

Caiaphas

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1/31/2010

Introduction

Although the New Testament identifies the high priest who tried Jesus by the single name “Caiaphas,” the first century Jewish historian Josephus refers to him as “Joseph who was called Caiaphas of the high priesthood.”ⁱ “Caiaphas is therefore a family name or possibly a nickname.”ⁱⁱ The name Caiaphas means “searcher” or “he that seeks with diligence.” This was his ordinary and official designation in Holy Scripture.

Caiaphas served as High Priest of the Jewish nation for 18 years, from roughly A.D. 18 to 36. He was appointed as high priest about A.D. 18 by the Roman procurator, Valerius Gratus.ⁱⁱⁱ He held office throughout the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, but was deposed by Vitellius, governor of Syria. He was High Priest during the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the early apostles.

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas, and apparently worked in close cooperation with him (John 18:12-13). Quirinius, governor of Syria, appointed Annas as high priest about A.D. 6 or 7. Although Annas was deposed by Valerius Gratus, the Procurator of Judea, in A.D. 15, he was still the most influential of the priests and continued to carry the title of high priest (Luke 3:1-2; Acts 4:5-6). After his removal, Annas was officially succeeded by each of his five sons, one grandson, and his son-in-law Caiaphas.

John 18:12-13 ... 12 So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, 13 and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. (NASB95)

Luke 3:1-2 ... 1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. (NASB95)

Acts 4:5-6 ... 5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. (NASB95)

The expression in Luke 3:2, “in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,” has led some to maintain that these two men took turns serving as High Priest. However, this is not consistent with the historical record. It is more likely that Caiaphas actually exercised the functions of the

office, while Annas still wore the honorary title because he formerly filled the position. Though out of office, Annas retained weighty influence.

Caiaphas was a Sadducee. This Jewish sect was named after their founder Sadoc who lived about 260 years before Christ. Their principle beliefs were (1) there is no angel, spirit or resurrection; the soul dies with the body (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8); (2) there is no fate or providence; mankind enjoys absolute freedom of action to do good or evil; (3) only the Pentateuch must be strictly followed.

Matthew 22:23 ... 23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, (NASB95)

Acts 23:8 ... 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. (NASB95)

Caiaphas appears three times in the gospel story: At the raising of Lazarus, at the trial of Jesus, and finally, at the trial of Peter and John. Caiaphas was an insolent, wicked man who did what was politically expedient without respecting what was right.

At The Raising Of Lazarus

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish rulers became alarmed at his ever increasing popularity (John 11:45-53). Jesus threatened their power and position. They also feared retribution from imperial Rome if civil disorder was to break out. When the Sanhedrin was quickly called into session, Caiaphas pointed a way out of their dilemma. He counseled that they bide their time until the enthusiasm of the people had waned. By killing Jesus they could eliminate a dangerous rival, and placate the ire of Rome. As High Priest, Caiaphas' words carried great authority, and his counsel was accepted (Matt. 26:3-5).

John 11:45-53 ... 45 Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. 47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." 51 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. (NASB95)

Matthew 26:3-5 ... 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; 4 and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. 5 But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people." (NASB95)

Though quite unintended, Caiaphas used prophetic language when he said that it was expedient for one man to die for the people (John 11:49-52; 18:14). The death of Jesus would prove to be a blessing, but not in the manner that this opportunistic man intended. With cold-hearted calculation, Caiaphas sought to eliminate a political rival. With a heart full of compassion, God sought a blessing, not only for Israel but also for the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3). Just as Balaam was an unwilling prophet, Caiaphas was an unwitting prophet. If God could speak through a mute beast, He could communicate through a malevolent man (Num. 22:26-30).

John 11:49-52 ... 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." 51 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. (NASB95)

John 18:14 ... 14 Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. (NASB95)

Genesis 12:1-3 ... 1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (NASB95)

Numbers 22:26-30 ... 26 The angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn to the right hand or the left. 27 When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick. 28 And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" 29 Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." 30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No." (NASB95)

At The Trial Of Jesus

After being betrayed into the hands of His enemies, Jesus was led first to Annas (John 18:12-13), and then brought bound unto Caiaphas (John 18:24).

John 18:12-13 ... 12 So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, 13 and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. (NASB95)

John 18:24 ... 24 So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. (NASB95)

After a preliminary inquisition before Annas, Jesus was tried before Caiaphas and the Jewish Counsel/Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-71).

