

# Exalting Jesus Christ

## ***The Enemies of Jesus – Part 3*** ***"The Herodians, Priests, Chief Priests and High Priest"***

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. Over the past two weeks, we have been looking at those who became the enemies of Jesus – men from among the religious and political leaders of the Jewish nation of Israel.
  - A. This bitter opposition came from four specific religious and political groups that exercised extensive control over the people of Israel.
    1. But why were they so opposed to Jesus, and so determined to see Him die on a Roman cross?
    2. If you remember a previous lesson we took a close look at the scribes and the Pharisees.
      - a. We found that the scribes and Pharisees saw Jesus as a lawbreaker and, therefore, a blasphemer.
      - b. To them, Jesus not only broke the Law of Moses, He also refused to follow the *"traditions of the elders"* – which were the scribal laws, or traditional laws, handed down from one generation to the next.

- c. Furthermore, Jesus openly exposed the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees – causing them to lose credibility in the eyes of the people.
2. Then last week we looked at the second group of the enemies of Jesus – the Sadducees.
  - a. Their opposition toward Jesus was prompted more out of a fear of what Jesus could do if masses of people believed He was the Messiah.
  - b. The Sadducees were the religious and political leaders among the people of Israel.
  - c. They feared what would happen if Jesus rose to power and lead an insurrection against Rome.
  - d. Since Rome would be obligated to crush a national uprising, the religious and political leaders of Israel feared the Romans would bring down their wrath upon the whole nation.
  - e. If that happened, the Sadducees would not only lose their positions of power and authority, they would also lose the wealth they gained from those positions of power and authority.
  - f. Therefore, the Sadducees saw Jesus as a threat to their power and wealth.

- II. As we continue our studies entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ" we now want to turn our attention to the last two groups that became the enemies of Jesus and see why they hated and feared Him so.
  - A. This final group is made up of Jews who actually had very little, if anything, in common.
    - 1. First, there were the Herodians who were a political party that wanted to maintain the status quo and were therefore supporters of Roman rule over Israel.
    - 2. And then there were the priests, the chief priests and the High Priest who were the most powerful among the religious leaders of Israel, and who likewise wanted to maintain the status quo.

**BODY:**

- I. So let's begin by taking a look at the Herodians.
  - A. The Herodians were a political party made up of influential Jews of high standing, and came to power during the days of Herod the Great.
    - 1. They openly supported the Herod's who ruled over Israel, by Rome's permission, from 37 BC to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 – just over 100 years.
      - a. Because the Herod's were close allies of Rome, many wealthy Jews believed that fact alone justified their rule in Israel.

- b. Although the Herod's were Idumaeans (Edomites), and not Jews, they loosely practiced the Jewish religion out of courtesy to the people over whom they ruled.
        - c. Herod the Great, his sons and grandsons were a kind of political buffer between the rule of the Caesars in Rome and the rule of the High Priest and chief priests in Jerusalem.
        - d. Because of that, the family of the Herod's brought stability and prosperity to the Jewish nation.
  3. And so, the Herodians – all of whom were wealthy and influential Jewish businessmen – backed the rule of the Herod's because they believed that would ensure political stability and economic prosperity.
- B. But why would the Herodians oppose Jesus?
  1. The answer is simply because they saw Jesus as a threat to the peace of Israel.
    - a. Jesus was rapidly winning the hearts and minds of the Jewish people, and had become an outspoken critic of the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem.
    - b. Since the Herodians were, for the most part, Sadducees, they shared many of the same fears of the Sadducees regarding Jesus.

- c. The last thing the Herodians wanted was some wanna-be Messiah to come along and lead a revolt against Roman rule.
  - d. Any civil outbreak against Rome would bring down the wrath of the Roman Empire against the people of Israel, and would devastate the Jewish economy.
  - e. Therefore, to protect their own political and economic interests, the Herodians were quick to side with those who opposed Jesus.
- C. There are only two places in the New Testament where the Herodians are mentioned. But what is so important about these passages is when we see who the Herodians joined in their opposition to Jesus.
1. **Mark 3:1-6** – *And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him [Jesus] closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.*  
*And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as*

*whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.*

- a. This was very early in the ministry of Jesus. Even though the Pharisees despised anyone who was sympathetic with Rome, they still sought out the Herodians to work up some plot against Jesus.
  - b. The Pharisees didn't want to see Jesus rise to power as the Messiah for religious reasons. And the Herodians didn't want to see Jesus lead an insurrection against Rome for political and economic reasons.
  - c. Therefore, the Pharisees and the Herodians both had a common interest – and that was to find some way to bring charges against Jesus that would ultimately end in His execution.
2. **Mark 12:13-17** – *Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. When they had come, they said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?"*

*But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it." So they brought it. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at Him.*

- a. Notice in verse 13 that *"they sent to Him [Jesus] some of the Pharisees and Herodians, to catch Him in His words."*
- b. Who are they? Who sent the Pharisees and the Herodians to entrap Jesus?
- c. The answer lies back in **Mark 11:27-28**. The day after Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple, He came back to the Temple to teach and was immediately confronted by the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders who asked Him, *"By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"*
- d. Jesus challenged them to answer whether the Baptism of John was from heaven or from men. And when they refused to answer, Jesus went on to teach the parable of the wicked vinedressers (**Mark 12:1-11**) which in essence said God was intending to take the vineyard of Israel away from the wicked

religious and political rulers and destroy them, and give the vineyard to others.

