

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-19 Trial by the Sanhedrin

In Bible times a person's name often revealed something about their identity. Names could have many titles attached to them. Every person could be identified with a personal name, plus the place of their birth, such as Jesus of Nazareth. The addition of their father's name gave more details, such as James and John, sons of Zebedee. Knowing a person's place of origin and father were important. As an adult, a person's character and achievements could be attached, overshadowing their earlier names. In this lesson the chief priest used the true name of Jesus in order to condemn him.

The crowd took Jesus from Gethsemane to the high priest. All the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. Peter followed at a distance, then entered the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

Jesus was first questioned by Annas, the former high priest. Then Annas sent him and his accusers, to Caiaphas for trial. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. This was the highest court of the Jews, with 71 members. But they did not find any such evidence. Many individuals testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even then their testimonies did not agree.

At that time the Jews could not execute anyone. Only the Roman overlords could put someone to death. The high priest was the highest local official recognized by the Romans. The Jewish leaders were looking for a criminal charge they could use against Jesus. Only then could they present him before the Roman ruler to be executed. Finally two witnesses came and accused Jesus, using a mix of truth and error. As the devil has loved to do since the beginning, he confused lies and the truth to the destruction of human souls.

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

The reason Jesus did not reply? He could not straighten out the testimony of these false, unbelieving witnesses. They did not understand what they were saying. More likely they were repeating what they had been told to say. Nevertheless Jesus was fully at peace with God's plan. The high priest, however, became more and more upset. By his silence, Jesus was fulfilling the words of Isaiah the prophet, who described the Messiah saying, "He was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth" (Isa 53:7).

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:53-62).

At that, the high priest became more frustrated and angry. What he had asked was, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” “The Blessed One” was a way of referring to God without pronouncing his name. The Jewish leader was very aware of who Jesus claimed to be and who his followers believed him to be. He didn’t come right out and ask “Who are you Jesus?” Or, “What is your name, the one that really describes who you are?” He knew very well who Jesus’ followers claimed him to be. He did not believe it himself or he would not have been trying to kill him. So he asked his question very specifically.

Jesus could have said, “You are correct,” but instead he just said, “I am.” He used the name God had used to identify himself to Moses at the burning bush. He is not just the Son of God, but he is Jehovah himself. And that was exactly how the high priest understood his answer. Jesus referred to himself as “Son of Man,” the name he preferred for himself. Then he added something all important about the future. He would soon return coming in the clouds, with all the power and authority of God!

The high priest tore his clothes—a sign of great grief or shock. Jesus was claiming majesty and authority belonging only to God. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”

They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him—a common sign of rejection and condemnation. They blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy to us! Who hit you?” And the guards took him and beat him (Mark 14:53-65).

Jesus was condemned as guilty and deserving of death for telling the truth about himself and his name. The charge of “blasphemy” against Jesus meant that he claimed to have the qualities or nature of God.

Not everyone in the Sanhedrin condemned him. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were both believers in his name and his message. All these events fulfilled the prophecies that said the Jewish people and their leaders would reject the one who came to save them.

This story is **important** because it demonstrates how believers can respond to those who oppose Jesus and the truth of the gospel. He did not defend himself nor debate, but simply stated who he was.

The **main truth** of this story is that the Jewish leaders fully understood the claim of Jesus, yet rejected him as their Messiah.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why did the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, have Jesus arrested?
 - A. [Pause] If you answered that the Sanhedrin was looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, you are right.

2. How did Jesus answer the high priest's question as to whether or not he was the Messiah, Son of God?

A. [Pause] If you said that Jesus answered, "I am. And you will see me at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven," you are correct.

3. What was the charge against Jesus that resulted in the penalty of death?

A. [Pause] If you said, "Blasphemy," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. After you tell it to someone, ask them this question, "What are the best charges Christians can receive if they are arrested because of their testimony? Answer: The charge of being like Jesus, doing the kinds of things he did, acting or speaking as if they personally know God.