

Religious Leaders Plan To Kill Jesus

Our study is in John 11:47-54. Jesus has just raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus' resurrection was stunning because the crowd saw Lazarus float out of the tomb while being bound from his feet to his head. He could not walk out of the cave because his feet were bound. He could not have pulled himself out because his hands were bound and he could not see where to go because his face was wrapped with cloth. The resurrection of Lazarus was a stunning event. After the miracle, John 11:45 says that many believed in Jesus. But verse 46 reveals that not everyone in the crowd believed in Jesus, and some of them visited the religious leaders and told them what Jesus had done. This occurred because miracle proved Jesus is God to those who have ears that hear the truth. The spiritually deaf or spiritually rebellious do not hear, because they do not want to hear. Our study will reveal how the religious leaders responded to the report they were given. John's account of the historical events that followed includes a prophecy about Jesus' death and why He died. Here is our study.

THIS MAN IS PERFORMING MANY SIGNS. Our study begins with John 11:47. In verse 46, we are told that someone had contacted the religious leaders and informed them that Jesus had raised Lazarus. Verse 47 begins the description of how they responded to the report.

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs." John 11:47 (NASB)



We are told the chief priests and the Pharisees responded to the news of Lazarus' resurrection by holding a meeting to discuss the situation. They were not rejoicing for Lazarus or with his family over the good news! They did not respond by believing in Jesus. Rather, they were upset that Jesus had resurrected Lazarus. Jesus was performing too many signs. What an amazing reaction. But that is characteristic of unbelieving politicians and other unbelievers. They

do not care about the people. They care only about themselves.

We should not be surprised at the reaction of the Pharisees and Sadducees since they were religious men only by reputation. The Sadducees were the liberals who believed in only the first five books of the Old Testament. Acts 23:8 tells us they

did not believe in resurrections, angels or spirits.

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

That is, they rejected the testimony of Scripture (Genesis 3:24; 16:7; 19:1; Exodus 33:2; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11) even though they had the first five books memorized. In Matthew 22:29-30 Jesus told them,

You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are

given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. Matthew 22:29-30 (NASB)

Imagine being told that you did not understand the Scriptures when you have it memorized. They were not true believers in God or the Scriptures. They did not understand Scripture. They were spiritually blind. The Sadducees were the wealthy aristocrats or the elite of Israel. They dominated the government of the nation of Israel by occupying a majority of the seats on the Sanhedrin Council.

The Pharisees were the conservatives of the time. While they believed the entire Bible, they also interpreted Scripture allegorically. Unlike the Sadducees, they believed in the resurrection, angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8). But on one occasion, Jesus taught that the Pharisees were spiritually blind. Jesus called them “hypocrites” six times (Matthew 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). He said they were “blind guides” five times (Matthew 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26). In John 8:44, Jesus said their father was the devil and accused them of being liars—Satan is the father of lies.

This helps us understand that the Sadducees and the Pharisees were not believers who followed God. Their hearts were hard. In Matthew 12:34 Jesus called them a brood of snakes and “being evil.” In summary, neither the Sadducees or Pharisees were godly men.

Consequently, both groups of men were incapable of loving and caring for others, especially Jesus. We must remember that only the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of love, peace, kindness, goodness and self-control. Unbelievers are not truly good people who care for the people they oversee. They are incapable of such care since the fruit of the Spirit cannot exist in them. Unbelieving politicians are incapable of true morality. Their viewpoint will always be more distorted and be more immoral than the morality of a mature Christian. The gospels clearly paint a picture of the Pharisees and Sadducees as extremely self-centered! They were religious leaders in title only and not in reality.

Some of our political leaders today are as self-centered as the Pharisees and Sadducees. They may quote the Bible, even though they do not believe it. They use it to deceive and influence gullible people. We must remember that Jesus said we can

know a good tree by its fruit.

