered together in the house of Caiaphas were the scribes*.

The scribes were the interpreters and writers of the Law. They were lawyers. Scribes were required to be present at Jewish trials and served as court reporters who wrote down everything that was said. Their presence reveals that they were expecting to conduct a trial.

During Jewish criminal cases, two *scribes* were assigned to write down everything that was said for the prosecution and the defense. Fairness to each side was so prioritized that one scribe sat next to the prosecution, and the other scribe sat near the defense. But fairness and justice was not a concern of the judges at *Jesus's* trial; their only concern was “how they might put Him to death” (Matthew 26:59).

The third group of people Matthew says *were gathered together in the house of Caiaphas were elders*.

Elders refers to the leading members of the Pharisees. In this context, the term *elders* likely specifies Pharisees who were on the Sanhedrin council. The Pharisees were the guardians of Jewish culture. They promoted and preserved God's laws in the synagogues located in towns and villages throughout Judea. *The elders* were the revered teachers of the Law.

In the next verse, Matthew includes a fourth group who is present at Caiaphas's home—“the chief priests” (Matthew 26:59). The chief priests were leading members of the Sadducees. The chief priests were to the Sadducees what *the elders* were to the Pharisees—that is, members of the Sanhedrin council. The Sadducees were the priests who operated the temple and performed the sacrificial duties. Their leader was *Caiaphas*. Matthew also informs his readers that “the whole council” was present for *Jesus's* second religious trial (Matthew 26:59).

The Pharisees and Sadducees were typically rivals who contended with one another for influence and power. The fact that *the Pharisees' scribes and elders were gathered together with the high priest* and the Sadducees at any hour of the day would have been noteworthy. The fact that they *were together* between three and four in the morning in the home of *the high priest* for the purpose of condemning *Jesus* demonstrated their illegal collusion [Rule 1: No Conspiracy]. And Matthew is demonstrating this collusion by highlighting this fact.

The next verse of Matthew's transitional passage from the scene of *Jesus's* arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane also informs us what happened with *Peter*.

After *Jesus* submitted to arrest and rebuked *Peter* for trying to defend *Him* with his sword (Matthew 26:51-54; John 18:10-11), *Peter* and all the disciples fled in fear and confusion (Matthew 26:56).

Now, Matthew tells us: *But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome* (v 58).

This passage also informs us that *Peter* followed *Jesus* at a distance after he fled away in fear and confusion when *Jesus* submitted to arrest (Matthew 26:56). *Peter* got as far as the courtyard

near the place where He was tried (Matthew 26:36-56). This lets us know why and how Peter came to arrive at the place where he will deny *Jesus* (Matthew 26:69-75).

The reason *Peter was following at a distance* (and not among the crowd) was likely to be far enough away so as not to get caught and to be able to escape if someone recognized him. The reason he followed was because he wanted to *see the outcome* of *Jesus's* trial. Matthew informs us that *Peter followed as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and even dared to enter in, and sit down with the temple officers to see the outcome.*

This would mean *Peter* also followed *Jesus* and His captors to Annas's house for the Preliminary Trial. John's Gospel affirms this (John 18:15-18).

John's Gospel also explains how Peter was able to get *as far as the courtyard of the high priest and enter in and sit down with the officers.* *Peter* was able to do so because the disciple John, who was with *Peter*, knew the doorkeeper within the high priest's household (John 18:15-16). According to John, it was at Annas's house where *Peter* denied knowing *Jesus* the first two times (John 18:12-24).

Matthew will pick up the story of *Peter* and his three denials of *Jesus* (Matthew 26:69-75) after he first discusses the second trial of *Jesus* in the home of *Caiaphas* (Matthew 26:57-68).

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

57 Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome.