

MATHEW 26:03

HIGH PRIEST, CHIEF PRIESTS, CAIAPHAS

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas.
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The office of High Priest began with Aaron and his sons (Exo. 28:1). The office was hereditary and was for life, but when the Romans conquered Palestine, they made the office political. They chose their own man, a man who would cooperate with the Roman government. Finding such a man was often difficult. For example, between 37 B.C. and 67 A.D. there were at least twenty-eight High Priests. These men were greatly respected and highly honoured throughout life, and even when they were removed from power by the Romans, they were still consulted by other Jewish leaders. The ex-High Priest, Annas, was a prime example. He still wielded unusual power (see Jn. 18:13; Acts 4:6). He and the others who had served as High Priests or else held the top positions of leadership were also called *chief priests*.

The term of office for a High Priest was determined solely by the Romans. The Romans let a High Priest reign so long as he pleased them. The reign of the twenty-eight averaged only about three years, except for Caiaphas. Caiaphas was High Priest for about eighteen years (18 A.D. to 36 A.D.). Apparently he was a master at intrigue and compromise. This throws great light on his fearing an uproar and wishing to wait until the feast was over to arrest Jesus (Mt. 26:5).

There was the danger that the people might rally to support Jesus if they saw Him arrested; so many believed Him to be a great prophet that a serious uprising was a real possibility. Caiaphas knew the Romans would hold him responsible and remove him from office. He would lose everything he had. The shrewdness of the man was seen in the strategy he laid. □