

3. John alone recorded that the Roman and Jewish authorities brought Jesus bound to appear before Annas before taking Him to Caiaphas, the acting high priest (18:12-23). Again, he gave no explanation for this appearance, but historical records show that Annas continued to wield authority among Israel's rulers after he was deposed as high priest. He did so by keeping the high-priestly succession within his own family (five sons and a son-in-law). The reason John chose to include this episode is also uncertain, but its striking parallel with the confrontation in Gethsemane perhaps provides a clue. In both of these encounters, Jesus confronted His accusers with their agendas and the way they were carrying them out. The arresting authorities approached Him as if He were a criminal evading capture when they could have arrested Him at any time. So Israel's rulers had no need to formally interrogate Jesus about His teaching and intentions; He'd taught openly in the synagogues and temple so that anything they might want to know they could have learned by simply coming and listening to Him. Jesus was an open book accessible to all who desired to know Him (cf. 7:25-26, 10:22-27); only blind eyes and stopped ears made Him baffling and threatening and John wanted his readers to see this circumstance as a matter of prophetic fulfillment. The Messiah had come to fulfill all that had been written of Him and this included the hostile unbelief of the covenant nation and its Roman surrogates (ref. 12:34-41, 13:18, 18:7-9, 19:23-37; also Mark 14:48-49).
- a. Thus when Annas questioned Jesus about His teaching and motives in gathering followers, Jesus replied that the answers he sought were a matter of public record. He'd spoken openly in every public venue throughout Israel and no one who cared to know about Him was uninformed. There were a multitude of Israelites who could answer Annas' questions; if understanding Jesus' message was his true motive, there was no need to have Him arrested and interrogated (18:19-22).

But the truth was Annas had a different motive; he and his associates regarded Jesus as a threat and were committed to His execution. They saw Him as a deceiver and dissenter and they despised and feared Him (18:23-23). They rightly recognized that He threatened the status quo – the nation's well-being under Rome (cf. 18:14, 11:45-50) as well as their own status and power – and nothing He said would change their conviction or intent; they simply needed to justify what they'd already determined to do. Brown's comments are helpful:

*“The interrogation before Annas may have had a very practical purpose. It may have reflected the real concern of the religious leaders about whether Jesus was a false prophet [and false Messiah]; and it may have been meant to gain information for the ‘grand jury’ proceedings before the Sanhedrin the next morning which would determine whether or not there was a political charge on which Jesus should be handed over to the Romans for trial [and execution].”*

- b. All four gospels record Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus, but they differ in the details. John seemed to indicate that the first of those denials occurred in the courtyard of Annas' house (cf. 18:15-18 and 24-27), while the Synoptists, who omitted Annas' interrogation, situated all of Peter's denials during the time Jesus was in Caiaphas' house (cf. Matthew 26:57-75; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-62).

At the same time, the Synoptists differ from one another in their accounts of the persons who challenged Peter and only Luke recorded that Jesus witnessed Peter's third denial and their eyes met before Peter fled the courtyard weeping (22:61-62). So also Luke is the only one of the four writers who presented the entire episode within an unbroken narrative.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of John's account is that he alone mentioned a "disciple known to the high priest" who was able to follow Jesus into the courtyard of Annas' home. After the Lord was taken into the house, that disciple went to the doorkeeper and convinced him to allow Peter to enter the courtyard with him. According to John, it was there that Peter was first confronted about his association with Jesus and issued his first denial (18:15-17).

John didn't identify this disciple and this has caused no end of speculation regarding who he was. A common view is that he was the "beloved disciple" John mentioned elsewhere (19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20) whom many believe was John himself. (The Gospel to the Hebrews mentions that John had supplied fish to the court of the high priest.) The most obvious challenge to this view is the intimacy between Jesus and John, the "beloved disciple." It seems unlikely the Jewish authorities wouldn't have been aware of John's connection with Jesus. They'd been watching Jesus for some time and certainly knew about His inner circle of disciples. One would have to argue that the doorkeeper, at least, didn't know that John was one of Jesus' disciples or he acted contrary to the men he served.

This difficulty (and others) has led some to conclude that this disciple wasn't one of the Twelve, while others propose that he was Judas Iscariot – a disciple who clearly was known to the high priest. Another view is that this man was Nicodemus. John certainly came to recognize Nicodemus as a disciple of Jesus and, being a member of the Sanhedrin, he would have had the sort of access and authority consistent with John's account. In the end, it's impossible to determine this disciple's identity; either John himself didn't know or he didn't regard it as important to his record. What mattered to John is that Peter found himself in the high priest's courtyard (Annas and Caiaphas may have had their living quarters in the same compound) where Jesus' word to him could be fulfilled. (Some have argued that Peter following Jesus to the high priest's house negates Jesus' prediction that all would fall away, but Peter fulfilled this word by his denial. He may have remained close by, but he abandoned his Lord nonetheless.)

