

# Jesus Before Annas and Caiaphas

📖 Matthew 26:57-68

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We are studying Matthew 26 which is the final narration of Matthew's gospel. So far, what is it we have been learning? There are events narrated here but each narration is teaching us something about the King. Let's recount the narrations. We have seen that Jesus and the Twelve arrived at the home of Simon the Leper on Saturday evening where they had dinner with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. During the evening Mary anointed Jesus with a very expensive vial of pure nard. To Judas this appeared to be a waste and so he led some of the disciples in rebuking her. However, Jesus defended her stating that she was preparing His body for burial. Something in this event triggered Judas' final decision to betray Jesus over to the religious authorities at a certain time, in keeping with Passover, so that Jesus was crucified on Passover and not at some later date. The event shows that Jesus was in command of the timing of His betrayal and death, though the people involved were not thereby mitigated of their responsibility.

The following Wednesday, the chief priests and elders gathered in the court of the high priest, Caiaphas. They plotted to seize Jesus by stealth and kill him sometime after the festival. But to their surprise, Judas volunteered to betray the secret movements of Jesus so that the arrest could occur sooner than they expected and at night so that it might go undetected. Jesus was in full command.

On Thursday, Jesus, knowing who was betraying Him, kept the location of the Last Passover hidden, in order to institute the Lord's Supper for the soon coming Church. He shows again that He was in full command of the timing of the events to transpire.

During the Passover He revealed three times that someone was going to betray Him. Yet throughout it all, only Jesus and Judas knew who was betraying Him. He was extending grace to Judas, giving him an opportunity to repent concerning the betrayal. At the last Judas would not repent and so Jesus told Judas to "do quickly what he had decided to do." Satan then entered Judas and he went out. They both understood that the betrayal was to take place in a secret location known only to the Twelve, namely, the garden of Gethsemane. While Judas went to gather the religious leaders, Jesus and the Eleven made their way through the city, across the Kidron Valley and to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mt of Olives. Along the way Jesus predicted that they would all

fall away, but they all denied it. Who is in command of the events? Jesus. He is like a brilliant general, orchestrating events which seem to be leading to His demise, but ultimately leading to His victory.

When they arrived at the garden Jesus commanded eight of His disciples to stay while He and the inner circle of three went further into the garden. Instructing them to keep watch and pray, He went further in and began to be overwhelmed with agony. He prayed three times with respect to the wrath that He would bear as the sinless substitute who died for the sins of the whole world. Each time He was submitted to the Father's will. In the midst of these sufferings and prayers the disciples kept falling asleep so that in a very real sense He was all alone. At the last Judas and the motley band of several hundred were at hand and so Jesus told them to rise so they might confront the enemy head on. And while He was still speaking there appeared Judas, leading this motley band. Who was in command? Who knew exactly when and where the betrayal was to occur? Jesus.

In John we see that Jesus initiated the conversation, asking who they were searching for. When they answered, "Jesus the Nazarene," that's when Jesus answered, "I am," and a flash of supernatural power went forth causing them to all draw back and fall to the ground. Who was in command of the situation? If they were going to arrest Him, it would be only because He permitted it. After composing themselves, they asked again and received the same answer. But this time Jesus did not cause them a problem. Judas then went forward and with the hypocrisy of the kiss fulfilled his contract to the religious leaders. Then they came and laid their hands on Jesus and bound Him. Peter, in horror over what was transpiring, took his Roman short sword and struck the right ear off the high priest's slave, named Malchus. Peter was ready to go to war. But this was not the time for war, and so Jesus said, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." I think that if Jesus had not said that the Eleven would have been slaughtered. That would have meant that the training that Jesus invested in them, preparing them to be the foundation of the Church on the day of Pentecost, would have all been lost. And further, John tells us that Jesus healed the ear of Malchus and it was restored. This had to play a role in the motley band not attacking them at this time. Who was in command of the situation? Jesus Christ. This is stated explicitly when He told Peter that He didn't need his little sword, for if He wanted, all He had to do was appeal to His Father who at once would give Him more than 72,000 angels. It became quite apparent that Jesus was permitting Himself to be arrested. The disciples didn't understand why and so they left Him and fled.

