

# Jewish Priests

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## Explanation

Thousands of people worked in and around the Temple of Jerusalem. Chart 3-7 shows the basic organization of the temple priests, who worked under the direction of the reigning High Priest, a Sadducee. Under him was a council of Chief Priests (see also chart 3-9). They appointed a captain of the temple. His guards or overseers protected the temple and were involved in the arrest of Jesus. Three treasurers maintained the temple treasury, which was opulent. By some estimates, the Temple of Herod housed over 10,000 talents of gold and silver, a staggering amount of wealth (see chart 2-7). The priests were the main officiators in the temple sacrifices and services, while the Levites were distinctly below the priests in status. Both groups are mentioned by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10.

Chart 3-8 lists the High Priests down to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Caiaphas, who was the High Priest at the time of the trial of Jesus, reigned for almost twenty years, an exceptionally long term in office.

Most powerful were the Chief Priests, a small group of extremely influential politicians and managers. As can be seen from chart 3-9, the Chief Priests were the dominant source of sustained opposition to Jesus. Often they worked behind the scenes, frequently alone, but on several occasions they enlisted the involvement of the elders or rulers (venerable or powerful men of the city). Their scribes (who were notaries, lawyers, recorders, readers, or interpreters) were often by their side, yet only rarely did Pharisees have any dealings with them.

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## References

- Drawn from Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 147, 377–78.  
Merlin D. Rehm, “Levites and Priests,” *ABD*, 4:297–310.

# The Chief Priests and Their Associates

## CHIEF PRIESTS ACTING ALONE

Mt 2:4	tell Herod where Christ should be born
Jn 12:10	consider putting Lazarus to death
Mt 26:14	meet with Judas to arrange for the betrayal and arrest of Jesus
Mk 14:10	meet with Judas to arrange for the betrayal of Jesus
Mt 27:6–7	refuse to return the thirty pieces of silver to the temple treasury and buy the potter's field
Jn 18:35	deliver Jesus to Pilate (acting in conjunction with entire nation)
Mk 15:3–4	accuse Jesus before Pilate
Mk 15:10	deliver Jesus to Pilate out of envy
Lk 23:4	are told, along with people, of Jesus' innocence by Pilate
Mk 15:11	persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released
Lk 23:23	prevail in asking for Barabbas to be released
Jn 19:6	cry (with their officers) for the crucifixion of Jesus
Jn 19:21	ask Pilate to change the wording of the title on the cross
Mt 28:11	are told by guards of the resurrection and empty tomb
Acts 9:14	give Saul authority to arrest Christians
Acts 9:21	issue authority to arrest Christians
Acts 26:10	had given Saul authority to arrest Christians
Acts 26:12	had given Saul authority to arrest Christians

**CHIEF PRIESTS ACTING WITH ELDERS (*PRESBYTEROI*), RULERS (*ARCHONTES*),  
CAPTAINS (*STRATEGOI*), OR THE SANHEDRIN (*SYNHEDRION*)**

- Mt 21:23 question Jesus in the temple about his authority (elders)  
Mt 26:47 arrest Jesus (elders)  
Mt 26:59 seek false witnesses against Jesus (Sanhedrin)  
Mk 14:56 seek false witnesses against Jesus (Sanhedrin)  
Mt 27:1 take council against Jesus (elders)  
Lk 22:4 meet with Judas and captains to arrange betrayal  
Lk 22:52 arrest Jesus with temple captains and elders  
Mt 27:3 refuse the thirty pieces of silver when Judas tries to return them (elders)  
Mt 27:12–13 accuse Jesus before Pilate (elders)  
Lk 23:13–15 are told, along with the rulers and the people, of Jesus' innocence by Pilate  
Mt 27:20 persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas (elders)  
Lk 24:20 with rulers deliver Jesus to be crucified  
Mt 28:12–13 bribe guards to say the disciples stole Jesus' body (elders)  
Acts 4:18 command Peter and John not to speak of Christ (elders)  
Acts 5:24–26 arrest Peter and John and command them again (captains)  
Acts 22:30 convene court against Paul (Sanhedrin)  
Acts 23:14–15 hear oath of vigilantes against Paul (elders)  
Acts 25:15 ask Festus to give judgment against Paul (elders)

**CHIEF PRIESTS MENTIONED WITH SCRIBES ONLY**

- Mt 20:18 Jesus prophesies his betrayal into their hands  
Mk 10:33 Jesus prophesies his betrayal into their hands  
Lk 20:19 offended by the parable of the rejected cornerstone  
Mt 21:15 are displeased at miracles and popularity of Jesus

Mk 11:18 are afraid of his popularity and temple teaching  
 Lk 22:2 are afraid of his popularity and seek to kill him  
 Mk 14:1 meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus  
 Lk 23:10 accuse Jesus before Pilate  
 Mk 15:31 mock Jesus on the cross

### **CHIEF PRIESTS LINKED WITH ELDERS AND SCRIBES**

Mt 16:21 Jesus prophesies his suffering and death by them  
 Mk 8:31 Jesus prophesies his rejection and death by them  
 Lk 9:22 Jesus prophesies his rejection and death by them  
 Mk 11:27–28 question Jesus in the temple about his authority  
 Lk 20:1–2 question Jesus in the temple about his authority  
 Mt 26:3 meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus  
 Lk 19:47 meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus  
 Mk 14:43 arrest Jesus  
 Mk 14:53 assemble against Jesus  
 Lk 22:66 assemble against Jesus  
 Mk 15:1 deliver Jesus to Pilate  
 Mt 27:41 mock Jesus on the cross

### **CHIEF PRIESTS TOGETHER WITH PHARISEES ONLY**

Mt 21:33, 45 hear the parable of the wicked tenants  
 Jn 7:32 send officers to attempt to arrest Jesus  
 Jn 7:45–46 listen as officers report that they will not arrest Jesus  
 Jn 11:47 confer together to discuss arresting Jesus  
 Jn 11:57 require disclosure of knowledge of Jesus' location  
 Jn 18:3 send officers to arrest Jesus  
 Mt 27:62–64 come to Pilate asking for soldiers at the tomb