

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Resurrection of Lazarus Provokes the Decision to Kill Jesus

Once again, John gives us a little more insight into the events recorded by the other Gospel writers. The resurrection of Lazarus at Bethany was virtually explosive in its impact. Since Bethany was so near to Jerusalem, and because Lazarus' family was evidently a prominent family, the report of his death would have been spread throughout the city. Now, the news of his resurrection was spreading like wildfire, and the Pharisees and Sadducees could no longer control the sentiment and thinking of the common people. Their worst fears were being realized as the story was carried throughout Jerusalem, and speculation about Jesus was rampant.

“Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees...” (vs. 47). There was no love lost between these two parties. They were very different in their outlook on most things, and for the most part they despised each other. **The chief priests** were all somehow related to each other, a family dynasty of power and wealth. They represented a larger political party called **the Sadducees**, who were comprised largely of the aristocracy of Israel and maintained a majority of the Sanhedrin, or High Council of Israel. They tended to be more liberal in their dealings with the Romans. They accepted some of the trappings of Gentile culture, while at the same time the priests remained scrupulously careful to keep Levitical purity. They denied the existence of angels or demons and the teaching about resurrection from the dead (Acts 23:8). They seem to have subordinated the rest of the OT to the Pentateuch, for in these Mosaic writings was the basis for their position of power and prestige. They were more conservative than the Pharisees in their use of Scripture, because they rejected the oral traditions that grew up as interpretations of the OT and the popular religious stories that the Pharisees would make reference to. They were more literal in their interpretations of the OT, rejecting any spiritualizing of the text as fanciful and unacceptable. For these reasons, they liked to portray themselves as the guardians of true Judaism. They were also more politically inclined, always careful to do what they could to insure their place of power. **Because of their aristocratic position, they were very conservative politically, i.e., they wanted no change of the status quo.** They fit many of the negative stereotypes of the wealthy ruling class, being arrogant, uncompassionate, and generally unpopular with the masses.

Pharisees, on the other hand tended to be more popular with the common people. They were more extremely devoted religious zealots, ones who had "separated" themselves from common life to serve God and the Law more completely. The name "Pharisee" is probably derived from a Hebrew root *pharas*, meaning "to separate". They were comprised mostly of middle class people, merchants and tradesmen. They usually lived in separated, closed communities with other Pharisees. Most were *not* formally educated in the interpretation of the Law, and relied heavily on those who were professional scholars in the Law, **the scribes**. While **the Sadducees, especially the priests, maintained most of their influence through the importance of the Temple, the Pharisees exercised great influence through the local synagogues** of the day, especially through their emphasis on teaching the Law and through the administration of alms to the poor and needy. While they virtually despised "the people of the land" for their lack of spiritual diligence in observing the Law, **the Pharisees were a much more progressive movement than the Sadducees, in that they strongly believed in human equality.** They sought to educate and motivate the masses to pursue righteousness precisely because **they believed such a life of dedication to God belonged to all people**, not just the priestly class. They often were a voice for human rights, and emphasized that people could make their lives better by their choices to obey God's Law. **The real distinctive of Pharisaism, however, was its emphasis on oral tradition.** There was a great body of teachings passed on by word of mouth that were the commentaries of famous rabbis on the Scripture, or their practical comments about life. Later, much of this was written down in the Jewish Talmud, and comprises volumes of material. Most of this was concerning practical points of correct obedience (*orthopraxy*), a much higher priority for the Pharisees than just correct doctrine (*orthodoxy*). It was in reference to this area of oral traditions, along with the additional problem of hypocrisy, that many of Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees took place. In the end, **after the destruction of Jerusalem, and its Temple, in 70 A.D., the party of the Sadducees disappeared and Pharisaism became the predominant influence in later Judaism.**

