

**PROCEDURES FOR TRIALS REQUIRED OF THE
JEWISH SANHEDRIN
AND HOW THEY WERE VIOLATED
IN THE CASE AGAINST
JESUS CHRIST.**

1. The conduct of Judicial meetings at night or the day before a Sabbath was forbidden.
 - ✘The Sanhedrin met at night (Luke 22:66; John 18:1-27).
 - ✘The Sanhedrin met the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:1, 42-45).
2. No member of the Sanhedrin could be an arresting officer.
 - ✘At least one member of the Sanhedrin was apparently one of the arresting officers (Matthew 26:48-55). [Although this reference is listed, it is not supported by the Greek text. --GLJ]
3. No arrests could be made after sundown.
 - ✘Christ's arrest occurred after sundown (John 18:3).
4. The Sanhedrin was required to be impartial, like a hearing tribunal.
 - ✘The Sanhedrin had plotted against Jesus from the early days of His ministry. It was, therefore, hardly impartial (Mark 11:18; 14:1-2).
5. The initial interrogation of the accused was to be conducted before an examining board of three to seven members of the Sanhedrin or before the entire Sanhedrin, but never before an individual member.
 - ✘Christ's first interrogation occurred separately before only two members of the Sanhedrin (John 18:13, 19-24).
6. Witnesses were to be interrogated before the accused, and the accused was *never* required to incriminate himself.
 - ✘Jesus was placed under oath without the prior testimony of witness, despite the protection against self-incrimination (Matthew 26:63; Deuteronomy 17:6; Mark 14:60-64).
7. An accomplice in a crime was not considered credible to testify, and the accused had the right of cross-examination.
 - ✘The contradictory testimony offered by accusing witnesses was never challenged by cross-examination (Mark 14:55-61a).
8. The High Priest was never to express his opinion until all others had spoken.

- ✘The High Priest led the way in condemning Jesus (Mark 14:55-57, 63-64; John 18:19).
9. Physical violence toward the accused was forbidden.
 - ✘The High Priest permitted acts of physical violence against Jesus by members of the Sanhedrin --and *without reprimand* (John 18:20-24).
 10. A written record of the proceedings was required.
 - ✘No written record of the proceedings appears to have been kept (Mark 14:53ff).
[This is inferred from silence, but is doubtlessly true. --GLJ]
 11. At least two votes from among the Sanhedrin had to be cast *on behalf* of the accused before there could be a conviction; and at least *one witness* had to appear on behalf of the accused.
 - ✘Without written records, there is no way to determine who voted against Jesus; nor is there evidence of even one witness who appeared on His behalf.
 12. Sentencing could not be carried out on the same day as the conviction.
 - ✘The Sanhedrin appears to have been rushing to convict and sentence on the same day (Mark 14:53ff).
 13. Witnesses against the accused were to be the first to lay hands on him at the time of execution. Executions at this time were possible only with the consent of Rome.
 - ✘Rather than an orderly adherence to proscribed law, officials not of the Sanhedrin promoted a riotous clamor by the people against the LORD Jesus (Matthew 27:20).

ADDENDUM

The Romans could have negated what Pilate knew to be a patently unfair procedure by the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:10). The Roman assurance of an impartial tribunal acquiesced to the verdict of the mob (John 18:38; 19:4-6). The normally fair policy of Rome against double jeopardy was ignored. Jesus was acquitted first before Pilate only to be turned over to Herod. He was then returned to Pilate, who despite finding Him innocent the second time, turned Him over to the Jews for crucifixion.

Truly, Christ Jesus was “by wicked hands...crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

THE COMPOSURE OF THE JEWISH SANHEDRIN

According to the *Mishna*, members of the Sanhedrin sat in a semi-circle, with the president in the center. Each was, therefore, enabled to view the others. Two clerks of the court stood before them: one on the right, the other on the left. Their duty was to record the votes of the members.

Three rows of learned men, each possessing a special seat according to his position, sat in front of the Sanhedrin.

The order of events was as follows:

1. Arguments for acquittal in capital cases preceded arguments for conviction.
2. No one who spoke *in favor* of the accused could afterward speak *against* him.
3. Those who had spoken *against* the accused, however, could afterward speak in his favor.
4. Student disciples were allowed to speak in favor of the accused, but not against him. In cases *not* of a capital nature, student disciples were allowed to speak either *for* or *against* the accused.
5. The sentence of acquittal could be pronounced on the day of the trial; but, sentence of condemnation could not be pronounced until the following day.

The manner of voting was as follows:

1. Each member stood to register his vote. Voting commenced with the youngest and continued through the eldest (although, in some instances, voting might commence with the most distinguished member).
2. Acquittal required a simple majority; condemnation required a majority of *two*.
3. If twelve of the twenty-three judges necessary for a quorum voted *for* acquittal, and eleven for conviction, the prisoner was discharged. If twelve voted for conviction and eleven for acquittal, the number of judges was increased by two; and this addition of judges was repeated until either acquittal or conviction was secured. The maximum number of judges was always 71.

Sources: *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. IV
Unger's Bible Dictionary