The Pharisees and Sadducees should have asked themselves what the resurrection of Lazarus revealed about Jesus. But they were not interested. They had already reached their decision. These spiritually deaf and spiritually rebellious men did not hear, because they did not want to hear. Hatred ignores the facts. Hatred just wants to kill. They wanted to kill.

So, a meeting of the Sanhedrin Council was called. It was composed of seventy-one¹ of the most prestigious, wealthy, politically and religiously influential men of the nation of Israel. The wealthy and religiously liberal Sadducees dominated the council. The Pharisees had the high respect of the average people. While these two groups had strong disagreements, one person brought unity of purpose. The major concern of this meeting of the council was Jesus. “What are we doing?” What were they going to do about Jesus?

The truth was that these religious leaders only had as much control as God granted them. Their very decision had already been determined. They did not realize that the raising of Lazarus was planned by God and had planned to motivate them to finally unite for one purpose — to murder Jesus on the cross. Jesus’ many signs were too significant! He was a threat.

ALL MEN WILL BELIEVE IN HIM. Ironically, during their meeting the religious leaders revealed that the signs were so incredible that they should have caused everyone, including them, to believe in Jesus. It was an admission that Jesus was not an ordinary human. They should have believed in Him, but such an admission would have argued that they should worship Him. Then someone admitted their greatest fear and in the process revealed that Jesus’ signs were real.

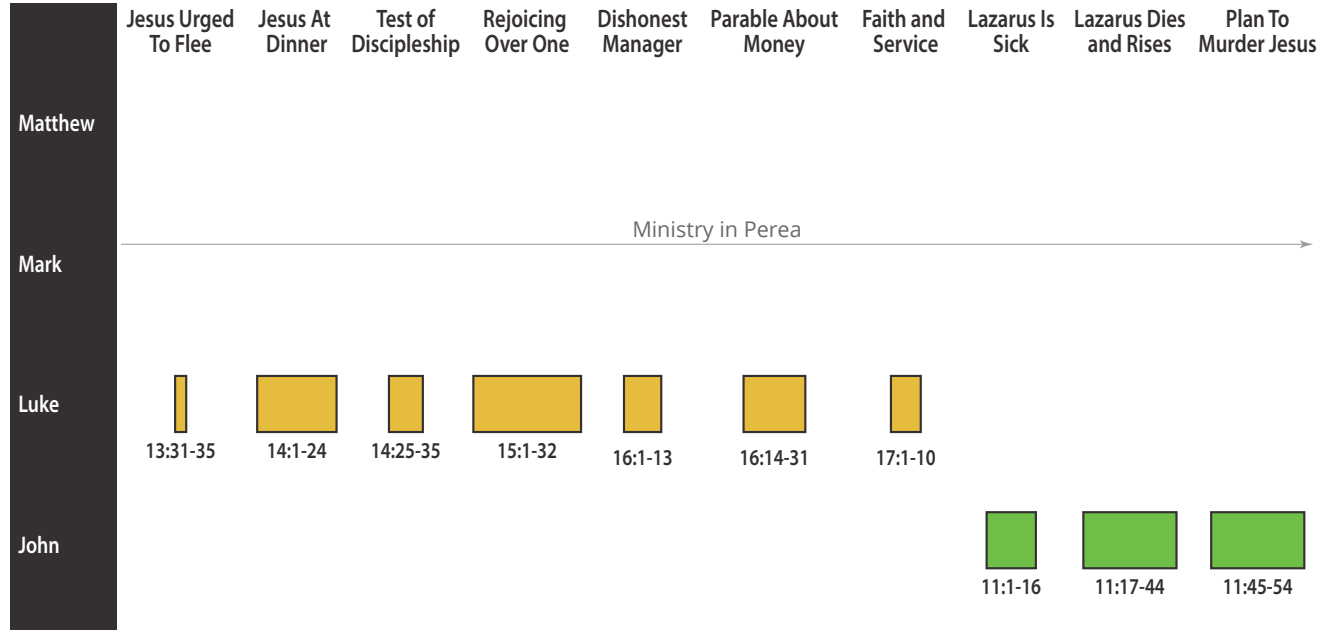
If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.
John 11:48 (NASB)