We come to Matt 26:57-68 and there is another lesson here beyond the teaching thus far, which essentially is that Jesus was in command, and that any arrest of Jesus would be by His permission only. But here we find something else. It is through the first two trials, that at the house of Annas and that at the house of Caiaphas, we learn this lesson. We start here in Matt 26:57 where we read **Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest.** The thought we get is that they went straight from the garden to the house of **Caiaphas.** However, if you turn to John 18:12 you'll see that they did not first go to the house of Caiaphas but to the house of Annas. John 18:12, "So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, <sup>13</sup>and led Him to Annas first;" Then the reason is stated, "...for he was father-in-law of

Caiaphas, who was high priest that year." So the first trial was before Annas. He had the real power. He had been high priest from AD6-15. And even though his son-in-law Caiaphas was now the high priest, he still had seniority. He was something like the high priest emeritus. And you can see from the fact that they led Jesus to Annas first, that they were respecting the rank of Annas over Caiaphas as a father-in-law over a son-in-law. Farrar said of Annas, "He enjoyed all the dignity of the office, and all its influence also, since he was able to promote to it those most closely connected with him. And, while they acted publicly, he really directed affairs, without either the responsibility or the restraints which the office imposed. His influence with the Romans he owed to the religious views which he professed, to his open partisanship of the foreigner, and to his enormous wealth." So he had all the power of the office but not without all the responsibility or restraints. He also had tremendous influence with the Romans. Farrar mentions three reasons. First, because of his religious views. Annas was a Sadducee. As a Sadducee he did not believe any of the OT books had authority besides the Torah. This limited the number of beliefs down to a number so small that He could easily accommodate to Roman ideas. Secondly, as to partisanship, he was happy to work with the Romans, keeping them in touch with the Jews while himself enjoying all the Roman perks. His partisanship with the Romans is evidenced by the fact that the Romans appointed to his office five of his sons, one son-in-law and one grandson. Thirdly, because of his enormous wealth. Annas was the one who owned the operation at the Temple of selling animals to the people at exorbitant prices. It was that operation that Jesus called a den of thieves and cleaned up earlier that week. Through that operation alone Annas had become extremely wealthy. Jesus' disruption of it was more than sufficient motivation for Annas to get rid of Him. So with these facts we see that Annas was the real power behind the religious trials that were to come. They took Jesus to Him first, to see what He would decide as the high priest emeritus. And whatever He decided would determine the decisions of the other courts.

Now according to John 18:19, Annas questioned Jesus on two points; first, as to His disciples, and second, as to His doctrine. As to His disciples, Annas was trying to discover how large a following He had. If He had a large following he may need to raise an army to crush any rebellion that might ensue because of this case. Annas had already decided what to do. To this question Jesus gave no response. As to His doctrine, Annas asked what He taught. To this question in John 18:20, Jesus told him that what He had taught He had taught publicly, and it was well-known. There was no reason for Him to re-hash it; just call forth witnesses and let them attest to His doctrine. One of the officers considered Jesus' response disrespectful to the high priest and so in 18:22 struck Jesus. This would have likely been with an open palm, a backhanded slap. In 18:23 Jesus defended His response and challenged the validity of the strike. In 18:24 Annas realized that he was getting nowhere with his line of questioning and so "sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest." The fact that he sent Him bound means that Annas was telling Caiaphas to proceed with the trial. That is the first trial. It is the first of three religious trials. He must still stand before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin during the night so that when they stand before Pilate at the first civil trial in the morning, they will have some charges. As J. Vernon McGee said, "Because the religious rulers are going to ask Rome for the death penalty, they must determine that night what charge against Jesus they can

bring when they go to Pilate in the morning.”<sup>1</sup> So the three religious trials during the night were necessary because the Jews could not issue a death penalty. All they could do was bring charges worthy of the death penalty to a Roman magistrate. If the Roman magistrate deemed those charges worthy of death then he could issue the death penalty. They wanted to kill Jesus more than anything. Therefore, they were willing to do many illegal things.

