

## THE HIGH PRIESTS ANANIAS AND CAIAPHAS

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*from The NIV Study Bible, page 1772: "The High Priests Annas and Caiaphas"*

From the reign of Herod onward, several high-caste priestly families ("houses") in Israel competed for the high priesthood. Since high priests were regularly deposed by the political authorities (whether Herod or the Romans), numerous individuals undoubtedly served in the capacity of high priest during the first half of the first century A.D. To make matters even more complicated, it appears that even if an individual did not actually serve as high priest, he might still adopt the title if he belonged to one of the high-priestly families.

Annas (high priest from A.D. 6 to 15; five of his sons held the position after him) and his son-in-law Joseph Caiaphas (high priest from A.D. 18 to 36) were of the house of Hanan. The Gospels indicate that while Caiaphas was the official high priest during the time of Jesus, Annas still wielded considerable power. It is noteworthy that Ananus, one of the sons of Annas, was the high priest who engineered the execution of James, Jesus' brother, in A.D. 62 (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.9.1). According to Josephus, those who were "strict in the observance of the law" (likely the Pharisees) were so disturbed at this action that they protested to King Agrippa and to the procurator Albinus. As a direct result, Ananus was deposed as high priest after only three months in office.

*excerpts from "The Jewish High Priests, 37 B.C. to A.D. 70" (term paper by Kevin Jensen for New Testament World class, Harding School of Theology, around the year 2000)*

### **Ananus (also called Annas) son of Sethi (high priest A.D. 6-15)**

Ananus, called Annas in the New Testament, was the first in a large family of high priests, but we know very little about the man himself. When Jesus was arrested, the soldiers who held him took him first to Annus, now out of office. The soldiers probably took Jesus to Annus before taking him to the current high priest, his son-in-law Caiaphas, because despite his retirement from the high priesthood, Annus's importance and power continued. As head of the most dominant high priestly family of the first century AD one can easily picture him as a kind of mob-boss Godfather.

While Jesus was with Annus, Annus questioned him about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered that all his teachings had been offered publicly. One of the officers standing there struck Jesus and reprimanded him for speaking defiantly to the high priest, but Jesus replied that he had spoken rightly and that his injury was undeserved. Annus then sent him to the high priest Caiaphas (John 18:12-13, 18:19-24). Annus is mentioned again in Acts 4, where he was present at Peter and John's first hearing before the assembled Jewish authorities. This is the last specific reference we have to Annus himself in our ancient literature, though if he were still alive he may well have been present for events described later in Acts.

Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer think they may have discovered the tomb of Annus and his family in Palestine. They base their claim on the ornate decoration of the tomb and some architectural similarities to the temple, plus the important placing of Annus's tomb in the vicinity of their discovery by Josephus when he lists it as a marker for the location of Titus's siege-wall built against Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The tomb they claim for Annus is located about half a mile south of old Jerusalem, at the southeast end of the Valley of Hinnom, at what is now the traditional site of the Field of Blood, Akeldama.

### **Joseph Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annus (high priest A.D. 18-36)**

Caiaphas appears more often in the New Testament than any other contemporary high priest. Luke tells us that it was during the high priesthood of Annus and Caiaphas that the word of God came to John the Baptist (Luke 3:2). Presumably Luke means that Caiaphas was the present high priest, but that the ex-high priest Annus was still active and influential as well.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the council to decide how to stop Jesus from creating a disturbance by his miraculous signs. At the meeting, Caiaphas fiercely insisted that it would be best for Jesus to die for the people rather than have the whole nation destroyed. In saying this he, as high priest that year, prophesied Jesus' death for the nation and, indeed, for all the dispersed children of God (John 11:49-52). He was, unwittingly, both priest and prophet.

Perhaps just a few days later, the chief priests and the elders gathered in Caiaphas's palace and planned the arrest and execution of Jesus. Only a little later still, a large crowd, including soldiers, sent by the chief priests, scribes, and elders came to arrest Jesus. Jesus' apostle Peter pulled out his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest—most likely of Caiaphas, but possibly of Annus, who is referred to as a high priest in both John and Acts.

After being interrogated by Annus, Jesus was brought into Caiaphas's house and was interrogated again, this time apparently by Caiaphas. Jesus remained silent until the high priest put him under oath and asked whether he was truly the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus answered him affirmatively, and at this the high priest tore his clothes and declared Jesus' reply to be blasphemy. He demanded a verdict from the assembly present and received the consensus that Jesus deserved to die. Then he sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the governor. Caiaphas appears once more in the Acts 4 account of the first hearing Peter and John endured before the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, including Annus and Caiaphas and the whole high-priestly family. This is the last explicit reference to Caiaphas in the New Testament.

Whatever far-reaching authority Caiaphas may have had, Vitellius, governor of Syria, had more. He removed Caiaphas from the high priesthood and assigned it to Jonathan son of Annus. Still, Caiaphas must have made his earlier supervisors very happy. Valerius Gratus had appointed four high priests in the span of about four years, but once he selected Caiaphas he kept him. Caiaphas remained through the entire administration of Pilate, so that he held that office 18 years, longer than any other high priest from Herod's time until Jerusalem's destruction.