False witnesses were called, but their accusations were inconsistent and unconvincing. Jesus offered no reply to their charges. Finally, Caiaphas asked Jesus whether or not he was the Messiah. The affirmative answer was accompanied by a declaration of His divine power and majesty. Caiaphas, pretending to be aggrieved at what he judged a blasphemous claim to deity, appealed to his enraged allies, asking if this was not enough. They answered that Jesus deserved to die. However, because Caiaphas had no power to meet out capital punishment, Christ was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, that His execution might be duly ordered.

Matthew 26:57-68 ... 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. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. 60 They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, 61 and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.' " 62 The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; 66 what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!" 67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, 68 and said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?" (NASB95)

Mark 14:53-65 ... 53 They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. 54 Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. 55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. 56 For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. 57 Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, 58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.' " 59 Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. 60 The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 61 But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? 64 "You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. 65 Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat

Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers received Him with slaps in the face. (NASB95)

Luke 22:54 ... 54 Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. (NASB95)

Luke 22:63-71 ... 63 Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, 64 and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophecy, who is the one who hit You?" 65 And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming. 66 When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, 67 "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer. 69 "But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." 70 And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." 71 Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." (NASB95)

This incident speaks volumes about the High Priest's deficiency of moral character. "The conduct of Caiaphas at this preliminary trial of Jesus, its time and its procedure, were almost entirely illegal from the standpoint of Jewish law."^{iv} "Caiaphas again displayed his lack of character by his open determination to find Jesus guilty. Since he was the high priest, his announcements were clothed with authority, but his shameless disregard of the forms of law to bring about the death of Jesus, revealed his warped conscience."^v

At The Trial Of Peter And John

The bigoted fury of Caiaphas was again exhibited at the trial of Peter and John (Acts 4:1-22). After healing the lame man who sat daily before the Beautiful gate of the temple, the apostles were brought before the Jewish tribunal. This manifestation of God's power was so evident that the Jewish authorities could do nothing. After threatening Peter and John, they were forced to release them.

Acts 4:1-22 ... 1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. 5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. 7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the

chief corner stone. 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." 13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. 15 But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name." 18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." 21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; 22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. (NASB95)

The apostles refused to be intimidated, but continued to boldly proclaim the truth (Acts 5:12-42). This provoked an additional response by Caiaphas and his cronies. They cast Peter and John into prison. However, being delivered from prison by an angel, the apostles continued to preach the gospel. These events greatly confounded and confused the Jewish leaders. Peter and John were brought before the council where they were threatened, beaten, and then released. However, they were not discouraged by this mistreatment. Departing from the Sanhedrin, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

Acts 5:12-42 ... 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed. 17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. 18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." 21 Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. 22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, 23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside." 24 Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly

perplexed about them as to what would come of this. 25 But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned). 27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." 33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." 40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (NASB95)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is interesting to contrast the high priesthood of Christ and Caiaphas. Christ was spiritually-minded, Caiaphas was materialistic. Christ was humble, Caiaphas was arrogant. Christ supported the truth, Caiaphas opposed the same.

Please note how the book of Hebrews describes the High Priesthood of Jesus. In striking contrast with Caiaphas, Christ is merciful and faithful (Heb. 2:17-18). He was faithful to God in all things (Heb. 3:1-2). Christ is sympathetic toward the weakness of His followers (Heb. 4:14-16). Christ is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26-27). He ministers at the true tabernacle (Heb. 8:1-2). Having offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, He has obtained a more excellent ministry (Heb. 8:3-5). He serves at a greater and more perfect tabernacle (Heb. 9:11-15).

Hebrews 2:17-18 ... 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to

make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (NASB95)

Hebrews 3:1-2 ... 1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; 2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. (NASB95)

Hebrews 4:14-16 ... 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NASB95)

Hebrews 7:26-27 ... 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. (NASB95)

Hebrews 8:1-2 ... 1 Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. (NASB95)

Hebrews 8:3-5 ... 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. 4 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." (NASB95)

Hebrews 9:11-15 ... 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (NASB95)

ⁱ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston, (1867; reprint ed, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1960), Book 18, Chapter 4, Paragraph 3.

ii Ronny Reich, "Caiaphas Name Inscribed on Bone Boxes," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September/October, 1992, p. 40.

iii Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston, (1867; reprint ed, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1960), Book 18, Chapter 2, Paragraph 2.

iv *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (1982), s.v. "Caiaphas," by C. M. Kerr.

v Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men of the Bible*, p. 81.