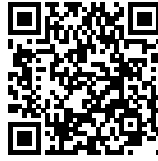




WHO WAS CAIAPHAS?

Posted on April 1, 2019 by Patrick



Joseph Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest between AD 18-37, best known for his role during the trial of Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing is known about his early career, but we can assume that he was a member of a wealthy family, because he married a daughter of the high priest who is called Annas (or Ananus) son of Seth, high priest from AD 6-15 (John 18:13). Even when he was no longer in function, he was apparently extremely influential. According to Josephus, five of Ananus' sons became high priest (Antiquities 20.198); to this we may add Caiaphas, his son-in-law.

Both Annas and Caiaphas may have sympathized with the Sadducees, which found most of its members among the wealthy Jewish elite. Some scholars think it probable that Caiaphas was a member of the embassy that went to Rome in AD 17 to discuss fiscal matters (Tacitus, Annals, 2.42.5).

In AD 18, the Roman governor Valerius Gratus (AD 15-26) appointed Caiaphas as high priest. The two men must have had an excellent working relation, because Caiaphas remained in office exceptionally long. Gratus had dismissed at least four high priests - Annas (Ananus), Ishmael ben-Fabus, Eleazar ben-Ananus, and Simon ben-Camithus - before appointing Caiaphas. Aside from Annas, the aforementioned high priests ruled for only a single year before being taken out of office.

It is tempting to link this appointment to the Jewish embassy that in AD 17 had appealed to Tiberius for a reduction in the tribute of Judaea: was Caiaphas rewarded for his tactful behavior in Rome? In any case, Gratus' successor Pontius Pilate never changed the high priest, which can mean that he had found in Caiaphas a man who could be trusted.

Jerusalem at the time of Jesus was governed by the high priest and his council. This was a reversion to the system that had been followed in the Persian and Hellenistic periods before the Hasmonean revolt. The high priest, often in concert with the 'chief priests', sometimes with the 'elders' (influential, aristocratic laymen), was in charge of ordinary police and judicial procedures, and he - alone and in such combinations as just described - figures large in the Gospels, Acts and in Josephus.

Priesthood was hereditary among the Jews; the priests traced their lineage to Aaron, brother of Moses and first high priest. During the Persian and Hellenistic periods, the high priests, who were rulers of the nation, were (or were thought to be) members of the family of Zadok (1 Kings 1:28-45). The Hasmoneans were hereditary priests, but they were not Zadokites. When they arose to power as a result of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids, however, the natural consequence was that the leading

member of the family was declared high priest.

When Simon ascended to the high priesthood (1 Maccabees 14:41-49), the previously ruling Zadokite family was deposed, though the system of government remained the same. About a hundred years later, however, the revolt of Aristobulus II (66-63 BC) and his son led to Herod's appointment as King of Judaea, and this changed the system.

Herod, himself a non-Jew, could not claim descent from a priestly family and had to appoint high priests during his reign. When Rome deposed Archelaus in AD 6 and sent a prefect to govern Judaea, it also began to appoint the high priest. Thereafter it sometimes granted the right to a member of Herod's family, but sometimes this right was retained by the prefect (later procurator), or by the legate of Syria.

During a sixty-year period (AD 6-66), the high priests were always chosen from one of four families of aristocratic priests. The high priests as political appointees did not have quite the prestige and authority of the hereditary high priests of earlier periods, but nevertheless they had some prestige and a lot of authority.

For the most part, they governed Jerusalem successfully.

In Jerusalem, then, even when Judaea was under 'direct' Roman control, Jewish leaders were in day-to-day control. The magistrates were Jews who ruled by Jewish law, the schools were Jewish and the religion was Jewish. The high priest and his council had a wide range of responsibilities: they were required to organize payment of tribute and to get the money and goods to the right person. Jerusalem was policed by the Temple guards, commanded by the high priest.