- e. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders were so incensed that they wanted to seize Jesus on the spot, but feared the people.
  - f. Therefore they needed another approach, and that would be to put Jesus in a dilemma where He would either anger the people by saying they should pay taxes to Rome, or anger the Romans by saying they should not pay taxes to Rome.
  - g. Their motive was to either cause Jesus to lose His popular support among the people, or to be arrested and convicted as a traitor and an insurrectionist for teaching people should not pay taxes to Rome.
  - h. Therefore, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to trap Jesus in the question over the payment of taxes.
- D. When we examine the motive behind the Herodians' opposition to Jesus, we see it was solely out of a fear that Jesus would upset the peace and security of Israel, and therefore devastate the Jewish economy.
- 1. To put it simply, Jesus was a threat to their wealth and prosperity.

- II. Now let's take a look at the last group of the religious and political leaders of Israel that became the enemies of Jesus – the priests, chief priests and the High Priest.
  - A. Of all the other groups – the scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians – it was this group that became the most active group in taking steps to bring about the death of Jesus.
    - 1. But just who are the priests and chief priests, and why did they come to have such bitter hatred toward Jesus?
  - B. The priests and chief priests trace their heritage back to Levi who was the head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and specifically to Aaron, Moses' brother and a Levite, who was chosen by God to be the first High Priest.
    - 1. In Old Testament times, High Priests were appointed for a lifetime. And so the office of high priest passed from Aaron to his oldest surviving son, and from that time forward, to the eldest son of each succeeding high priest.
    - 2. The remaining descendants of Aaron served as the priests, and assisted the High Priest in his functions as the supreme spiritual leader of the people of Israel.

- a. The High Priest had the responsibility for offering sacrifices according to the Law of Moses on behalf of the people of Israel.
  - b. Furthermore, only the High Priest who could enter the holy of holies once a year and offer an atonement for the sins of the people by sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice on the ark of the covenant.
3. Under David's kingship, the priests had grown so numerous that David divided them into 24 groups or courses. In this way they would take turns serving in the tabernacle and ultimately in the temple that would be built by Solomon.
4. However, over the centuries, the office of High Priest became a highly coveted position among priests, and they would often resort to plots and political intrigue to gain the office.
5. This was especially true under Roman rule. The Roman governor of Judea would often demand that the ruling high priest be replaced by another who would better suit Rome's purposes.
6. This happened so often that in the 104 years between 37 BC and AD 67, there were 28 High Priests – and 22 of these came from only four families, forming a kind of "priestly aristocracy."

7. As various High Priests were forced into early retirement, they, along with the heads of the 24 courses of priests, formed a group known as the chief priests – in other words, the chief priests were ex-High Priests.
- C. By the time of Jesus there were approximately 100,000 priests and chief priests, and according to Josephus they were all enormously well off.
1. For example, when sacrifices were made at the Alter, only a small portion of the animal was actually burned. The rest went to the priests.
    - a. Try to imagine how much meat would come from hundreds of thousands of animal sacrifices that were offered on a regular basis, and that would then be divided between approximately 100,000 priests, chief priests and the High Priest.
  2. Not only that, but the priests received the "*first fruits of the seven kinds*" (**cf. Exodus 23:19**), which was the first fruits of wheat, barley, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, the olive and honey.
  3. They also received the choicest fruits of every growing thing, or one-fiftieth of the crop, as a means of their personal support (**cf. Numbers 18:12**).

4. In addition to this, there were the tithes, which consisted of one-tenth of everything that could be used for food (**cf. Numbers 18:20-22**).
  5. And finally, there was the "challah," or the offering of kneaded dough. The priests were entitled to one twenty-fourth part of all dough used in baking.
  6. In a country that was comparatively poor, the priests lived a life of unparalleled prosperity, and this was something those 100,000 priests did not want to lose.
- D. So, why did they hate Jesus?
1. The reason is simply because the priests and chief priests (which would include the High Priests) also saw Jesus as a threat to their positions of power, and to their economic prosperity.
  2. It was a common belief among the Jews of Jesus' day that when the Messiah came to power, the first act He would perform would be to cleanse Jerusalem of its corrupt priesthood.
  3. And since it was widely known that the priests and chief priests were morally corrupt and religious compromisers, these men would be the first to be stripped of their power.

E. During the period between the Testaments, hundreds of Jewish sacred writings surfaced, none of which were inspired, but nearly all of which spoke of the Messianic hope.

