

## John 63 –The Prophecy of Caiaphas

10/05/2025

### **Scripture 1: (Jn. 11:45-54 ESV)**

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

### **Scripture 2: (Isa. 52:13-53:12 ESV)**

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you-- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind-- so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

### **Sermon:**

The evangelist will next shift our perspective away from considering Jesus, the Person, to prophecies about Jesus within the context of their impending historical fulfillment.

After Jesus's friend, Lazarus, had been raised from the dead after four days sealed inside his tomb, John explains that “*Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.*”. These Jews already, most likely, had a belief in a future “resurrection of the dead”. So, after witnessing this miraculous occurrence, after seeing this Sign performed, many of them began to believe in Jesus. They may have been believing in Him as a prophet, but now they were beginning to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. They may even have begun to believe in Him as the Son of God. But, some of the others went and informed the Pharisees and Jewish leadership about what had just happened. Perhaps it was only one or two people, maybe it was half, or maybe it was most of them but, however many they were, they went to the religious leaders with bad intent. They went to the Pharisees, not so that they could believe in Jesus, but so that they could use this event against Jesus. They went to the Pharisees because their hearts were hardened by sin and their eyes were blind to the truth by the machinations of the devil.

So, after being informed about this miracle of resurrection, “...*the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council...*”. Although these leaders had already met to discuss Jesus several times before (it is implied first happening between John 2:22 and 3:1, John 4:1, 5:15-18, 7:32 and 7:45-52, 9:13-16), this moment is the formal beginning of their conspiracy against Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. Yet, we cannot readily appreciate just how large this conspiracy was, in comparison to other infamous murders (or attempts), without first doing some math.

- John F. Kennedy was, most probably, assassinated and killed by an single man, acting alone.
- There were ten persons convicted, as having participated, in the plot and assassination of Abraham Lincoln<sup>1</sup>.
- An indeterminately large number of persons were aware of and actively participating in the failed, Operation: Valkyrie, plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler (July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944)<sup>2</sup>.

But the conspiracy against Jesus was not crafted by a small cabal of men gathered in a smoke filled room, with drawn curtains, doors locked and guarded. It was many men and it was, at least, semi-public. John describes three important and easily identifiable groups of Jewish persons participating in this conspiracy: the chief priests, the Pharisees, and the council. But who were part of these groups, really?

The chief priests are a distinctive, but nebulous category, yet they are the most important influence in the plot. To understand who they were, we need to recollect some details from the prior fifteen hundred years of Jewish religious history.

The New Testament category of “chief priests” relates to the role and person of the high priest. Moses' brother Aaron was the first Israelite high priest with his four sons (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar) serving along side him as lesser priests (Exodus 28:1). After Nadab and Abihu were killed by the LORD's judgment against them (Numbers 3), Eleazar became Aaron's heir and successor to the high priesthood. Then when Phinehas,

<sup>1</sup><https://www.nps.gov/foth/learn/historyculture/the-lincoln-conspirators.htm>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/germanic-collections/about-collections/spotlight-archive/operation-valkyrie>

