

# The Mind of Christ

## The Trials of Jesus – Part 1

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our series entitled “The Mind of Christ,” we are now moving to the trials of Jesus leading up to the crucifixion.
  - A. To fully understand the impact of these trials – both Jewish and Roman – we need to begin by attempting to understand how these trials SHOULD have been conducted.
    1. Under Jewish law, trials involving capital cases – cases in which the death penalty was a possibility – were conducted by the Great Sanhedrin.
    2. Two highly respected and deeply revered writings of the Jews give us a complete picture of how the Sanhedrin was to conduct trials of this type. These writings were:
      - a. The Mishna – which contains the traditional oral interpretations of Scripture.
      - b. The Tosefta (toe-SEF-tah) – which is a commentary and expansion of the oral interpretations of Scriptures found in the Mishna.

3. When taken together, these two writings clearly defined the jurisdiction, the powers and the procedures that governed the Sanhedrin.
  4. Although it is argued that these writings were never intended to be followed EXACTLY, they do, however, give us two important facts concerning how the Sanhedrin was to operate in capital crimes:
    - a. First, these two writings provide a general overview, or a broad picture, of how the Sanhedrin was to act in all capital crimes.
    - b. Second, these writings provide the MINIMUM standards of justice by which the Sanhedrin should operate when dealing with all capital crimes.
- B. When we examine the standards of conduct contained in the Mishna and the Tosefta (toe-SEF-tah), and compare them to the actual way in which the Sanhedrin acted during the trial of Jesus, one thing clearly emerges.
1. There was a GROSS MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE!
    - a. The facts of the matter are that the Jewish authorities went against EVERY IDEAL of justice.

- b. They were **ABSOLUTELY DETERMINED** to sentence Jesus to death – **REGARDLESS** of the evidence that was **CLEARLY** insufficient to find Jesus guilty of **ANY** crime.
  - c. And to carry out their wicked desires to see Jesus die, they cast aside every **LEGAL PRECEDENT** and every **LAW** that would have found Jesus innocent of **ANY** crime.
2. So, let's begin part one of our study of the trials of Jesus by looking at the Great Sanhedrin and try to learn how it was designed to function in all matters of law.

**BODY:**

- I. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews in the days of Jesus.
  - A. It was composed of seventy-one members.
    1. Seventy members made up the **MAIN** body of the Sanhedrin, because that was the number Moses appointed to aid him in his task of handling disputes between the children of Israel. **(cf. Numbers 11:16)**
    2. The seventy-first member of the Sanhedrin was the High Priest, who presided over all meetings of the Sanhedrin.
  - B. This judicial body was made up of men who came from a variety of religious backgrounds.

1. Its members included:
    - a. Scribes and Pharisees
    - b. Sadducees
    - c. Priests
    - d. Elders of the people
  2. All four groups that made up the members of the Great Sanhedrin were among the most bitter enemies of Jesus.
  3. So, from the very beginning, Jesus was at a distinct disadvantage in being able to find justice in THIS court.
- C. The Sanhedrin also had tremendous powers.
1. It had jurisdiction over EVERY Jew.
  2. During the days of Israel's independence (prior to Roman rule), the Sanhedrin could impose the death penalty.
    - a. The forms of execution the Sanhedrin prescribed included stoning, burning, beheading or strangulation – depending on the severity of the crime.
- II. However, what is perhaps the MOST unique characteristic about the Great Sanhedrin was the fact that it was deliberately ordered to PROTECT the interest of the man on trial.

- A. Under Jewish law, the Sanhedrin was designed to act as counsel for the DEFENSE.
  - 1. Its whole purpose was to exercise what Jewish law defined as “mercy in judgment.”
  - 2. Even when it appeared that the man on trial was clearly guilty of the crimes he was being charged with, the Sanhedrin was supposed to diligently search to find SOME way to ACQUIT the man and find him INNOCENT.
  - 3. In fact, one writing stated, “The Sanhedrin which condemns to death ONE man in SEVEN YEARS is accounted murderous.”
    - a. And, even then, another great rabbi argued, “the Sanhedrin that condemns to death one man in SEVENTY years is to be considered murderous.”
    - b. But two other well-respected rabbis’ wrote that the Sanhedrin should NEVER condemn a man to death.
  
- B. Even the way the Sanhedrin produced and questioned witnesses was designed to protect the accused.
  - 1. There were four general guidelines that were established to govern every criminal procedure in capital cases:
    - a. First, Jewish law demanded absolute and complete agreement between those who were making the accusation

when it came to all material facts in the case – those facts that were absolutely essential to either acquit or convict the accused.

