

THE SANHEDRIN

The Sanhedrin.

This is the title given to the highest tribunal in the Jewish nation area, (A body of people/leaders which made the decisions of judgement in the area). In Jerusalem there was the "Great Sanhedrin", this was the main judgement council for the Jewish nation. It normally met in Jerusalem, the name is often translated "council." There were specific times and places for these meetings. Local courts met on the 2nd and 5th days of the week but there is no record of when the Jerusalem Sanhedrin met. However they never met on festival days or Sabbaths.

They all had set procedures (methods, customs), the sitting arrangement was always as a semicircle around the person being charged, the prisoner. Prisoners were normally dressed in a humble way.

Each Sanhedrin meeting had two clerks of court, one to record votes for the conviction,(condemn, sentence), one to record the votes for the acquittal(the release, discharge).

The points for acquittal were put before the council first, then those for the conviction spoke. If a person originally spoke for an acquittal the person was not allowed to change to speak for the conviction. However if the person was originally for a conviction they were allowed to change and vote for an acquittal. For a prisoners condemnation, a two thirds majority vote was required.

The kind of people who were normally on these councils were Sadducean Priests, though at the time of the New Testament, Pharisees were also included on the council. As King Herod favoured the Pharisees they tended to be more of an influence on the council during his reign.

The Great Sanhedrin normally consisted of the High Priest, those who had been previous high priests. There were often members of the privileged families from which the high priests came. In addition there were representatives from the elders of the tribes, family heads, priests and legal experts.

Matt 26:3,57,59; 3 Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,

57 And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;

Mark 14:53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

Mark 15:1 And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.

Luke 22:66,67. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe:

Acts 4:1-7.And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

Acts 5:17,18 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

Acts 22:30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

Acts 23:2-8. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

During the period that the Romans controlled the Jewish nation the Sanhedrin had considerable power as long as the case did not involve capital punishment(if a person is found guilty and the punishment was death) Acts 4:1ff. The charge would then require confirmation(agreement) by the Roman procurator John 18:31.

"Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: "

The New Testament records a number of matters which were brought before the Sanhedrin.

Jesus was charged with Blasphemy, Matt 26:57ff; John 19:7;.

Peter and John were charged with teaching false doctrine Acts 4:1ff,

Paul with transgression of the laws of Moses Acts 22 to Acts 24.

The Romans could always overrule the Sanhedrin's decision, Paul's arrest in Acts 23:1ff is a case in point.

There have often been questions about the legality of the trial of Jesus, experts have come to the conclusions that according to the Sanhedrin rules and regulations the trial was a total miscarriage of justice.