

OUR *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

Lesson 47

Trial Before the Sanhedrin

The Scripture Lesson

John 18:13, 14, 19-24; Mark 14:55-65

After Jesus was taken captive He was led at once to the Palace of the High Priest. It was about 1:00 in the morning — a time when most people would be in *bed*. The chief priests, however, did not want to wait for the sun to rise. They were worried about the people — that when the people found out what was happening to Jesus, they would make trouble. The chief priests therefore decided to bring Jesus to trial right away, while the people were still asleep.

They brought Jesus first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest. Annas hoped that he would be able to get Jesus to say something that could be used against Him at the trial before the Sanhedrin. He asked Jesus therefore to tell him about His disciples and about His teachings. But this was *wrong*. The Sanhedrin should *already have had* a charge against Him, and they should have had *witnesses to prove that charge*. “Why do you ask *Me*?” Jesus said. “Ask those who *heard me*.”

So Annas ended up with nothing that could be used against Jesus at the trial. He sent Him then to another room in that same building, where Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin were now ready to try Jesus.

Knowing that they must have witnesses, the

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Sanhedrin *paid some of their friends* to give *false testimony* against Jesus! But even this did not work. Their *law* said that they could not use the testimony unless at least two witnesses *agreed exactly*. One by one the witnesses came with all kinds of bad things to say about Jesus. But, when they were questioned, no two witnesses were ever able to agree. So the Sanhedrin was forced to reject it all.

And all the while these witnesses were telling lies about Him, Jesus stood there without saying a single word. He was silent before His accusers. Surely that was a fulfillment of the prophecy which said, “He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.”

Caiaphas was angry. He was angry because Jesus just stood there, saying nothing. He wanted Jesus to *talk*, so that they could trap Him in His words. Finally he cried, “Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?” But Jesus answered him not a word.

Caiaphas had hoped that they would be able to condemn Jesus for some *evil that He did*. But, try as they might, they could find nothing. Caiaphas knew, therefore, that they were going to have to condemn Jesus because of *what He claimed to be*. So he demanded that Jesus declare

before them all whether He were the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus then told them plainly that He surely was. And He warned them too that, though He now appeared as a helpless prisoner of *theirs*, someday things would be different. Someday, He said, you will see Me, sitting at the right hand of God, and then *I* will be judge over *you*.

When Caiaphas heard that, he rent his clothes and said, That's blasphemy. Here is only a man, and He says He's the Son of God. The high priest then turned to the Sanhedrin and asked, What is your verdict? And they all said, He is worthy to die!

Then, to show their hatred of the Christ, they began to spit in His face, and to mock Him. They even put a cloth over His head so He could not see, and hit Him in the face and said, Prophesy, thou Christ, who is he that smote Thee? No convicted criminal would ever have been treated like this by the dignified Sanhedrin. So much did they hate the Son of God that they stooped even to spitting.

Peter's Denial

Mark 14:66-72

While all this was going on in the chambers of the high priests, Peter was standing below in the open courtyard.

It was a cold night and there was a fire burning in the middle of the courtyard. Around this fire were the officers and servants who had taken part in Jesus' arrest. Peter was a bit cold, too, so he went and stood by the fire with the other men. He figured that it was perfectly safe for him to do that, because no one here knew him anyway. But then one of the maids who stood by the door came and said before them all, You were also with Jesus of Galilee.

Peter felt at once that he was in trouble. If he admitted to being a disciple of Jesus, he might be arrested on the spot. But, he thought, what business is it of theirs who I am? Things will work out a lot better if they do not know that I'm a disciple. So he said quickly, I don't know what you're talking about.

Almost before he knew what was happening, Peter had denied his Lord. That was a terrible

thing to do. But are we not just like that? Do we not also often, by what we say, or by what we do not say, make it appear as if we do not know the Lord? We are, you know, not one bit better than Peter.

Perhaps Peter thought that he had ended the matter with his one "little" lie; but just a few minutes later some others saw him and said, This is also one of Jesus' disciples.

Now what could Peter do? He was more afraid than ever to confess that he was a follower of Jesus. So, with an oath, he said, I do not know the man.

Still Peter's troubles were not over. The men did not believe that he was telling the truth. Finally one of them said, You *must* be one of this man's disciples; we can tell from your *speech* that you are a *Galilean*. Peter was trapped. And, in his frantic efforts to save himself, he began to curse and to swear and say, I know not the man.