Notice that they did not attack Jesus’ miracles. They did not claim His signs were the act of trickery, were deceptive or were false. In fact, earlier in John 9 they had investigated the healing of a man who was blind at birth. The entire chapter describes their investigation. They could not find any evidence

1. Jacob Neusner. Sanhedrin 1.5. Mishnah. Yale University Press. 1988, p. 584.

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that the miracle was false. They could not refute that the miracle occurred. They tried to find another explanation for the healing, but they could not. They refused to believe. Finally, they argued that since Jesus was a man, He could not have healed the man born blind. They finally found an excuse for rejecting the healing. A spiritually hardened individual will always find an argument to support their refusal to believe. Unbelief always looks for a reason to support itself.

Therefore, we can understand that the decision of the Sanhedrin Council had already been determined. They were not going to believe in Jesus because they hated Him. The verdict had already been determined. It just had to be formally stated in the Sanhedrin Council. They were also fearful that they would lose power and their nation. There is no explanation as to why the Romans would remove them from their leadership role. But Matthew 27:18 and Mark 7:22 both tell us that the members of the Sanhedrin Council had envy toward Jesus.

EXPEDIENT THAT ONE MAN DIE FOR THE PEOPLE. Finally, somewhere in the discussion Caiaphas, the high priest, made a prophetic statement.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 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." John 11:49-50 (NASB)

Three high priests are mentioned in the New Testament. The first one mentioned is Annas (Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 24; Acts 4:6). He was the high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15. Caiaphas was the next high priest of Israel from A.D. 18 to A.D. 37. He was the grandson of Annas. The third high priest mentioned in Scripture is Ananias (A.D. 47 to A.D. 58). He first appears in Acts 5:1 and his last appearance is Acts 24:1.

Caiaphas' statement that "You know nothing at all, 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" was both accurate and prophetic. It is clear that the men on the council knew nothing. Caiaphas used a very strong and negative word when he said that they knew nothing. The Greek word for "nothing" is composed of two negatives, *ou oudeis*.

The two negatives adds emphasis to his statement. They knew nothing!

In fact, they were spiritually blind, like everyone else who rejects Jesus Christ. Those who reject Jesus are spiritually blind. They are like a blind man who feels pieces of wood that are similar. Walnut lumber feels like cherry lumber, and Salmon feels like catfish. A blind man cannot determine the difference. The spiritually blind can read the Bible, but he does not really understand the full depth of what he reads. He reads it like a novel that he purchased from the local store. It has no real spiritual depth of meaning for him, and, eventually, he is not interested in it. The Bible has little or no life for him. His interest in the Bible is found in what appeals to his self-contentedness. Some want to become scholars of the Bible. They are like the Sadducees.

Caiaphas' statement was accurate. They knew nothing—spiritually! They were the spiritually blind leading the spiritually blind. Yet ironically, if Caiaphas was truly concerned that they would lose their position as leaders and the nation and killing Jesus would secure their position, he was wrong. Their rejection of Jesus resulted in the loss of their position as leaders and the destruction of the nation in A.D. 70 when the Roman army invaded Israel and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Later Mara Bar-Serapion, a Syrian, wrote that God avenged the death of Jesus by abolishing the Jewish nation.

Or the Jews by murdering their wise king? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God rightly avenged these men. . . the wise king . . .²

Biblical fools lack wisdom.

THE PROPHECY ABOUT JESUS' DEATH. At the same time, Caiaphas prophesied accurately. Yet, he did not realize that the Holy Spirit had motivated him to make the comment. His statement was a prophecy not just about murdering Jesus. The prophecy summarized the Old Testament prophecies about the sacrificial death and resurrection of the Messiah for the sins of men and women (Isaiah 53).