Eleazar's son, killed an Israelite idolater of Ba'al at Peor (Numbers 25), he cemented his lineage as high priest, a role he served through most of the Judges period because this duty was theirs for life. The next priest mentioned is Eli (who had a son name Phinehas; 1 Samuel 1:3) he, however, did not belong to the line of Eleazar because apparently, during the time when “*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” (Jdg. 21:25 ESV) any Levite could serve as priest. After the reign of David, Solomon established Zadok, a descendant of Aaron through the line of Phinehas (1 Chronicles 6:3-15; 6:8), as high priest (1 Kings 2:35). Afterwards, through and after the exile, Zadok's descendants continued to serve in this role until Judea's difficulties with the Greeks and Seleucids. Following the revolution begun by the sons of Mattathias, {a Levite from the town of Modin, descended from the Joarib/Joarib who returned with Ezra (Nehemiah 12:8;1 Maccabees 2:1)}, Simon Thassi assumed and united the hereditary role of ethnarch and high priest, for himself, around 140 BC (neither of which was he eligible for), thereby establishing the Hasmonean dynasty as king-priests. But, after Jerusalem was captured by the forces of Herod (the Great) with the help of Marc Antony {companion of Julius Caesar and rival to Augustus}(Josephus *Antiquities* 20:244-249), and Herod became king and ethnarch of Judea, the role of high priest transitioned into more of a political role, appointed by the king. The men whom Herod chose to appoint, were “..made certain men to be so that were of no eminent families, but barely of those who were priests...” (Ant. 20:247 JOE). This practice continued for the next one hundred and seven years, with twenty eight high priests being appointed and deposed (Ant. 20:250 JOE) according to political whims and expediency.

During much of Jesus' lifetime, this appointment was assigned to several members of the house of Ananus (or Ananias). The governor of Syria, Quirinius (Luke 2:2; Ant 18:26 JOE), appointed Ananias as high priest in 6 AD (“in the thirty-seventh year of Augustus Caesar's victory over Antony at Actium” (Ant. 18:26 JOE)), a role he held until the reign of Tiberius Caesar in 14 AD, when he was deposed by Valerius Gratus, the Roman procurator of Judea immediately prior to Pontius Pilate. During his eleven year tenure, Gratus appointed four high priests, including the son (Eleazar) and son-in-law (Joseph Caiaphas) of Ananias (John 18:13; Ant 18:34-35 JOE). After the rule of Pilate ended, Caiaphas was similarly deposed and replaced by his wife's brother, Jonathan (Ant 18:95 JOE). In total, the house of Ananus/Ananias held seven appointments to the high priesthood, in six men: Ananias, Eleazar, Caiaphas, Jonathan (twice; Ant 18:95, 19:313 JOE), Theophilus (Ant 19:297 JOE) {and a possible candidate for the Gospel of Luke's intended audience}, and Ananus II (Ant 20:197 JOE). So, we may reasonably conclude that these “*chief priests*”, mentioned by John, were the members of the political, priestly family of Ananias and it is also relevant to note that they were inclined towards the sect of Sadducees {at least the youngest son, Ananus II, a fact that suggests the whole family was as well (Ant 20:199 JOE)}. Politics was their true religion.

The council was a deliberative body called the Sanhedrin. It consisted of seventy elders and it rendered judgment and provided decisions on all matters of the Jewish religion. Its origin is traced through Exodus 24, when “...*Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up [on the mountain], and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.*” (Exod. 24:9-11 ESV) and Jethro's earlier advice to Moses, “*Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves.*” (Exod. 18:21-22 ESV). Scripture records the names of three out of the seventy men serving on the council during the time of Jesus' death and resurrection: Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50), Nicodemus (John 3:1), and Gamaliel (Acts 5:34); two of these men supported Christ quietly, and the third publicly opposed His teaching (tentatively). However, when the other Gospel writers make multiple mentions of the council, as the “*whole council*” (Matt 26:59; Mark 14:55, 15:1), it is meant in the representative sense; where certain decisions and actions are made as representing the will of the whole, without any regard for internal disagreement. {Similarly, decisions made by

a church Session are understood representatively, as being from “the whole”, even when a vote is not unanimous.}

Lastly, the Pharisees, despite how they seem to be portrayed in the Gospels, were not a monolithic power block. They were a small and strict sect of the Jews, more like a denomination (as the Essenes and Sadducees would be considered similarly), and they were uniquely identifiable by their doctrine and practice. Although they were small numerically, they were exceptionally influential among the general populace (Ant 13:298 JOE). This social support gave them a great deal of political influence. Unlike our modern denominations, the Pharisees were not organized formally, but rather adherents were found in every sphere and strata of life. There is no historically known, named, single leader of the Pharisees. Thus, their influence was present more in certain members of the Sanhedrin rather than as a separate, organized group of individuals.

