The Question were Annas and Caiaphas both serving at the same time? Did God ever permit two high priests to minister simultaneously?

The Scriptural Account

> Luke 3:2
>
> During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. (ESV)

At first glance, this verse seems strange, because the Law of Moses prescribed that there was to be only one high priest at a time, serving for life. Numbers 35:25, for example, shows that the high priest remained in office until death. Only then would another succeed him.

So why does Luke mention two?

Historical and Political Background

Originally, Annas was the high priest, appointed around A.D. 6. But under Roman occupation, sacred offices were manipulated for political purposes. The Romans understood that the high priest held immense influence over the Jewish people. To prevent rebellion, they refused to let anyone hold that position for life. Instead, they dismissed high priests at will and installed their own appointees.

Thus, Annas was deposed by Rome, and his son-in-law Caiaphas was appointed (John 18:13).

Yet in the eyes of the Jews, Annas remained the legitimate high priest, since the Law of God required that a high priest serve until death. This explains why Jesus, when arrested, was taken first to Annas, even though Caiaphas officially held the office (John 18:24). Both were respected: Annas by tradition and divine order, Caiaphas by political authority.

Theological Lessons

1. Man’s Interference Corrupts God’s Order

God intended the high priesthood to be a sacred office pointing

forward to Christ, our eternal High Priest (Hebrews 9:11–12). But political interference corrupted the system. The Romans reduced it to a tool of control, while God had designed it to foreshadow salvation. This shows the danger when worldly power overrides divine order.

2. Religious Confusion Prepares the Way for Spiritual Blindness

With two high priests, along with competing sects—Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and zealots—the Jewish faith was fractured. No wonder they failed to recognize the Messiah, though He stood among them performing miracles and fulfilling Scripture. Paul later wrote:

> 2 Corinthians 4:4
>
> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

3. Christ as the True and Eternal High Priest

Amid this corruption, Christ appeared as the perfect fulfillment of the priesthood. Unlike Annas and Caiaphas—whose authority was temporary and flawed—Jesus became our eternal High Priest through His own blood:

> Hebrews 7:23–24
>
> The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

Unlike the political appointees of Rome, Jesus was appointed directly by God:

> Hebrews 5:5
>
> So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.

4. A Warning Against Divided Allegiances

The presence of two high priests illustrates the danger of divided spiritual authority. Jesus Himself said:

> Matthew 6:24
>
> No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

The Jewish leaders honored both Annas and Caiaphas, but in doing so, they failed to honor the One true High Priest standing before them.

Application for Today

Just as in the time of Annas and Caiaphas, today’s religious landscape is filled with divisions, sects, and institutions, many claiming to represent God. Yet the critical question remains: Is Christ at the center?

The true High Priest, Jesus Christ, is not concerned with titles, denominations, or political power. He is concerned with setting captives free, proclaiming good news to the poor, and reconciling humanity to God (Luke 4:18–19).

Religious systems may shift, but Christ remains the only One approved by the Father. Of the three “high priests” in that generation—Annas, Caiaphas, and Christ—only one was chosen by God.

Therefore, as believers, we must look beyond human traditions and political structures, fixing our eyes on Jesus, “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Conclusion

The case of Annas and Caiaphas reminds us that man’s interference creates confusion, but God’s plan remains unshaken. Annas was displaced, Caiaphas was politically installed, but only Jesus was divinely appointed. He is the eternal High Priest, our perfect mediator, and the One we must follow.

Amen.

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