If you take a look at your chart you'll see these things. First, all of these legal proceedings occurred at night. That was illegal! All capital cases had to be held during the daytime and the verdict had to be reached during the daytime as well. But in this case both the trial and the verdict were decided during the night. But this was just the beginning of the illegalities. Second, in capital cases, a verdict of conviction could not be issued until the day following the trial. But in Jesus' case the conviction was issued the same night as the trial. That was a grave illegality. Third, in capital cases the case must begin with reasons for acquittal and not conviction. But in Jesus' case there are no reasons for acquittal set forth, they begin only with reasons for conviction. It becomes quite apparent that all they were interested in was getting a conviction. The reason is because they had already decided to kill Him. There is nothing more here than going through legal formalities. But there is more than that. Fourth, they either sought or bribed false witnesses. That, of course, was illegal, a perversion of justice, and all of this occurring under the auspices of the high priest, supposedly the most holy man in the nation and the Sanhedrin, the just ruling council of Israel. But the illegalities don't stop there. Fifth, they neglected to warn the witnesses of the consequences of perjury before giving evidence. Under the Law if a witness made a false charge and it was found out, the witness himself would have to suffer the penalty for the crime. In capital cases this was all the more serious. But the witnesses were never warned. Sixth, if witnesses failed to agree with one another the court was to release the accused prisoner. But they did nothing of the sort, they kept trying to find two witnesses who could agree. Seventh, they forced Jesus, the accused, to testify against Himself. Yet you were never to force a prisoner to incriminate Himself. Eighth, they used the accused's confession against himself. This was illegal. The entire thing was illegal. Why then did Matthew record this as part of his gospel? What purpose would it fulfill for Jewish believers? Two things? First, for Jewish believers it would confirm that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was innocent and perfectly righteous. Despite being innocent He remained silent. This fulfilled prophecy; like a lamb led to slaughter, He did not open His mouth. This would confirm the Jewish believer's faith that Jesus was the Messiah even though Messiah's kingdom had not come. Second, for Jewish believers it would give them apologetic ammo against Jewish unbelievers who denied that Jesus was the Messiah. All they had to do was point to the corrupt proceedings of the religious leadership. Things that could be investigated. Look how corrupt they were in this case against Jesus and how far they were willing to break the law themselves in order to condemn an innocent Man. At the very least a Jewish unbeliever would see the corruption of the religious leadership and at the most it might convince them to further investigate the claims of Matthew's gospel, a gospel which presents Jesus as having all the earmarks of the Messiah. So the records of these cases are

extremely important for confirming that Jesus is the Messiah and convincing Jewish unbelievers that He is Messiah.

So much for the first trial before Annas, only recorded in John 18. Verse 24 says, "So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest." We pick up the narration at Caiaphas' house in Matt 26:57. This, then, is the second religious trial of the night, but the course had already been decided. We read, **Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together.** This was not far from Annas' house. They both would have lived in the priestly district just west of the Temple Mount. If you have been to Israel it would have been near the Burnt House Kathros. It was strange to meet at the house of **Caiaphas** because the Sanhedrin usually met in the Temple. Shepard said, "The regular place for the meeting of the Sanhedrin was in the Temple, but they led Jesus away to the house of the high-priest Caiaphas, situated in a place just outside the present wall of the city..." **Caiaphas** served as high priest from AD18-36. He was also a Sadducee. Wiersbe said, "Both Annas and Caiaphas were Sadducees, which meant they did not believe in the resurrection, the spirit world, or the authority of any of the Old Testament except the five Books of Moses. It was the high priestly family that managed the "temple business" which Jesus had overthrown twice during His ministry. Of course, these men were most happy to lay hands on their enemy. Caiaphas had already made it clear that he intended to sacrifice Jesus in order to save the nation (John 11:47-54)."<sup>2</sup> By the time Jesus arrived Caiaphas had gathered the **scribes and the elders**. These were members of the Sanhedrin. In verse 59 the phrase **the whole Council**, in the Greek, is **the whole Sanhedrin**. The **Sanhedrin** was the ruling body of Israel lead by the high priest. It was composed of 70 men plus the high priest. However, it is unlikely that they were all awakened to convene this night since only a quorum of 23 was required. Constable said "The phrase "whole Council" or "whole Sanhedrin" need not mean that all 70 members plus the high priest were present since only 23 constituted a quorum (cf. Luke 23:50-51)."<sup>3</sup> These 23 would have been select members, already predisposed to a hatred of Jesus. Farrar may be right in pointing out that there is no explicit mention of the Pharisees in these final narratives. "It is most remarkable, and, so far as I know, has scarcely been noticed, that, although the Pharisees undoubtedly were actuated by a burning hatred against Jesus, and were even so eager for His death as to be willing to cooperate with the aristocratic and priestly Sadducees...yet...the Pharisees took so little part in it that their name is not once directly mentioned in any event connected with the arrest, the trial, the derisions, and the crucifixion. The Pharisees, as such, disappear; the chief priests and elders take their place."<sup>4</sup> So the Sadducees are leading this injustice and it may well be because they were still hot about Jesus cleansing the Temple earlier in the week.

When we come to 26:58 we see that even though all the apostles fled, **Peter was following Him at a distance.** He evidently slipped into hiding on the hillside but then kept close watch. He came **as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome.** Somehow Peter was given access to this **courtyard**. He was anxious to see what would take place. He **sat down with the officers,**

probably thinking he could blend in. The Greek word for **officers** is *υπερητης* and therefore refers to the Jewish Temple police. They were the ones who were armed with clubs at the arrest.