So, even if this conspiracy was limited to just the family of Ananias and the principle movers and shakers of the Sanhedrin, we can still assume around ten or twenty people, or more.

Again, “...*the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."*”. The logic of their argument betrays their true concern, and it was not for the spiritual condition of Israel.

- They acknowledged the plain fact that Jesus was performing “*many signs*”, affirming the truth of His miracles. They did not consider Jesus to be a fraud or a false prophet. They recognized the truth of what He was doing, even while they refused to accept the truth about what it honestly meant.
- They understood what the logical and natural consequence of Jesus's many signs should be, that “*everyone will believe in him*”. Everyone should rightly be beginning to believe in Jesus. First, as a prophet of God and then, as the Messiah of God.
- If the Jewish people would begin believing in Jesus as the Messiah then, they might become politically motivated and be willing to rise up and reassert local control. They might be willing to fight for Jewish independence from Rome and be inclined to declare Jesus, King of the Jews; a position He was legitimately entitled to, unlike the Idumean (Edomite) dynasty of Herod (Ant 14:10 JOE) or the (now extinct) Hasmonean dynasty, because Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah and could trace His lineage to King David (Matthew 1; Luke 3), as the patriarch Jacob had prophesied, “*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*” (Gen. 49:10 ESV)
- If the Jewish people revolted, then the Romans would be certain to respond with overwhelming force (as they would eventually do in 70 AD), since Judea held strategic value to the Empire; namely, its location as the land junction connecting Europe, Asia, and Africa.
- If the Romans responded in force, these Jewish leaders expected that they would “*take away both our place and our nation.*”. The Greek term translated as “place” is *topos*, and it is used in reference to location, as in their land or their territory. While the Greek term translated as “nation” is *ethnos*, it is used more often in reference to different people groups. So, what they truly feared was the loss of their existing territory and the deportation of their people; fearing a repetition of the Assyrian deportation of the Northern Kingdom and a repetition of the Babylonian deportation and exile.
- Lastly, the final implication for them was that if such a deportation were to occur, they would personally lose all of their wealth, social status, power and influence.

Following this logic, it becomes understandable why they would feel so threatened by Jesus and His ministry. Since they acted on this logic, it is clear that these conspirators were unregenerate and worldly sinners, despite all of their many public expressions of piety.

Then, *"...one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.""*. Caiaphas, the appointed high priest: the top ecclesiastical person (technically) in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism; spoke with the highest authority, declaring *"... it is better for you that one man should die for the people..."*. He used the language of sacrifice, specifically a substitutionary sacrifice, *"...not that the whole nation should perish."* He used the language of appeasement, of atonement. This kind of language demonstrates that the high priest considered, in advance of the act, that the planned death (murder) of Jesus of Nazareth, would be as a sacrifice for the benefit of the whole Jewish people; for all God's chosen Elect.

John plainly explains the fuller reality of the situation to us, *"He [Caiaphas] did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."*. Again we see, Scripture interpreting Scripture. Under the influence, wisdom, guidance, and guarding of the Holy Spirit, John authoritatively recorded the words by Caiaphas as prophecy. While we might wonder or question how John knew about this prophecy and its particulars, we do not need to assume that it came through supernatural means, since word of it likely spread to Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and many, or most, of the other council members, even those who were not present for this meeting. There had to have been widespread agreement with Caiaphas's view in order for the conspiracy to move forward, agreement and the apathy demonstrated through expressed neutrality. So, we may reasonably expect that John, and the other disciples, learned of this prophecy after the fact, through the memory of council members who eventually came to faith in Christ. However, this prophecy by Caiaphas was not uniquely his. This prophecy echoed the prophetic words of Isaiah regarding the LORD's "Suffering Servant".