These two parties, who in many ways were avowed enemies, came to be united together in their efforts to discredit and destroy Jesus. *convened a council* -- The word for "council" is *sunedrion*. This same word was brought over from Greek into common Aramaic usage to refer to the high governing council, the Sanhedrin, or for local councils. It is not clearly stated in the Greek of this verse if this is the official Sanhedrin, or if this was a secret meeting of those who were known to be loyal to the leaders of the two parties. The Greek word translated as "convened" here literally means "they gathered together", which tends to support the idea of a covert meeting of known sympathizers, rather than calling an emergency session of the Sanhedrin. *What are we doing? For this man performs many signs.* -- **They recognized that Jesus did miracles, evidently many more than is recorded in John's Gospel. Their efforts to defuse the danger they perceived in His popularity were ineffective because He kept doing these miracles.** They were unable to discredit them, because they produced physical changes that were undeniable, and they kept Him before the eye of the people.

Vs. 48 - *If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him* -- These signs were doing their job. *and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation* -- **Their fear was that** if Jesus was truly proclaimed to be the Christ-King, and started an insurrection, that **the Romans would defend their interests by force.** They painted the most extreme situation in their imagination. The entire removal of the populace was not a normal practice with the Romans. It would nevertheless be a bloody slaughter, for the Romans were quite ruthless in putting down such revolts. Really, they feared more the loss of their prestige and influence if such a scenario would unfold.

Vss. 49-52 - Caiaphas' counsel. *Caiaphas, who was high priest that year* -- **Joseph Caiaphas was the son-in-law of the former high priest, Annas (Jn. 18:13). The Romans retained the right to remove or appoint whomever they wanted as high priest in order to protect their interests.** This made the high priesthood a very volatile, unstable position to hold. Any perceived attitudes or actions of rebellion or disloyalty to Rome meant immediate dismissal. Josephus tells us that in the 107 years of Roman rule before 70 A.D. there were twenty-eight high priests. **Caiaphas was one of the most successful at playing politics with the Romans. He held office from 18-36 A.D.** Aside from presiding over Jesus' trial, he was undoubtedly the high priest during the time of the early church through the time of the great persecution spearheaded by Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1,2 -- Again, a Pharisee and a Sadducee united against the cause of Christ!). Aside from historical references, Caiaphas is one of the only players in the NT whose actual tomb has been found, complete with mummified remains! **It is ironic that Jesus' tomb is empty, but Caiaphas' was not.** *You know nothing at all* -- A statement of arrogant mockery and rebuke by the supreme politician as he introduces his dastardly plot. *nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you* -- The Greek word translated "expedient" means "profitable, beneficial, useful, advantageous". **The issue for Caiaphas was to find a way to deal with this situation that would be to their advantage.** Expedience and personal advantage were key selling points of his proposal. His political savvy was capable of turning a situation that might have made them appear as insurrectionists into an apparent act of loyalty to Rome, all at the cost of only one man's life, ...truly a bargain when compared with the wholesale slaughter that might have prevailed had they let Him live. *that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish* -- Though Caiaphas' motives were rooted in selfishness, he unwittingly stated a sound, Biblical principle from Isaiah 53. **John comments on how he unknowingly prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation.** If God can speak through a donkey (Num. 22:28-30), He can put His words into the mouths of even ungodly people, a valuable practical lesson to remember. *and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.* -- Interesting verse. Literally, "in order that [purpose clause] also the children/offspring of the God, the (ones) having been thoroughly scattered abroad, He might assemble/gather together (at a point in time) into one (thing)." Obviously, John is talking about Gentiles. It could be referring to what Paul discusses in Eph. 2:11-22, an objective spiritual event of cosmic significance available to all who respond in faith. Another observation to consider: These scattered children of God already exist. In what way are they children? They did not need to know the name Jesus in order for them to be thought of in this way. Will this be necessary in the future?

Vs. 53 - *So from that day on they planned together to kill Him* -- **The council agreed with Caiaphas' suggestion. The decision was made.** Now it was a matter of working out the details of how they would do it.