All four of the gospel writers recorded Peter's denial, which shows that, looking back on it years later, they saw it as deeply significant. By the time they composed their accounts – and their audiences read them, Peter had become a well-known and respected pillar in Christ's Church (ref. Acts 15:1-11; Galatians 2:1-9), highlighting the Spirit's restorative and empowering work. Peter's restoration, like his failure, was predicted by the Lord and both were scripted into His purpose for this man and his role in the new community He was building upon Himself (cf. Matthew 16:13-19; Luke 22:31-34; John 21:15-17).

- c. Taken together, the four accounts seem to indicate that Jesus' interrogation by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin occurred in two stages. The first took place in Caiaphas' house during the night (Matthew 26:57ff; Mark 14:53ff; Luke 22:54ff; John 18:24) and the second after sunrise in the meeting place of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:1ff; Mark 15:1ff; Luke 22:66ff). It seems a group of priests, elders and scribes gathered in Caiaphas' house to interrogate Jesus and they then convened a meeting of the entire Sanhedrin after daybreak to formally confirm the verdict they'd reached and issue the sentence of death.

The Synoptists give some account of those hearings, while John simply noted that Jesus was taken from Annas to Caiaphas and then sent to Pilate (18:24-28). And two things are highlighted in the synoptic records: the *fraudulent nature* of the hearings and their *messianic orientation*. All three Synoptists emphasize that the proceedings amounted to a "kangaroo court." Not only did the "judges" have no interest in getting to the truth of the matter, they called false witnesses against Jesus in order to secure the verdict they'd already reached. And given the timing and circumstance of the proceedings, this so-called "court" must have located their witnesses and made arrangements for them to appear before even arresting Jesus. Apparently several witnesses testified, but their testimony was inconsistent and even contradictory (Matthew 26:59-60; Mark 14:55-56).

Yet, when two men testified that they'd heard Jesus speak about destroying the temple, that caught the high priest's attention and he adjured Jesus to tell the assembly plainly whether He believed Himself to be the Messiah. This question highlights the fact that Israel's rulers regarded Jesus to be a false messiah. The high priest *wanted* Him to answer in the affirmative, but with a view to condemning Him. They were certain that Jesus wasn't the Messiah, and His statements about the temple only proved the point. The claim to be able to tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days showed Him to be completely delusional; more importantly, the Scriptures taught that Messiah would *restore* the temple at his coming. This might require it to be cleansed as Judas Maccabeus had done more than a century earlier, but it wouldn't involve destroying it.

Jesus responded that He was indeed the Messiah and He elaborated by alluding to two scriptures the Jews regarded as messianic: Psalm 110 and Daniel 7. Moreover, both passages were understood in terms of Messiah's rule as the Son of David putting into effect Yahweh's prophesied rule over Israel and the nations; *Yahweh was to become King over all the earth through Messiah's triumphal reign* (cf. Psalm 2 with Zechariah 9:9-10; also Isaiah 11, 49, 53-55, 59-60).

And so, by answering the high priest in this way, Jesus was affirming that He is the Messiah revealed in the Scriptures and promised to Israel. He is indeed the messianic "Son of the Blessed One" (Mark 14:61) the nation had long waited for and hoped in – the regal Son of David "begotten" by Yahweh to take His throne and execute His reign as His anointed Son-King (cf. 2 Samuel 7 with Psalm 2; also Hebrews 5:1-6 with Zechariah 6:9-15).

Jesus was Israel's Messiah, but the Messiah revealed in and through the Scriptures, not the messianic deliverer of Jewish tradition and scholarship. The "messiah" of Israel's hope and longing was the product of historical and traditional concerns and considerations, and understandably so. For the Scriptures declared that Messiah would come to end Israel's long night of exile and subjugation and restore Yahweh's presence and rule. In Him, Yahweh would execute His "day" of judgment, deliverance and renewal, raising up David's fallen tabernacle and reestablishing His throne and dominion (cf. Amos 9:11-15 with Isaiah 2:1-4, 9:1-7; Jeremiah 23:1-8; Ezekiel 34; Hosea 1-3; etc.). Thus Messiah's coming profoundly implicated the temple and its glorification, for His coming would signal Yahweh's return to Zion to restore His reign in power as He again took His throne in His sanctuary (cf. 2 Samuel 6:1-18 with Psalms 80, 99). It was perfectly natural for these rulers to connect Jesus' statements about the temple with the messianic claims surrounding Him. But from their vantage point, Jesus' temple claim disproved the messianic one; nothing in their tradition suggested that the Messiah would destroy and then rebuild Yahweh's temple.