In 26:59 we see the legal proceedings. **Now the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.** The **whole Sanhedrin** we said probably means a quorum of 23. These were selected by Caiaphas because he knew their hatred of Jesus. Note that the quorum **kept trying to obtain false testimony.** The tense of the verb **kept trying** is the imperfect. The imperfect conveys ongoing action in past time. The meaning is that this went on for some time. What they were trying **to obtain** was **false testimony.** They had already decided to kill Him. All they were doing was going through the motions of a legal trial. But even here these were improper procedures. As mentioned earlier, in a capital case you had to begin with reasons for acquittal, but they did not try to obtain any testimony to acquit Jesus, only to convict Him. The fact they were looking to obtain **false testimony** was described by Constable as follows, "This does not mean they looked for liars, but they looked for witnesses who would document their conviction that Jesus was a law breaker."<sup>5</sup>

In 26:60 Matthew says, **They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward.** The parallel in Mk 14:56 says, "many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent." The court really needed two consistent witnesses. But **They did not find any.** What is Matthew's point? That the King was innocent. They listened to many false witnesses and yet none could give consistent testimony that constituted a capital crime. McGee said, "the trouble with getting false witnesses was in finding one that could stand up under investigation. Pilate might be a little inquisitive (which he was) and ask a few annoying questions."<sup>6</sup> That would expose the whole thing for the sham that it was. But they were having trouble finding these witnesses. Now, under the law, if they went through many false witnesses and could not find a ground for conviction, they were to release the prisoner. But they did not release Him. They had decided to kill Him even if it took all night to find a consistent testimony against Him. So they kept hearing witnesses and at the end of verse 60 it says, **Finally two came forward...Finally** is a superlative adverb emphasizing that at long last **two came forward.** The point Matthew is emphasizing is that this entire procedure was illegal. Jesus was innocent.

In 26:61 we see their false testimony. They said, **"This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'**" What was the crime in saying this? Wiersbe said, "It was a serious matter to speak against the temple; this very charge later led to the death of Stephen (Acts 6:12–14; 7:45–50)."<sup>7</sup> The reason it was considered so serious was because the Sadducees viewed themselves as the guardians of the **temple.** They thought that God dwelled in the **temple,** even though His presence had departed in 586BC. But because they really thought they were guarding God they viewed an attack on the **temple** as an attack on God. Yet the interesting thing is that what these men said Jesus said is not what He said, nor what He meant. He did not say **I am able to destroy the temple of God.** He said, if someone destroys this temple I am able to raise it up in three days. And besides, He was not referring to the literal temple but to the temple of His body. He was speaking of

the resurrection. But since the natural mind is at enmity with God it cannot understand the spiritual import of the word of God. And so they bring this charge, which is really a false charge.

Now in 26:62 **The high priest stood up and said to Him, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?”** But in verse 63, **Jesus kept silent.** Why did Jesus keep silent? On one hand, because He was not required to answer. This was an illegal trial. He should have been released hours ago. But on the other hand, because He was fulfilling prophecy. Isa 53:7, “Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.” But even more interesting than this is why the high priest would even have asked Jesus to give an **answer.** Under Jewish law two witnesses was sufficient to get a conviction. There was no need for the accused to confirm or deny. In fact, it was illegal to ask for it. The parallel in Mark 14:59 sheds light on why Caiaphas asked for it when it says, “not even in this respect was their testimony consistent.” In other words, even the two men who said that he said, **‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days’** had a consistent testimony. Therefore, Caiaphas really didn’t have any witnesses that Pilate could not see through in the morning. He needed some basis upon which he could bring capital charges against Jesus. His question to Jesus seems like a desperate attempt to find some basis. So again it points up Jesus’ innocence and the high priest’s corruption.