- b. Second, the examination of all witnesses was to be open to the public so that their accusations could be openly and publicly challenged. Witnesses were never questioned in private for fear that someone might be tempted to coach a witness to testify in a particular manner.
- c. Third, under Jewish law the accused was automatically granted full protection against any miscarriage of justice. This meant that the accused was to be assured that he would receive full and complete protection against false imprisonment, false witnesses or any conceivable injustice. Under Jewish law, a man was TRULY and FACTUALLY innocent UNTIL he was proven guilty. Furthermore, a man could never be proven guilty of a crime based solely on mere CIRCUMSTANCIAL evidence.
- d. And finally, every effort was taken to verify the truthfulness of the testimony of every witness or accuser.

2. It had always been a fundamental principle in Jewish law that the testimony of a MINIMUM of TWO WITNESSES was required to condemn the accused.
  - a. **Deuteronomy 17:6** – *Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.*
  - b. The Mishna set forth various requirements for the open and public examination of every witness.
    - (1). First, the witnesses were required to be examined separately, so that one witness could not hear the testimony of another.
    - (2). Second, each witness was asked a series of seven questions to evaluate the relevancy or materiality of all testimony given as evidence.
    - (3). Finally, the testimony of a witness must agree EXACTLY with every relevant and material fact offered in testimony by all the other witnesses. If there was ANY variation WHATSOEVER as to essential and material facts in the case, the testimony of all witnesses was disregarded, and the accused was automatically acquitted.

3. There is another interesting fact about the legal procedures that governed the Sanhedrin – the accused was not even to be considered on trial until the evidence of the witnesses had been stated and confirmed.
  - a. This meant that a man could not even be incarcerated until every witness had been examined.
  - b. The trial could begin ONLY after the testimony of all witnesses was ruled as relevant and material to the case.
  - c. This is the very point of discussion between Jesus and Annas the former High Priest.
    - (1). **John 18:19-21** – *The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. 20 Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. 21 Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said."*
    - (2). Jesus challenged the right of Annas to ask Him ANY questions. NO ONE had a legal right to ask the accused ANYTHING until the evidence of witnesses had been taken and found to be credible.

4. Jewish law also prohibited certain people from giving evidence, including anyone whose honesty was questionable, or anyone who could be proven to be a friend OR an enemy of the accused.
  - a. Enemies were defined as “a man who, from hostility, has not spoken to his neighbor for three days.”
5. Witnesses were also compelled to appear at the beginning of a trial as well as at the end.
  - a. In all capital cases the witnesses were reminded at the beginning of the trial of what God told Cain after he slew his brother Abel:
    - (1). **Genesis 4:10** – God said, “... *The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.*”
    - (2). Witnesses whose testimony has condemned a man to death were told that the word “blood” is in the plural in this passage, and literally means, “bloods.”
    - (3). In other words, they needed to understand that they were not just executing the man found guilty, but all future generations that may come from him.
    - (4). Furthermore, witnesses were reminded that all this was being done in the sight of God, Who knew the REAL truth.



- b. If, for some reason, one of the members of the Sanhedrin was unable to serve because of illness or some other reason, a young man from the front row of disciples was chosen to take his place as judge.
  - (1). As soon as this young man would rise and join the other members of the Sanhedrin in the semi-circle, the other young men would shift seats to fill the empty space left, and a man from the audience would then be selected to fill the last empty seat in the third row.
- 3. Furthermore, judges in capital cases could only be priests, Levites, and Israelites who could marry into priestly families.
  - a. In other words, they had to be men whose ancestry or lineage was absolutely pure.
  - b. Also, judges in capital cases could not be eunuchs or men with no children – which is another way of saying, judges in all capital cases had to be married men with families.
- B. The conduct of the judges was carefully regulated, especially in capital cases.
  - 1. First, there had to be an ABSOLUTE MINIMUM of twenty-three judges present.

2. Second, the case always began with the arguments for the DEFENSE – arguing for the ACQUITTAL of the accused.
  - a. Trials NEVER began with the prosecution bringing charges before the court.
  - b. Rather, the DEFENSE was given the FIRST opportunity to show to the court reasons for the accused being acquitted and released.
3. Third, the members of the Sanhedrin were restricted when it came to the matter of changing their verdict.
  - a. If a judge argued for a GUILTY verdict, he could later change his mind and argue for ACQUITTAL.
  - b. But, if a judge argued for ACQUITTAL, he could **NOT** change his mind and later argue for a GUILTY verdict.
  - c. Also, if a judge voted to CONDEMN the prisoner to death, he could later change his mind after a night of meditation and prayer, and vote the next morning to ACQUIT the condemned.
  - d. However, if a judge voted to ACQUIT the accused, he could not change his mind later and vote to CONDEMN him.
4. Fourth, in capital trials the accused could not be found GUILTY on the basis of self-incriminating evidence.