Jesus' reference to Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 was His answer to the question of His supposed messiahship, and His answer served two important purposes.

- 1) First, connecting Himself with these messianic passages affirmed that He was indeed the Messiah revealed in the Scriptures.
- 2) At the same time, the orientation of these particular passages is toward Messiah's triumph over the enemies of Yahweh and His kingdom.

*Jesus thus answered their question in a way that both discredited their judgment and brought them under His judgment. They sat as judges over Him, issuing the verdict that He was a false messiah who deserved to die; He negated their judgment and turned it back on them. He would soon be vindicated when He took His place at His Father's right hand and then they would experience His judgment and condemnation as Yahweh's enthroned King: "Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:59-64; Mark 14:57-62).*

Jesus' blending of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 is profound in bringing together numerous strands of messianic and eschatological content. Not surprisingly, it has provided centuries of scholarship with abundant material for study and debate. But all too often Jesus' statement is removed from its historical context – not only its first-century Jewish context, but its Israelite context within the unfolding salvation history centered in Israel, the Abrahamic people through whom God determined to accomplish His purposes for the world. Both passages are messianic and were interpreted as such by Jesus' generation. But each had its own place and significance within the salvation history – Psalm 110 as a Davidic prophecy framed by the Davidic Covenant and Daniel 7 as an exilic prophecy speaking to Israel's circumstance of exile and subjugation under Gentile power.

With respect to Daniel 7, of first importance is that the “coming of one like a Son of Man on the clouds of heaven” refers to this individual’s approach to the “Ancient of Days” culminating with His enthronement and the commencement of His dominion over Israel and the nations (cf. Matthew 24:1-3, 29-34 with Acts 2). Often Jesus’ use of this passage is interpreted in terms of His Parousia at the end of the age, but this introduces a new meaning to Daniel’s prophecy. Whether Jesus intended this new meaning is another question, but it seems clear from the context that He primarily (if not entirely) was following Daniel’s meaning:

*The Son of Man returning on the clouds of heaven referred to Jesus’ vindication as Israel’s Messiah through His ascension and enthronement at His Father’s right hand. This enthronement, in turn, would demonstrate that He is indeed the “Son of the Blessed One” – the Davidic King of Israel and Melchizedekian High Priest who sits at Yahweh’s right hand until all of His enemies are made the footstool for His feet (Psalm 110; cf. Acts 2:22-36; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Romans 8:31-34; cf. also Psalm 2 with Hebrews 4:14-5:6).*

Jesus’ answer showed that the judged One was to become the Judge; His vindication would mean His accusers’ condemnation, even as it demonstrated that His seemingly just execution under the Law was an act of murder, albeit murder scripted into God’s plan. This judgment and condemnation would begin with His resurrection and reach a high point at Pentecost (Acts 2:22-37). But its climax for the Israelite nation would come in 70 A.D. with the destruction of Jerusalem and its beloved temple (cf. Luke 19:28-45, 21:5-24). And yet, there was to be another dimension of vindication and condemnation to be realized at the end of the age: The One who was returning to the Ancient of Days on the clouds of heaven to receive His kingdom and sovereign dominion was going to return in like manner to judge and eliminate all opposition to His lordship (cf. Luke 21:5-24 with vv. 25-28; cf. also Matthew 24-25, 28:18-20; Acts 1:3-11; Revelation 1:4-7).

The high priest responded by charging Jesus with blasphemy and tearing his robe in symbolic outrage. He had what he needed to achieve his ends; under the Law of Moses, blasphemy carried the sentence of death (Leviticus 24:16). This response shows that he viewed Jesus’ statement as something more than His claim to be the Messiah. Caiaphas didn’t believe Jesus was the Messiah, but that claim didn’t constitute blasphemy. If it did, no man could ever make it. Caiaphas obviously heard in Jesus’ use of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 something He believed constituted a direct affront to God. Many scholars believe the affront was Jesus claiming deity by talking about “sitting at the right hand of power,” but the Jews wouldn’t have interpreted His words that way. They believed the Messiah, like his father David, would sit on Yahweh’s throne and rule His kingdom in His name and authority (1 Chronicles 29:23). They had no problem ascribing Daniel’s and David’s words to the Messiah (cf. Matthew 22:41-46). It seems, then, that the charge of blasphemy arose from the belief that Jesus had born false testimony while under oath to God (“*I adjure you by the living God...*”). Such conduct was viewed as showing utter disdain for God, treating His name as empty.