- *"For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him."* Although Jesus was actually "Somebody from Somewhere", during in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Jesus of Nazareth was a "nobody from no where". There was nothing inherently attractive about Him. There was nothing that should have naturally drawn people to Him. It was His ministry, His miracles, and the irresistible call of the Holy Spirit which drew (and still draws) people to Jesus.
- *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief..."* The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus and His teachings. He was rejected and driven away from His home town, *"For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown."* (Jn. 4:44 ESV; Matt 13:57, Mark 6:4). Despite having the wondrous power to heal people who were sick, Jesus chose instead to suffer human sorrow and grief, when His friend, Lazarus, got sick and died before commanding the dead man to live, again.
- *"...and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."* People turned away from Him in shame: such as those who left Bethany, who reported to the priests and the council with bad intentions; and those others who chose to not speak out, or stand up, for what is right and true because of their fear, who became complicit in the conspiracy against Jesus through their silence and inaction. Then as now, silence is often interpreted as consent.

All of these elements had been fulfilled in Jesus's life. Now, just one final part of the prophecy remained to be fulfilled, *"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was*

*the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*” This part was made certain through the words of Caiaphas declaring that Jesus's death would be a sacrifice of propitiation, to turn aside wrath foreseen. But, Caiaphas was wrong about whose wrath would be getting turned aside and He was ignorant concerning the fullness of the atonement that Jesus would achieve for God's people. Caiaphas lacked the necessary faith, given by God's grace alone, to be expected to benefit from the salvation and forgiveness of sin that Jesus would purchase with His death.

The Church has always understood Jesus's death on the cross to be an atoning sacrifice, but we often do a poor job explaining why or how we have reached that interpretive conclusion. While the idea of Christ making such a sacrifice is central to the message of the anonymous Letter to the Hebrews (chapters 7-10), it is virtually absent from the letters of Paul. Most of Paul's references to sacrifice concerns living lives of Christian obedience, as living sacrifices pleasing and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1; Eph 5:2; Phil 4:18), a sentiment that is also echoed by Peter (1 Peter 2:5). Paul, however, does directly connect the death of Christ to one particular old covenant sacrifice, that of the Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7), but the Passover sacrifice was not an atonement for sin. It was a propitiation, a turning aside of God's wrath against the Egyptians and turning God's favor towards the Israelites. But, the Passover of the old covenant was not an expiation, or a removal, of sin or sin's guilt.

Jesus died, was executed and murdered, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread after celebrating the Feast of Passover with His disciples; the Paschal lamb had already been sacrificed. During that meal, He reestablished, or reconsecrated, Passover as the Lord's Supper under the new covenant. During this reconsecration, Jesus amended the traditional liturgy, as Luke described, *“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”* (Lk. 22:19-20 ESV). Jesus's broken body and poured out blood united the expiation of sin with His propitiation against God's wrath, while eating them is a memorial and celebration of our spiritual union into Christ and our receipt of their benefit. As all of the rites and rituals of the old covenant were foreshadowing's of Christ, so the spiritual effect of Passover and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) rites are reasonably united in and through the singular sacrifice of the singular Christ upon the cross that they always pointed towards.

The prophecy of Caiaphas did not make the death of Jesus Christ a sacrifice of atonement, but through his words he affirmed it in advance, alongside Isaiah, *“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”*. Thus, offered as a substitutionary sacrifice by Israel's high priest, on behalf of God's chosen people, Jesus carried our sins to the cross, poured out His soul interceding for us (propitiation), so that we would be accounted righteous (justification after expiation), an accounting we receive only by faith and trust in Christ alone. Only through our God-given faith in Him who died, do we have the hope and promise of life eternal, fellowship, and friendship with God.

Finally, *“...from that day on they made plans to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.”* The course of the Jews was settled. They agreed that Jesus needed to die. They agreed that it would be the only way to prevent the destruction of their nation, their way of life, and their people. They were in agreement and they were wrong about so much. They were blind to their wickedness by their own self righteousness, and they were blind to how their sinfulness would be used for the salvation of Israel, by the LORD.