1. When we read some of these it's easy to see what the Jews expected the Messiah to be and do, and to see why the political and religious leaders in Jerusalem were so fearful of a Messiah.
2. For example, here are just a few quotes from the apocryphal writing entitled "Psalms of Solomon" (**Psalms of Solomon 17:23-51**):
  - a. *"Behold, O LORD, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David. At the time in which thou seest, O God, that he may reign over Israel thy servant. And gird him with strength that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction."*
  - b. *"He shall destroy the godless nations with the sword of his mouth... and he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their hearts, and he shall gather together a holy people... and he shall not suffer unrighteousness to lodge any more in their midst."*
  - c. *"He shall have the heathen nations to serve him under his yoke."*

d. "He shall purge Jerusalem, making it holy as of old... and there shall be no unrighteousness in his days in their midst... He will rebuke rulers, and remove sinners by the might of his word."

3. Now do you see why the priests and chief priests feared Jesus? If He really was the Messiah, then the first thing He would do, according to Jewish beliefs of that day, would be to purge Jerusalem of all its unrighteousness – including its unrighteous rulers.
4. Why? The answer is simply because the priesthood had reached the height of corruption and wickedness in the days of Jesus.
  - a. Jesus struck right at the heart of their wickedness when He drove the money changers out of the temple and charged the priests with having made the house of God a "*den of robbers.*"  
**(cf. Matthew 21:12-15)**
  - b. The whole system of sacrificing to Jehovah had become corrupted. The worship of God had turned into a big business, and the priests and chief priests were at the very center.
  - c. They benefited most from this grand life-style, and they also had the most to lose.

d. Therefore, since Jesus was threatening their security, He must go!

F. This one group took the lead in opposing Jesus – in fact, there are at least 14 examples in the Scriptures where the priests, chief priests or the High Priest opposed Jesus.

1. They were angered by what Jesus did in cleansing the Temple.  
**(Matt 21:12-15)**
2. They demanded to know by what authority Jesus spoke and acted the way He did. **(Matt 21:23-27; Mark 11:18, 27f; Luke 20:1)**
3. They were constantly plotting to kill Jesus, and seeking a way to eliminate Him without arousing the crowd. **(Matt 26:1-5; 27:1; Mark 14:1; Luke 19:47; 20:19; 22:2)**
4. It was to them that Judas went with his offer to betray Jesus. **(Matt 26:14-16; Mark 14:10; Luke 22:3f)**
5. It was the priests who were behind Jesus' arrest in the garden. Their own temple police made the arrest. **(Matt 26:47-56; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:52)**
6. It was to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, that Jesus was first taken and tried illegally. **(Matt 26:57-58; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54)**

7. And it was to the Sanhedrin that Jesus was taken for another trial. This body was made up of scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees and the elders and priests. But it was the priests that ruled the proceedings and who hired false witnesses against Jesus. **(Matt 26:59-61; Mark 14:55)**
8. It was the High Priest who was the principal cross-examiner of Jesus. **(Matt 26:62-68; Mark 14:60-64)**
9. It was the priests who delivered Jesus to Pilate, and who brought the charges against Him. **(Matt 27:1-2, 12; Mark 15:1-3; Luke 23:3-5, 10)**
10. It was the priests who urged the mob to choose Barabbas over Jesus. **(Matt 27:15-23; Mark 15:11)**
11. It was the priests who led the shouts demanding the crucifixion of Jesus. **(Luke 23:18-23)**
12. It was the priests who mocked Him while He hung on the cross. **(Matt 27:38-43; Mark 15:31)**
13. Even after Jesus died, the priests would not leave Him alone. They urged Pilate to set a special watch on the tomb. **(Matt 27:62-66)**
14. And finally, after Jesus rose victoriously from the grave, proving that He was the Son of God, it was the priests who were willing to

bribe the guards of the tomb to say the disciples stole the body of Jesus while they slept. **(Matt 28:11-15)**

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. It's hard for us to understand why Jesus was hated so – especially when we see all the goodness and beauty that characterized the Son of God.
  - A. However, since the Herodians, the priests, the chief priests and the high priest were, for the most part Sadducees, they opposed Jesus because they loved the world, and all the lusts of the world.
    1. To follow Jesus they would have to give up all their worldliness, and all their corrupt desires for wealth, power and prestige.
  - B. Unfortunately, people are rejecting Jesus today for the very same reasons – because they love the world, and all the lusts of the world.
    1. However, there's a problem with loving the world and the things of the world.
      - a. **1 John 2:15-17** – *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

- b. We will either choose the world and all of its alluring desires – all of which will eventually end in a fiery judgment. . .
- c. Or, we will choose to do the will of God and live forever in heaven.

C. What are you choosing?

1. To love the world with all its alluring desires or to do the will of the Lord and live forever in heaven?
2. Do you realize that at this very moment you're choosing one or the other?
3. If you've never surrendered your life to Christ, or if you have but haven't lived as you should, it's now time to make the right choice – the choice to turn to Jesus Christ in complete faith and obedience.