But Jesus would not answer the question. There was nothing legal about these proceedings, and His silence was fulfilling prophecy. So in verse 63 **the high priest said to Him, “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”** The words **I adjure You** are from the Greek *εξορκίζω* and mean “I put you under oath.” What the high priest was doing here was forcing Jesus under oath. Under oath Jesus had to answer truthfully. The question he asked is very interesting. **Tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.** One has to wonder where Caiaphas came across the idea that Jesus believed He was **the Christ, the Son of God?** My suspicion is that it came from the parable of the landowner in Matt 21:33-45. This was the parable where a landowner provided everything for a vineyard to be productive and then rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. When the time came the landowner sent some of his servants to receive the produce. But when they arrived the vine-growers mistreated them. So he sent some more but they did the same thing to them. Afterward he thought to himself that if he sent his own son they would surely respect him. However, the vine-growers took the son and killed him. Caiaphas had heard this parable and understood what it meant. It says at the end of that parable that the chief priests and the Pharisees understood that He was speaking about them. They understood that Jesus was saying that God was the one who had sent Him and that they were going to kill Him.<sup>8</sup> If Jesus affirmed this statement He would be claiming to be God and Caiaphas would consider it blasphemy, a charge worthy of capital punishment.

In 26:64 **Jesus said to him, “You have said it.”** These are the exact same words He said to Judas when Judas said, “It is not I, is it?” It is a very simple affirmation, but in the eyes of Caiaphas it was all he needed to bring to Pilate the next morning. Jesus was, to him, claiming to be someone He was not, God and Messiah. But Jesus did

not leave it at that. He continued saying, **“Nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”** This is a quote of Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13, both Messianic passages. By it He was saying that He was the Messiah, but not in the mold expected by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. He did not come as a political Messiah leading a revolt against Rome. He came first to suffer by the rejection of the leadership. But **Nevertheless, hereafter** He would be raised and seated at the right hand of the Father, where He would receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days and come from heaven to establish it on the earth. Constable said, “This was one of Jesus’ clearest claims of messiahship (cf. 16:27; 23:39; 24:30–31; 26:29). It constituted both a revelation and a threat to Israel’s leaders. From now on, Jesus claimed, His hearers would not see Him as He stood before them then. In the future they would see Him as the Messiah and their Judge.”<sup>9</sup>

In 26:65 **the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has blasphemed!** The act of the **high priest** tearing his **robes** had become a traditional response to blasphemy expressing anger or grief. However, it was contrary to the Law in Lev 21:10 which said, “The priest who is highest among his brothers...shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes.” Therefore, it was the high priest who had committed a crime, not Jesus. Yet the charges fall on the innocent. **He has blasphemed!** The punishment for **blasphemy** was death under the Law in Lev 24:16. But Jesus had not blasphemed the name of the Lord because He was all that He said. Caiaphas then asks, **What further need do we have of witnesses?** The **witnesses** thus far had been inadequate because their testimony was inconsistent. But now with these words of Jesus he perceived that there was no need **of** further **witnesses** and turns to the quorum saying, **“Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy, what do you think?” They answered, “He deserves death!”** The vote seems unanimous.

In 26:67 **Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, “Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?”** The parallel in Mark 14:65 adds that “some blindfolded Him.” McGee captured the scene correctly, “They played a game with Him. They apparently blindfolded Him, then hit Him on the face, and He was to guess who did it.”<sup>10</sup> They were mocking His claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God. They hated Him. Walvoord said, “They hated Jesus and delighted in this opportunity to hurt Him. In all this abuse, Jesus was silent. He was ready to answer sincere questions of faith but not the slanted questions of unbelief.”<sup>11</sup> He would not throw His pearls before swine. They hated Him because He claimed to be God and the natural man is at enmity with God. He hates God more than anything. That is why they expressed such hatred toward the Son of God. We need not be surprised. If we were natural men we might have done the same. Paul said later that the flesh does not submit to the things of God, nor can it (cf. Rom 8:7). And yet, even while we were enemies of God, Christ died for us. He would die for them. These enemies who beat Him and spit on Him. How silly is the notion of limited atonement. Christ didn’t just die for the elect; He died for His enemies and we are all His enemies, every last one of us. The only difference is we are no longer His enemies because we have trusted in Him. But these remained His enemies and would be judged for their rejection. How dreadful it will be for them in that day.



But why is this written? Why does Matthew include this in His argument? First, to confirm to Jewish believers that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. For He fulfills the prophecies of Isa 53, like a lamb led to slaughter, He did not open His mouth. Second, to give Jewish believers apologetic ammo to use with their fellow Jewish unbelievers, showing them both the innocence of Jesus and the corruption of their religious leadership. Given this testimony they need to investigate these matters and then put their faith in Jesus. Just as surely, all men should put their faith in Him. For He has already come to suffer and die. But hereafter He will come with great power and glory to reign. And he who has not put faith in Him will be excluded, cast out forever.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 172.

<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 26:59.

<sup>4</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 459.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 26:59.

<sup>6</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 173.

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 26:63.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 26:64.

<sup>10</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 175.

<sup>11</sup> John F Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 223-4.