Meanwhile, Jesus once again left the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. We are told us that He went to a town called Ephraim, located somewhere near the Judean wilderness. Although it is uncertain where precisely this

town was {early 4<sup>th</sup> Century tradition holds that it was the town now called Taybeh<sup>3</sup>, identified with the Benjamin town of Ophrah in Joshua 18:23 (Ophrah/Ephraim shares some verbal similarities that may be explainable through time and linguistic contamination)}, its proximity to “the wilderness” supports a location somewhere north of Jerusalem in the vicinity of Jericho, the desert, the Dead Sea, and the Jordan River Valley. Jesus remaining in such a location at this time, is in harmony with Luke 18 and 19, when Jesus healed a blind beggar outside of Jericho, and ate with Zacchaeus, the tax collector, in Jericho as He was making His final journey up to Jerusalem, for the Passover.

So, what does all this mean for us now?

Having this “behind the scenes” look into the conspiracy against Jesus reminds and encourages us in a few different elements of our faith.

First, it reminds us that God truly does, can, and will turn even the worst of things to the good, somehow and somehow. Believing this, knowing this, by having this example, strengthens our ability and willingness to trust God, His providence, and His plan even when we do not have the “how's” or “why's” explained for us. John gives us evidence to remind us that God is in control, even when His control seems to be in the background.

Second, this prophecy shows us how redemptive history is connected as a one, single, continuous thread: past, present, and future.

Third, it helps to explain some of why we believe, what we believe, about the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, John's explanation, “*that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*”, refutes the lies told by some, that the full inclusion of Gentiles within the people of God was a later invention of Paul. It refutes one of the greatest lies of dispensational eschatology, that God's Israel and the Church are not one united people; that God has one plan of salvation for the Jews and another one for the Church. John plainly tells us that Jesus gathers “... *into one the children of God who are scattered abroad...*”, drawing all of us from every nation, tribe, culture, and family in the world. Then, when that lie is exposed, that whole system collapses. The only hope for anyone's salvation depends entirely upon Christ, Himself and the mercy of God's adoption, and not our works.

Fifth, by interpreting the life and ministry of Jesus in light of Isaiah's Servant, we remember that salvation is entirely and solely the work of God. The entirety of our contribution is the sin which made our need for saving necessary, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*”. Once we understand that, we cannot ever assume that we chose Christ, or that we have or can do anything to earn, deserve, or merit saving. Instead, we can only praise and that God for His mercy and grace, for His covenant with Christ to redeem us from our sin and adopt us as His chosen and beloved people. Christ has saved us, by His grace. Now it remains to us to respond in faith, with works.

Sixth and lastly, although the Gospel of John is different from the three Synoptic Gospels in tone and content, by the writer's intention, it still has synergies with the others. The three and the one do not contradict one another, but instead, they work together in the power of the Holy Spirit, to better present a clear narrative whole and teach us everything we need to know and believe about “Who Jesus is”, “What He has done for us”, and “How we may trust in Him, for life”. This internal, written consistency between the Gospels, and with the letters of Paul, and with the Prophets, and the Law of Moses is further evidence of the singular Author and Subject of Scripture, the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*: Jesus Christ, God the Son and Son of God. So many writers, writing across so many centuries, writing for different contemporary audiences could not have generated the authoritative and inerrant text of Scripture, unless there was just one single, mind directing it the whole time.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.seetheholyland.net/tag/ephrain/>

The story of the Bible is the story of Jesus, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. The story of the Bible is Jesus's story, told for us and for our good benefit of faith. Therefore, trust God's Word. Trust His promises and trust in His fulfillment of them. Trust Jesus Christ. He alone is the Justifier, the righteous servant of God who has atoned for your sin and for my sin, gaining the LORD's forgiveness for us, His beloved children of adoption.

**AMEN**