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, 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. John 11:51-52 (NASB)

Christians sometimes think the Holy Spirit only moves believers in Christ to prophecy. But that is not true. Numbers 24:1-9 tells us the Holy Spirit moved the prophet Balaam to give a prophetic blessing upon the nation of Israel. Revelation 2:14 reveals that Balaam was a false prophet. The Holy Spirit moved the false prophet to give a prophecy. Here in this passage we are told the Caiaphas gave a prophecy, and it is clear that God the Holy Spirit moved him to do this. We need to be careful to not limit God and to be good students of the God of God. God can use false prophets and unbelieving, Christ-rejecting religious leaders.

Isaiah 53:4-10 prophesied of the Messiah's sacrificial death for the sin of mankind. Zechariah 12:10 and 13:7 prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus. In Zechariah 12:10 God speaks these words,

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. Zechariah 12:10 (NASB)

Caiaphas urged the council to pierce Jesus. The resurrection of Lazarus is the miracle that motivated the religious leaders to finally kill Jesus.

Caiaphas' prophecy concludes with, "In order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." Earlier in John 10:16-17 Jesus had said that He had two different flocks and the purpose of His sacrificial death was to bring them together into one flock.

I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. John 10:16 (NASB)

2. British Museum, Syriac Manuscript, Additional 14,658

Caiaphas' prophecy echoed the same truth. Who are those scattered abroad? First, they include the Jews who were scattered as the result of the Assyrian Army invading the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and the Babylonian Army invading the southern kingdom of Judah in 605 B.C. These invading armies took the Jews captive and scattered them. James 1:1 refers to them as "the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad." They are the diaspora. In 1 Peter they are called "those who reside as aliens, scattered . . ." Both James and 1 Peter are written to Jewish Christians, also called Hebrew Christians or "Completed Jews." But in Jesus' statement in John 10:16 and in Caiaphas' prophecy, we are given a hint that the "children of God who are scattered abroad" will include the Gentiles who believe in Jesus. Jewish and Gentile Christians will be brought together.

THEY PLAN TO KILL JESUS. Amazingly, that is the only comment that Scripture records from the meeting. The next verse tells us that the conclusion of the meeting was to kill Jesus.



before the supposedly just trial was even started. Yet, it occurred because God had planned from the foundation of the world for it to occur. Here are the words of the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. Acts 2:22-24 (NASB)

God had planned Jesus would die for our sins, and yet, the Sanhedrin Council was responsible for His death. They wanted Him dead and made the decision to kill Him. Jesus is now going to die in about three months.

CONCLUSION. Galatians 4:4 says

that in "the fullness of time" God sent Christ to be born into this world. That is, to take on human flesh. Romans 5:6 says,

So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. John 11:53 (NASB)

... at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... Romans 5:6 (NASB)

This reveals that the arrest and trial that will occur in the near future will be an unfair trial. The guilty verdict and sentence of death were already determined at this council. The trial would not be just and Scripture will confirm that was true.

Today, the Jews object and complain that they are wrongly accused for killing Jesus. Such complaints are not based on facts. The Sanhedrin Council planned to kill Jesus months

That is, the timing of Jesus' death was carefully planned. This helps us understand that verse 54 reveals Jesus left the area to avoid being killed. Even though His death was the plan, it was too early for Him to die. Jesus' hour had not yet arrived (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).

Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the

Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples. John 11:54 (NASB)

Jesus and the disciples did not return to Capernaum, the city of His headquarters, or to Nazareth, His hometown, but to a city called Ephraim. Maybe Galilee and Judah were too dangerous now. Maybe that is the reason Ephraim was selected. Ephraim was located about twelve miles from Jerusalem on the edge of the desert. From this location He and the disciples made trips to Samaria and Galilee until it was time for Him to be crucified.

The divine plan for His crucifixion was being implemented

perfectly. Jesus was in control, but it was in accordance with the Father's wishes. He would soon become . . .

. . . the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29 (NASB)

The death of Lazarus was for the glory of God. God the Father was glorified by the resurrection of the Lazarus, but the great glory was three months away. God the Father would be revealed as being righteous and believers could be forgiven their sins and be declared as righteous (Romans 5:1-2) as Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).