- a. This means that the evidence on which a man might be found guilty had to come from the testimony of others – never from something he said himself.
  - b. In fact, it was illegal to even ask questions that might lead to self-incrimination (this is why Jesus challenged the incriminating question asked by the High Priest).
  - c. One leading rabbi wrote, “Our law condemns no one to death on his own confession.”
  - d. Another wrote, “It is a fundamental principle with us that no one can damage himself by what he says under trial.”
5. Finally, in capital cases a man could NEVER be condemned by a unanimous vote. There had to be at least ONE VOTE FOR ACQUITAL!
- a. It was believed that a unanimous vote was a sign of an unfair trial, and therefore invalidated the whole process.
  - b. Cases in which the verdict was unanimous were declared a mistrial and the accused was automatically acquitted.
- C. There were also regulations concerning the time and days during which trials could be held.
1. Non-capital crimes could be tried and ended in the same day.
  2. However, capital cases were different:

- a. The only way a capital trial could possibly begin and end on the same day is if the accused was found innocent and acquitted.
  - (1). The prisoner would then be released immediately.
- b. But if the defendant was found guilty, the final pronouncement of sentence could NOT be made until the FOLLOWING day.
  - (1). The members of the Sanhedrin were required by their own rabbinic law to spend the entire night in meditation and prayer, trying every way possible to find the accused innocent of his crime so that he could be set free.
- c. This was the very reason why a trial for a capital crime could NEVER take place on the day before the Sabbath, or any great feast day.
- d. And, this is also why trials for capital crimes were never conducted at night. In keeping with their own rabbinic laws, the members of the Sanhedrin MUST spend one night in meditation and prayer between the time the accused was found guilty and the final pronouncement of judgment.

IV. In our next lesson we're going to begin taking a close look at the actual trials of Jesus.

- A. Keep in mind that as we look at the Jewish trial, the Great Sanhedrin never attempted to follow ANY of these rules and regulations.
1. It was as though Jesus was condemned BEFORE He came to trial – which He was.
  2. When we put together all the pieces of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, we will notice something else.
    - a. We'll notice that the Jewish trial was actually divided into three parts.
    - b. This will also be true of the Roman trial – it was also divided into three parts.
  3. All this will show us that in the 12 hours prior to His crucifixion, Jesus went through an experience that was deliberately calculated to exhaust His body, numb His mind, drain His emotions, and break His spirit.
  4. But Jesus will emerge through this entire ordeal unbroken and unbowed.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. In his letter to the church at Philippi, the apostle Paul said this about the Savior's death. **In Philippians 2:8**, he wrote, *“And being found in*

*appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

A. Sometimes we simply read passages about the death of Jesus without fully understanding WHY Jesus willingly went to the cross.

1. Without question, the primary reason Jesus willingly went to the cross was for you and me. And perhaps nowhere other than in the book of Hebrews do we find passage after passage that speaks of this great sacrifice.

a. **Hebrews 2:9** – *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”*

b. **Hebrews 2:14-15, 17** – *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage... 17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation [satisfaction] for the sins of the people.”*

- c. **Hebrews 9:12-14** – *“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*
  - d. **Hebrew 9:28** – *“...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”*
  - e. **Hebrews 10:10** – *“... we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*
  - f. **Hebrews 10:14** – *“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”*
2. So, without question, Jesus gave His life on the cross to bear our sins and to shed His blood so that we might be sanctified forever. But the Hebrew writer gives us one more reason why Jesus went to the cross willingly.
3. In **Hebrews chapter 12**, immediately after giving us in chapter eleven a list of all the faithful men and women of God who

endured to much suffering to faithfully serve God, the writer of Hebrews says this:

- a. **Hebrews 12:1-2** – *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*
- b. Jesus endured the cross for you and me, despising the shame and all the horrible suffering He was about to endure, because of “the joy that was set before Him.”
- c. Jesus could willingly and courageously go to the cross of Calvary because every step He took would bring Him just one step closer to home – heaven.
4. And so, with the joy of knowing that He was only hours away from going home, Jesus willingly placed Himself into the hands of His enemies, and moved toward the cross.

II. We should be outraged at injustice of the Jewish and Roman trials of Jesus.

- A. This was the greatest miscarriage of justice in the history of the entire world – the pure, innocent, holy and sinless Son of God was unjustly accused of sins and crimes of which He was never guilty.
1. But as outraged as we might be over this terrible miscarriage of justice, there is something that should stir our souls even more.
    - a. Our blatant refusal to take advantage of the GREAT SACRIFICE Jesus paid for you and me.
    - b. He WILLINGLY died on the cross, and innocent man, for you and for me – and IRONICALLY, WE'RE the ones who are GUILTY of sins and crimes worthy of death.
    - c. WE are the ones who deserve to die at the hand of God for our sins and rebellion against God and against His Son, Jesus Christ.
    - d. But, He died for us – for YOU and for ME.
  2. And you know why? It wasn't JUST to forgive us of our sins. It was to forgive us of our sins so that WE could have the SAME JOY SET BEFORE US that was set before Him – knowing that in the end, we're going HOME to heaven!
  3. Jesus willingly died on the cross so He could bring you home when you die.
  4. Do you want to go home when you die?

- a. If you DO, and you've never been baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, then you need to do that today.
- b. And if you're a child of God who has taken the wrong road on your way home, then do what you need to do to get back on the right path today.