

Who was Caiaphas in the Bible?

Joseph Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest during the time of Jesus' ministry and a few years afterwards. He was a strong opponent of Jesus and His message.

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas, the former high priest, which may have accounted for his own rise to power. Caiaphas was also a member of one of the ruling Jewish sects, the Sadducees. Sadducees were often wealthy men of high position and, as they sought to appease their Roman rulers, were heavily involved in politics. They held the majority seat in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, over which Caiaphas ruled for the 18 years he served as high priest. In terms of theology, Sadducees denied the afterlife and any existence of the spiritual world (angels, demons, etc.). Because of these things, they were often at odds with Jesus due to His teachings about humility, heaven, and His own deity.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, both the Pharisees and the Sadducees met at Caiaphas's palace to express their concern that Jesus' growing number of followers would incite the anger of the Roman Empire (Matthew 26:2; John 11:47). They were unsure how to proceed until Caiaphas spoke: "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:50). This statement calling for Jesus' death was a cold, calculating move of political expediency; at the same time, Caiaphas was unknowingly prophesying about God's plan for Jesus' death. Through the Sanhedrin's wicked actions, God would save both the Jewish nation and anyone else who would believe in Christ (verses 51-52).

When the Jewish leaders had Jesus arrested at Passover, they first brought Him before Annas (John 18:13). After he had questioned Jesus, Annas sent Jesus to his son-in-law

Caiaphas, who as the high priest would be the one to rule on Jesus' fate. When Jesus stood before Caiaphas and the entire Sanhedrin, many false witnesses were brought forward, but nothing was found to warrant a death sentence (Matthew 26:59-60). Finally, Caiaphas stood up and addressed Jesus directly, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (verse 63). Jesus replied just as directly, "You have said so. . . . But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (verse 64). Caiaphas had what he was looking for; he tore his robe and cried, "Blasphemy!" (verse 65). The result of the sham trial was that Jesus was pronounced "worthy of death" and beaten and mocked (verses 66-67). However, since the Jews could not legally execute prisoners, Caiaphas sent Jesus to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

Jesus endured another series of trials that night under Roman jurisdiction. Caiaphas and the other religious leaders stirred up the crowd against Jesus. When Pilate attempted to release Jesus by giving them a choice between Him and the convicted felon Barabbas, "the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed" (Matthew 27:20). Pilate acquiesced, and Jesus was sentenced to die, beaten, led outside the city, and crucified (verses 26-35). It's what Caiaphas wanted all along. It's important to note that these things did not happen at the whim of Caiaphas, the priests, or Pilate, for it was all part of God's plan to save the world through the death of His Son. As Jesus had said, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18).

Three days later, Jesus rose again from the grave, fulfilling prophecy, defeating death, and emboldening His followers to share the good news of salvation with thousands throughout the known world. Caiaphas continued to persecute the followers of Christ,

being present at the trial of Peter and John (Acts 4:1-22), but his opposition did nothing to stop the spread of the gospel.

Caiaphas's story is a tragic one. Caiaphas was faced with the reality of who Jesus is and yet denied the Truth that literally stood before him. As high priest Caiaphas had wealth, an honorable position, and the respect of the people, but he was deficient in the one area that truly matters: saving faith in Jesus Christ.