The high priest was a suitable ruler because the office was traditional and thus was held with great reverence, and the prefect considered him the ideal spokesman for and to the population of Jerusalem. Granted, there were cases when people did not like a high priest (the mob hunted down and killed a former high priest when revolt broke out in AD 66), but whether the high priest was good or not, respect for the office was deep and genuine.

First Herod and then Rome took control of the priestly vestments and released them only during special occasions. With them on, the high priest wielded too much power. Cases concerning control of the vestments, and with it the appointment of the high priest, more than once went directly to the

emperor for decision.

Who controlled the vestments and the office really mattered, because the man in the office was not only a mediator between Rome and her subjects, but also between God and man. He was the one who, on the Day of Atonement, would go into the Holy of Holies and make atonement for the sins of himself and all Israel.

The Romans considered the high priest to be the reasonable official for them. If people wanted to deal with Rome, they went to the high priest. If Rome wanted to communicate with the people, the prefect summoned the high priest. If anything went wrong, the high priest held full responsibility. But he was only the first among equals: responsibility to prevent trouble fell, to some degree, on all the leading citizens.

In short: Rome's rule over Judaea at our period was rather 'indirect': it governed through client (puppet) kings or resident governors, who in turn, utilized local aristocrats and magistrates down the food chain - be it the local village elder or the Temple high priest.

The prefect's main duties are to maintain domestic peace and collect tribute: in Judaea - specifically in Jerusalem, both tasks are turned over to the priestly aristocrats, while the prefect would usually limit himself to monitoring for potential trouble and moving out only when things spiralled out of control, under normal circumstances.

If the high priest did not preserve order, the prefect would intervene militarily, and the situation might get out of hand. As long as the Temple guards, acting as the police, carried out arrests, and as long as the high priest was involved in judging cases (though he usually did not execute anyone), there was little possibility of a direct clash between the Jews and the Romans.

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. (John 11:49-52).

To keep his job, he had to remain in control, but any decent high priest - and Caiaphas, it seems, was pretty decent - had to care about the common populace as well. He had other obligations than just the need to prevent clashes with Roman troops. As the man in the middle, he should also represent the views of the people to the prefect, and should stand up for Jewish customs and traditions.

Around AD 36, Pilate's career in Judaea came to an end. The governor of Syria, Lucius Vitellius, intervened in the Jewish affairs during the Passover festival of AD 37 and removed Caiaphas from office. The man who had ruled the longest of the nineteen high priests of the first century was succeeded by his brother-in-law Jonathan, a son of Ananus, who himself ruled for only a year before being replaced by his brother, Theophilus (AD 37-41).



In November of 1990, a family tomb was discovered in Peace Forest in North Talpote, Jerusalem. The crypt contained four loculi (burial niches), with twelve intact ossuaries (boxes containing human bones), as well as some coins. The coins, as well as the writing on the ossuaries, help date this tomb as being from around the 1st century AD.

On one of the ornate ossuaries (left), measuring 74 cm long, 29 wide, and 38 high, two inscriptions were found: on the side was written Yehosef bar-QYF', with Yehosef bar-QF' written on one end. This ossuary contained the bones of two babies, a young child, a teenage boy, an adult woman, and a man about 60 years of age. Another ossuary from the same tomb also bore the inscription QF'.

After some study, the bones were buried again back on the Mount of Olives - because burial is so central to the Jewish faith, there has in fact been some recent controversy between archaeologists and ultra-Orthodox Jews over human remains uncovered in digs: it is now a rule that uncovered remains are to be promptly turned over to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (presently the Ministry of Religious Services) for reburial - while the ossuary is currently located in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Those who favor the Caiaphas interpretation (based on Josephus, who mentions his name as Joseph Caiaphas) propose that QYF'/QF' should be read as Qalyalfa', while those questioning it think that it should be vocalized as Qofa' or Qufa' instead.

Patrick lives in Japan. He supports the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite according to the Missal of Bl. Pope John XXIII.

The [photo](#) shows, "He Is Guilty Of Death" by Vasily Polenov, painted in 1906.

