

# Annas and Caiaphas—Parallel Priests

Written and compiled by Gary Kukis

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.” (John 3:16–18). “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

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**Preface:** This information was taken from Luke 3 ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

**Introduction:** There was a very odd situation which took place around the time that Jesus was born. There appear to have been two high priests and they seem to cooperate with one another.

**Luke 3:2a:** [In the] position of high priest, Annas and Caiaphas.

As Luke has already done at the beginning of Luke 1 and Luke 2, he places these events into a very careful historical context.

Luke strikes me as being a very organized writer; and even if there were no chapter divisions in that era, he likely saw these divisions as being there, each defined by its historical preface. These will not be found throughout the book of Luke, but they do begin each of the first 3 chapters.

You may recall that there were two high priests during the time of King David. At this point, we do not have two *official* high priests, but a high priest, Annas; and his successor, Caiaphas, his son-in-law. We

do not know exactly the reason for this, but given the passages in the gospels featuring both men, it is clear that Annas continues to exercise great influence in this religious/political domain.

According to the NET Bible, Annas was the chief priest from A.D. 6-15, apparently removed from power by the Romans. Although relatives were brought in, Annas appears to have continued with the power and authority of a high priest,. At some point in time, his son-in-law Caiaphas came to power in A.D. 18 and remained there until A.D. 36, which is a remarkably long time.

Wilbur Pickering presents a point of view different from the opinions of most commentators. He believes that the Romans required a new high priest each year in order to reduce the power and influence of the high priest. He writes, *in this particular year, it was Caiaphas*. This puts him at odds with other historians. The fact that some assign a period of time to his reign as high priest goes against Pickering's view. Whatever the exact circumstances, there were two high priests at the time that Luke focuses upon. Recall that there was to only be one High Priest; as his was the highest religious authority; and he represented the Lord.

Annas is found 4 times in Scripture; always in conjunction with Caiaphas (Luke 3:2 John 18:13, 24 Acts 4:6). Caiaphas—and perhaps this indicates greater power or more independence from Annas—is found by himself in Matt. 26:3, 57 John 11:49 18:14, 28.

John Knox claims that Caiaphas is the actual high priest, but that Annas continues to wield considerable influence regarding religious and civil matters.

Sometimes, it can be very instructive to know the backgrounds of these various men. After all, there are clearly parallels which we may draw between personalities in this era and today's era.

## Annas

1. Annas was appointed High Priest in A.D. 7, at age 37 by Quirinius, the imperial governor of Syria.
2. Annas was obliged to give up his position to Ismael by Valerius Gratus, the procurator of Judaea, in the beginning of Tiberius' reign, A.D. 14.
3. Annas being removed from office did not appear to lessen his influence or authority.
4. Several High Priests were appointed after him, while he was still alive: Eleazar, son of Annas; Simon; and Joseph Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas (John 18:13.), who remained the High Priest until A.D. 37.
5. It appears that Annas never fully relinquished his power, as Annas and Caiaphas, are both called *high priests* in Luke 3:2 Acts 4:6.
6. Annas apparently used his position to bolster his wealth, establishing and maintaining money-making enterprises at the Temple and the Mount of Olives. One revenue stream was provided by the selling of approved animals for sacrifices to be offered at the Temple. There were specific requirements of animal sacrifices specified in the Law. Annas apparently extrapolated the authority over these sacrifices, providing Temple-approved sacrifices at a price (I do not know when this practice was begun). Is it not human nature for those who have power and wealth try to use one in order to increase the other? In any case, this practice was condemned by Jesus in no uncertain terms (Matt. 21:13).
7. Annas was known by many as the High Priest, as we see in John 18:19, 22.
8. In the pre-dawn morning prior to the crucifixion, Jesus' case was first heard by Annas (John 18:19–23), who appeared to fully wield the power of high priest's office. Some interpret this to be a set of formal questions, which information might be summarized and sent along to

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Caiaphas. Others see this as a hearing (or perhaps a preliminary hearing). It is possible that Annas made a decision of what was to happen to Jesus, and somehow passed this decision along to Caiaphas.

9. That Jesus was first taken to Annas is significant.
10. In any case, Jesus was then formally tried before Caiaphas. Matt. 26:57–68
11. Some believe that the power and influence of Annas was the driving force behind the final persecution of Jesus. From ISBE: *Renan's emphatic statement is substantially correct, "Annas was the principal actor in the terrible drama, and far more than Caiaphas, far more than Pilate, ought to bear the weight of the maledictions of mankind" (Life of Jesus)*. In support of this, ISBE reads: *Caiaphas, indeed, as actual high priest, was the nominal head of the Sanhedrin which condemned Jesus, but the aged Annas was the ruling spirit. According to John 18:12–13, it was to him that the officers who arrested Jesus led Him first.*
12. Nevertheless, it is futile to try to find any single person to blame for the crucifixion. Ultimately, it was the sins of us all that placed the Lord on the cross.
13. Annas lived to an old age, having five sons high priests.
14. He did not live long enough to see his fifth son, Annas (or Ananus II) become High Priest. Ananus II will cause James, the half brother of our Lord, to be stoned to death circa A.D. 62.
15. Interestingly enough, Annas and his family are cursed *in the Talmud, "Woe to the family of Annas! Woe to the serpent-like hisses" (Pes 57a)*. (ISBE). Hastings understands this to mean: *they exerted private influence on the judges and perverted justice for their own ends*. You would think this quote was about some contemporary politician.

Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*; from e-Sword, topic: Annas.

James Hastings, D.D., *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels; Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*; © 1918. By Charles Scriber's Sons; (from e-sword); topic: Annas.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Annas.

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Both Annas and Caiaphas are called high priests in Luke 3:2 Acts 4:6. The way that their names are used in John 18:13, 19, 22, 24 indicates that both men had that office and that title—and were clearly recognized by others with that office and authority—but there does not appear to be any sort of power struggle or competition between them. Our only exposure to them as working together is at the trials of Jesus, and they seemed to be cooperative or possibly in collusion with each other.

In our society, some men retain their political office titles long after they retire; but that is not what is happening here. Josephus refers to various men as High Priests after they have left office, but simply retaining a title is not what is happening here.

### How exactly are there two High Priests at the same time?

1. We do not know the exact answer to this question, so all of the answers offered below are speculative.
2. It is important to note that, this office of High Priest was, at one time, to have a particular man represent the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a type of Christ. However, over the years, this became more of an office of political power and influence.<sup>1</sup>
3. The most natural explanation is, Annas, as the father, has a number of sons who are high priests

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and one son-in-law (Caiaphas). The authority of a father is strong, and it is possible that Annas retained some real authority as a High Priest and some psychological authority over his adult sons.

4. One commentator suggested that the powers-that-be did not want the same High Priest to remain in office and continue to increase his power and authority in office, so that it was mandated that there be a new High Priest (either yearly or often enough).
5. ISBE's explanation: *The explanation seems to be that owing to age, ability and force of character Annas was the virtual, though Caiaphas the titular, high priest. He belonged to the Sadducean aristocracy, and, like others of that class, he seems to have been arrogant, astute, ambitious and enormously wealthy. He and his family were proverbial for their rapacity and greed. The chief source of their wealth seems to have been the sale of requisites for the temple sacrifices, such as sheep, doves, wine and oil, which they carried on in the four famous "booths of the sons of Annas" on the Mount of Olives, with a branch within the precincts of the temple itself. During the great feasts, they were able to extort high monopoly prices for theft goods. Hence, our Lord's strong denunciation of those who made the house of prayer "a den of robbers" (Mark 11:15-19).*
6. From Hastings: *At the time of our Lord's trial he was merely high priest emeritus, and his son-in-law Caiaphas, the acting high priest, presided ex officio over the meeting of the Sanhedrin (John 18:24, Matt. 26:67). Nevertheless, since the high priest emeritus retained not only his title (cf. John 18:15-16; John 18:19; John 18:22, Acts 4:6), but all his obligations and many of his prerogatives, it is not surprising that the masterful Annas took an active and independent part in the proceedings.*
7. That Jesus was first taken to Annas is significant. I see him as making the ultimate decision which Caiaphas later ratifies (that, like much of what is in this doctrine, is opinion).
8. If Rome did require a change in the high priesthood, a natural recognized authority could have been vested in Annas simply in rebellion to Rome.
9. It is not completely clear the term length for the high priestly office. It was passed along from father to son, but even in the Old Testament, there were times when a different line would assume that office. As Rome began to take over, the political power in Judæa began to select the high priest, as Herod the Great chose 6 of them. I had assumed that the Mosaic Law vested lifetime authority in the High Priest, but I have been unable to verify that. Given that the political leaders began to select the high priests, there may have been some quiet rebellion among the Jews, asking, *who do we obey, man or God?* This could account for the continued power of Annas.
10. Given that Annas has held this position for a very long time, there may have been a group of men who looked to him as their leader (Fausset suggests that Annas was the president of the Sanhedrin).
11. It is not impossible to imagine an older group of men giving their allegiance to Annas, resulting in an amiable split in the spiritual authority.
12. Perhaps Annas was the true power, and those in his family who became priests were figureheads.
13. More than one of the possible ways that Annas and Caiaphas were high priests suggested above could be true; and some of these theories could be true in part.
14. When David was king, there were two high priests, which was the result of Saul killing off nearly all of the priests at the Tabernacle (Saul did not personally kill them, but a general under him did). The young man who escaped became the High Priest; but there was another man who became High Priest who probably functioned in or near Gibeon so that Saul could keep an eye

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on him.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout human history, it has become clear that there was not to be a melding of political and religious power. Saul once tried to assume the prerogatives of Samuel the prophet, a move that turned out badly for Saul. King David, on the other hand, was voluntarily subject to spiritual authorities. When Nathan the prophet excoriated David for his immorality, David took it to heart. In this instance above, Annas wields both religious and political power, but to no good end. The Catholic Church, despite its promising beginnings, soon became corrupt, using its considerable religious influence to wield political power. At least one man with strong religious influence in the United States properly and carefully maintained political neutrality—the evangelist Billy Graham. Although he was often seen in the company of presidents of both parties, he offered advice and spiritual guidance without violating the separation of church and state (whether presidents listened to him and took his advice is quite another matter).

