

The Hearing before the Council

Explanation

One of the greatest difficulties in reconstructing the events of the trial of Jesus is ascertaining what happened, or most likely happened, when he was interrogated before the Jewish council. Many important legal issues remain very obscure. Who were these people? Was this an official trial, or something akin to a grand jury investigation, only an informal hearing? When did the council meet? How many judges were there? Were witnesses produced? What questions was Jesus asked? How did he answer? Were those questions directly related to alleged crimes, or were they simply probing for further allegations? Was an actual accusation and verdict reached, or did the council just express outrage? What was the purpose and intent behind humiliating and shaming Jesus? On close inspection, different conclusions emerge from the different Gospels.

Reference

Haim Cohn, *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 94–141.

The Hearing before the Council

THE COUNCIL

The council assembled at night.	Mt 26:57, 59, 74
The council assembled at night.	Mk 14:53, 55, 68
The council assembled "as soon as it was day."	Lk 22:66
The council assembled at night or very early in the morning.	Jn 18:28

THE WITNESSES

Two false witnesses said that Jesus had said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."	Mt 26:61
Certain witnesses said that Jesus had said, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands."	Mk 14:58
There is no mention of witnesses being brought against Jesus.	Lk 22:71
There is no mention of witnesses being brought against Jesus.	Jn 18:19, 23

THE QUESTIONS

Caiaphas asked Jesus if he was the Christ, and Jesus answered, "Thou hast said."	Mt 26:63–64
When asked if he was the Christ, Jesus answered, "Thou sayest truly; for thus it is written of me."	Mt 27:11 JST
Caiaphas asked Jesus if he was the Christ; Jesus answered, "I am."	Mk 14:61–62
The council asked Jesus if he was the Christ, and Jesus answered, "If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go.... Ye say that I am."	Lk 22:67–70
There is no mention of Jesus being asked whether he was the Christ.	Jn 18:19

THE ACCUSATIONS

Caiaphas rent his clothes, saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?" The council said Jesus was "guilty of death."	Mt 26:65–66
Caiaphas rent his clothes and said, "What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy." All the council found Jesus "to be guilty of death."	Mk 14:63–64
The council said, "What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth."	Lk 22:71
There is no mention of witnesses or of Jesus declaring he is the Christ.	Jn 18:28

THE HUMILIATION

The council spit in Jesus' face, buffeted him, and "smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?"	Mt 26:67–68
Some of the council "began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands."	Mk 14:65
The "men that held Jesus" mocked him, smote him, blindfolded him, and asked him to "prophecy" who it was that smote him.	Lk 22:63–64
One of the officers struck Jesus with the palm of his hand.	Jn 18:22