But just then the cock crew. And at the same time Jesus turned and looked at Peter. It was a hurt look, and a look of love. Then Peter realized what he had done. To spare himself trouble he had done exactly what Jesus had said he would. He had denied, in a most terrible way, the Master whom he loved. And he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter, you see, was a child of God. He had fallen deeply into sin; but by the grace of God he repented. Because of Christ's love for him, there is forgiveness (as there is also for us, when we fall, and repent in tears as Peter did). And God used it all for Peter's good. For Peter learned from this bitter experience to look for his strength, not to himself, but to Christ.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

Isaiah 53:7 "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

Group B

Isaiah 53:7b "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- _____ 1. While it was still night, the chief priests brought Jesus to be questioned by Annas.
- _____ 2. Unable to come up with a charge against Jesus, Annas sent Him on to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.
- _____ 3. Because he was the high priest in Israel, Caiaphas was determined that his trial of Jesus be conducted exactly according to the law.
- _____ 4. The Sanhedrin found many false witnesses to testify against Jesus, but no two witnesses could be found to agree with each other when questioned.
- _____ 5. When Caiaphas saw that there simply was no criminal offence of which Jesus could be accused, he demanded that Jesus tell them if He was indeed the Christ, the Son of God.
- _____ 6. The Sanhedrin then declared Jesus to be worthy of death because, they said, He was guilty of blaspheming God.
- _____ 7. Peter meanwhile had been admitted into the courtyard of the Palace of the High Priest.
- _____ 8. Thinking that no one in this place knew him, Peter was surprised when a maid came up and, before them all, announced that Peter was a follower of Jesus.
- _____ 9. Peter immediately denied, with an oath, that he knew who Jesus was.
- _____ 10. The men in the courtyard, however, suspected that Peter was lying, and twice more they accused him of having been with Jesus.
- _____ 11. While Peter was denying Jesus the third time, with cursing and swearing, the cock crew for the second time.
- _____ 12. At that same moment Jesus turned

and looked on Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. It was about 1:00 Friday morning when Jesus was brought captive into the Palace of the High Priest. Why did the chief priests decide to try Jesus right away, in the middle of the night?
2. Jesus was brought first to Annas. Who was this man? Why did he ask Jesus about His disciples and His teachings?
3. How did Jesus answer Annas?
4. Jesus was then sent to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. How did they try to get witnesses who would accuse Jesus of some crime? They were able in this way to find *many* witnesses willing to testify against Jesus. Why then were they not able to come up with a *charge* against Him?
5. How did Jesus react to all of the lies which the witnesses told about Him? Why did Caiaphas *want* Jesus to respond to those lies? What Old Testament prophet had foretold how the Messiah would act under this kind of treatment?
6. When all else failed, what did Caiaphas finally ask Jesus? How did Jesus answer him?
7. Why did Caiaphas rend his clothes when Jesus said that? What was the verdict of the Sanhedrin?
8. How did the Sanhedrin show their hatred of the Christ after they had announced their verdict?
9. Which two disciples had followed Jesus to the Palace of the High Priest?
10. How did it happen that Peter denied Jesus three times while he was in that building?
11. What two things happened, after the third denial, which caused Peter to remember Jesus' warning?
12. How are we often like Peter?
13. How was the fall of Peter used by God for his good?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. From Gethsemane, Jesus was led, bound, to the Palace of the High Priest. The arrest itself had been illegal — for Jesus had as yet been charged with no crime. Further, the meeting of the Sanhedrin, which they now hurried to arrange in order to *make* a charge, was also contrary to Jewish law — both as to its time and place. For, night sessions were forbidden by law, and, further, all formal meetings were to be held in the regular meeting room of the Sanhedrin. In their eagerness to accomplish their purpose before the multitudes of people present in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration knew what was happening, the Sanhedrin was willing to break the law, by coming together after midnight, and in the Palace of the High Priest.

Jesus was brought first to _____, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas. The latter was the official _____ that year, so he would preside over the meeting of the Sanhedrin. But, since all the Sanhedrists had not yet arrived, it was decided to let Annas, the former high priest, conduct a sort of preliminary investigation. It was Annas, therefore, who asked Jesus of His _____ and of His _____ (John 18:13, 19).