Much of this doctrine was original. Some came from:

Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*; from e-Sword, topic: Annas.

James Hastings, D.D., *Dictionary of the Bible*; © 1909. By Charles Scriber's Sons; (from e-sword); topic: Annas.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Annas.

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Caiaphas's name occurs more times in the New Testament than Annas's. The ESV; capitalized is used below.

### Caiaphas

1. Caiaphas is also known as Joseph Caiaphas. He married the daughter of Annas in A.D. 25; thereby becoming the son-in-law of Annas. John 18:13
2. He was appointed to the office of High Priest between A.D. 26–37. This would have been for the entirety of governorship of Pilate.
3. Most authors believed him to be under the authority of Annas, even if that authority structure was ill-defined (both he and Annas are called high priests in Luke 3:2). We might understand him to take his cues from his father-in-law.
4. Caiaphas had to have been a wily politician, being able to hold onto his position for such a long period of time. This suggested that he was able to work both with the Romans over him and the priests, Levites and sadducees under him. Boyd in Hastings' NT commentary suggests that Caiaphas's willingness to set aside both justice and religion made this possible. W. F. Boyd: *Caiaphas is a type of the wily ecclesiastical opportunist, who places the success of himself and the institution he represents before all claims of truth or justice.* Part of this is seen in his evaluation of Jesus. He did not want to anger the public who followed Jesus; but, he also believed that if Jesus's movement became too big, Rome would crush it and Judæa along with it.
5. He presided over the Jewish Sanhedrin and pronounced Jesus guilty of blasphemy. Different sources had Annas or Caiaphas as presiding over the Sanhedrin. I did not come across any single source which told me that both men presided over the Sanhedrin at one time or another. Therefore, I don't know if both were leaders of the Sanhedrin or not.
6. It is quite fascinating that Caiaphas's words concerning Jesus were unintentionally prophetic.
  - 1) John 11:47–48 **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."**

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- 2) John 11:49–50 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."
- 3) John 11:51–53 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.
- 4) These words of Caiaphas may be the reason he receives so much attention in the gospels.
7. The idea was, the Sanhedrin would wait for the right time, and grab up Jesus to put Him to death. John 11:45–53
8. When Jesus was apprehended the night before His crucifixion, He was first taken to Annas and then to Caiaphas. Both trials were illegal, bringing forward false witnesses, holding court in the middle of the night, attempting to drum up some false charge to take to Pontius Pilate (as only Pilate could pronounce a sentence of death).
9. Caiaphas asked Jesus straight out if He was the Messiah, and when Jesus answered directly, Caiaphas tore his clothes, saying, "What more do we need?"
  - 1) Matt. 26:62 And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against You?"
  - 2) Matt. 26:63 But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest [Caiaphas] said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God."
  - 3) Matt. 26:64 Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."
  - 4) Mat 26:65–66 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard His blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."
  - 5) This gave them only the charge of blasphemy to take to Pilate.
10. Since the Hebrew people could not execute anyone, so Caiaphas sent Jesus to Pilate in order for Him to receive the death sentence. Matt. 27:1–2 John 18:28
11. Caiaphas also persecuted the Apostles as they began to establish the church. Acts 5:14–18
12. According to Fausset, Caiaphas was the end of the earthly priesthood. However, another commentator suggests that another of Annas's sons became High Priest after Caiaphas.
13. Fausset on Caiaphas: *Unscrupulous vigor, combined with political shrewdness, characterizes him in the New Testament, as it also kept him in office longer than any of his predecessors.*
14. There are 3 specific incidents involving Caiaphas in the Bible.
  - 1) Right after the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Caiaphas realized that he would have to deal with this Jesus fellow. However, because of the Lord's popularity with the people, Caiaphas knew that he had to wait this situation out.
  - 2) Caiaphas is one of the many who presided over an illegal hearing of the Lord prior to His crucifixion.
  - 3) Caiaphas also went after the Apostles of Jesus in Acts.
  - 4) Boyd further suggests that Caiaphas imprisoned Peter and John, presided over the trial of Stephen, and gave Saul of Tarsus letters to enable him to apprehend Christians in Damascus. See Acts 5:17-21, 27 7:1 9:1

M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; 1897; from e-Sword, topic: Annas.  
 Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*; from e-Sword, topic: Caiaphas.  
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One of the reasons why we study Caiaphas and Annas is, there are men with power like them today. What is right and true rarely enters into their thinking. They concern themselves primarily with whatever retains their power. Power is of the utmost importance to them. What puts coin into their pockets is also of the utmost importance to them

Men who have power and wealth often use one of those possessions to gain more of the other.

**Illustration:** Men who have power and wealth often use one of those possessions to gain more of the other. Have you ever seen a politician appear to sell out everything that he professes to believe in? That is called Tuesday in Washington D.C. Whereas, there are some politicians who truly believe the things that they say (whether naive or brilliant), most of them will say whatever they believe is necessary to hold onto their power and wealth. And, if necessary, they simply obfuscate, giving 100 word answers to simple *yes or no* questions.

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