2. Annas hoped to be able to get something from Jesus' own mouth that could be used later by the Sanhedrin to convict Him. Questions about "His disciples" had to do with His followers generally, not just the Twelve. What Annas wanted was some evidence that, because of Jesus' teaching, there was a possibility that people throughout the country would rally around Him, to make Him king in place of the current rulers in the land. If Annas was successful, it would be easy to persuade Pilate that action should be taken against Jesus. Jesus, however, reminded Annas that He had always spoken _____ to the world. In _____ He had said nothing that was different from what He taught publicly. So, Jesus said, Why askest thou ____? Ask them which _____ me. A *just* judge would attempt to get charges from the testimony of competent

witnesses, not from the mouth of the *accused* (John 18:20, 21).

3. Annas had been foiled. All he could do now was send Jesus on to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (John 18:22-24). The Sanhedrin, in order to give this mock trial an appearance of legality, proceeded to call in witnesses. Matthew tells us that they sought _____ witnesses against Jesus (26:59) — indicating that, because they knew that they would gain nothing by *true* testimony concerning Jesus, they bribed men to *lie* about Him. And, quite surprisingly, they failed. Mark tells us that they found _____. Not that they found no one willing, for a price, to try to help them make a case against Jesus. For the truth is that _____ bare _____ witness against Jesus. But these witnesses had to be questioned separately, and repeatedly their witness _____ not _____. At last two witnesses appeared who were agreed on this much, that Jesus had once said, I will _____ this temple and in _____ days build another. Though this statement was made three whole years earlier; though it was not meant to be taken literally; and though it was in fact *misquoted*, the court would evidently have been willing to accept it as legitimate testimony, were it not for the fact that, on further questioning, the witnesses again failed to _____ together (Mark 14:55-59).

4. How frustrating it must have been to Caiaphas that, after listening to witness after witness, they still had no case against Jesus. And, to add to the frustration, they got nothing from the accused either — for Jesus had, throughout, uttered not a single word. Finally Caiaphas could stand it no longer. He _____ up and demanded of Jesus, "_____ thou nothing? What is it which these _____ against thee?" Jesus however _____ His peace and _____ nothing — His very silence serving to condemn both Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (the spiritual leaders of Israel) for

the monstrous wickedness of this “trial” (Mark 14:60, 61).

5. Caiaphas had all along hoped to be able to uncover a criminal offense that would both satisfy the people (whom the Sanhedrin continued to fear) and hold up before Pilate (who would not care a snap about Jesus' claim to *spiritual* kingship). But every attempt to find such a crime had ended in dismal failure, frustration, and embarrassment. So at last it became necessary to face what really was, and had always been, the real issue. “I _____ thee by the living _____,” said Caiaphas, thus putting Jesus under solemn oath, “that thou tell us whether thou be the _____, the Son of _____” (Matt. 26:63).

6. Jesus answered with a straightforward, “I _____.” Jesus warned them, too, not to be fooled by present appearances, for someday “ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of _____, and _____ in the _____ of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

7. At that the godless Caiaphas _____ his clothes in pretended horror at the dishonor done to God's name. “He hath spoken _____,” Caiaphas cried. “What further need have we of _____?” And then he put the question to the Sanhedrin, “What _____ ye?” Now *they* are on trial. What will they do with the Son of God when He stands before them as an apparently helpless man? Their answer: “He is guilty (worthy) of _____!” (Matt. 26:65, 66).

8. Not satisfied with that, they began to abuse the Christ. So much did they hate Him that, forgetting even the dignity of their office, they _____ in His face, and _____ Him. And others _____ Him with the palms of their hands, saying, _____ unto us, thou _____, Who is he that _____ thee? (Matt. 26:67, 68).

9. Two of Jesus' disciples, meanwhile, had managed to gain entrance into the building where the trial was held. Peter was one of them. The other disciple (surely John, who never refers to himself by name) was _____ unto the _____, and for that reason was able to follow Jesus right into the _____ of the high priest. Peter, however, was for a time left standing at the door _____. John at length went and spoke to her that kept the _____, and brought Peter in also (John 18:15, 16).

10. Where John went at that point we are not told, but Peter stayed in the courtyard. The servants and the temple police had made a fire there, for it was _____, and Peter stood with them and _____ himself (John 18:18). A short time later a _____ (evidently, according to John 18:17, the maid who had opened the door to admit him) came to Peter in order to expose him. “Thou also wast _____ Jesus of Galilee,” she said. Caught by surprise, and afraid of what might happen if the men there knew he was a disciple of the man who had just been arrested, Peter made a quick denial before them _____, saying, I know _____ what thou _____ (Matt. 26:69, 70).

11. Feeling uncomfortable now by the fire, Peter made his way back to the porch (the passageway from the courtyard to the street). He had just barely gone out onto the porch when a cock _____. No time, however, did Peter have to consider that crowing, for, a _____ saw him again and began to say to those who stood by, This is _____ of them (Mark 14:68, 69). Evidently one of the men then challenged Peter directly: “Thou art _____ of them.” Hoping to set the matter to rest once and for all, Peter responded emphatically, “_____, I am _____” (Luke 22:58). And this time he denied with an _____ for added emphasis (Matt. 26:72).

12. Perhaps Peter returned to the courtyard at that time and, in order not to appear to be an outsider, he joined in the fireside talk. But by doing so he only gave himself away, for, about the space of one _____ after (Luke 22:59), another man said to him, _____ thou art one of them; for thou art a _____, and thy _____ agreeth thereto (Mark 14:70). To make the situation even more threatening, one of the _____ of the high priest, a _____ of the man whose _____ Peter had cut off, said, Did not I see thee in the _____ with him? (John 18:26).

13. Peter was frantic. Ready to do almost anything to save himself he began to _____ and to _____, saying, I _____ not this _____ of whom ye speak (Mark 14:71). Thus did he call God Himself to witness that he spoke the truth. But while he yet _____, the cock _____ (Luke 22:60). And this time Peter heard, and remembered that Jesus had said, Before the cock crow _____, thou shalt deny me _____ (Mark 14:72). Then Peter saw Jesus. (Maybe Jesus was at that moment being led from Annas' chamber to Caiaphas'.) And Jesus _____ and _____ upon Peter. It was a look that brought Peter to repentance. For we read that Peter went _____ and wept _____ (Luke 22:61, 62).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What did Annas hope to gain by asking Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine?

2. Both Annas and Caiaphas tried hard to uncover some criminal offense with which Jesus could be charged. In the end the Sanhedrin declared Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy and therefore worthy of death. If, with that charge, they had all they needed, why did they not ask Him that right away, instead of trying so long to find something *else*?

3. Imagine how *we* would likely respond to lies about *us* in a trial which could result in imprisonment or death, and then tell how Jesus' silence here was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7. Jesus' silence here was also, from the point of view of good order in a court of law, very *proper*. Jesus therefore accomplished more by saying nothing than He could have gained by refuting the lies. Can you explain how His silence was in effect a rebuke of Caiaphas and the court?

4. After Jesus testified before the court that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of God, Caiaphas asked the Sanhedrin for its verdict: "What think ye?" They would then, as judges in this trial, decide the fate of Jesus. In a very real sense, however, it was the Sanhedrin which was *on trial* at this point. Can you explain how that was the case?

5. Caiaphas rent his clothes. That was a fitting response for true blasphemy. Moments later, members of the Sanhedrin struck, spit at, and mocked Jesus. Was that also, do you think, fitting treatment of a real blasphemer? Or were the Sanhedrists revealing here a different motive for condemning Jesus?

6. Peter, meanwhile, was in the courtyard. A maid there decided to identify him as being one of Jesus' disciples. Peter's response to the first accusation was simply, "I know not what thou sayest" (Matt. 26:70). Can you imagine yourself giving that same answer? How did Peter probably, in his own mind, justify it? Do you think that Peter heard the cock crow the first time?

7. Peter did not *begin* his denying of Jesus with cursing and swearing. But he did *end* it that way. Do you understand how it happened that his lying became progressively worse? And can you think of ways in which we, though in different circumstances, do the same thing?

8. While the words of Peter's third denial were still on his lips, the cock crew for the second time. And then Jesus turned and looked on Peter. Do you see a connection between those two happenings and the notice that Peter went out and wept bitterly?

9. We believe that God uses even the deep falls of His people for their benefit. Can you see how this grievous experience of Peter could actually *help* him? What can *we* learn from Peter's fall?