

40. They Had to Know

In dragging Jesus before Pontius Pilate, the Sanhedrin—or supreme court of the Jews—accused Jesus of having tried to stir up a rebellion against the Roman emperor. But among themselves, it was for a very different so-called crime that they condemned the man from Nazareth. At the end of the trial, the high priest had said, “You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death (Mark 14:64). Blasphemy means denying God verbally, insulting His name, cursing Him, disloyalty toward God in action or in word, dishonoring him or attributing to one’s self the honor that belongs to God alone. According to the Sanhedrin, Jesus had spoken against God in claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God.

The word “Christ” comes from Greek and the word “Messiah” comes from Hebrew. Both words indicate “anointed.” Formerly in Israel, one anointed (that is, poured oil on) priests, prophets and kings to designate them as being chosen by God to perform their functions. But the expression “The Christ” or “The Messiah” did not refer to just any priest, prophet or king. It referred to a very special person that God had promised to send. He would be a prophet, priest AND king at the same time, as well as the Savior of his people. In the first century, the nation of Israel was under the rule of the Roman Empire. Almost all of the Jews hoped ardently for the coming of this Savior.

Of course, it was not a crime to claim to be the Messiah, especially if one really were the Anointed One. But Jesus was condemned for having said that he was the Christ. In our last lesson, we saw the numerous violations of the law committed by the members of the Sanhedrin in the proceedings against Jesus. But without any doubt, the greatest fault committed was that the judges condemned Jesus without even trying to establish that Jesus was not the person He claimed to be. They did not prove that Jesus had lied in saying that he was the Christ, the one whose coming the Scriptures had foretold.

As for the expression “Son of God,” it was used in several ways, but it seems to have been a term that was often associated with the Messiah for whom they waited. When Peter confessed his faith in Jesus in Matthew 16:16, he said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In Luke 4:41, we see that the demons

used the term “Son of God” as an equivalent to “Messiah.” “And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.” Again in John 1:49, we see that Nathaniel clearly associated the two terms: “Nathanael answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’” Remember that everyone knew that the Christ would be “king of Israel.”

I cannot say to what extent these different people understood the significance of the phrase “Son of God” as it applies to Jesus. The Jews would not have used the phrase in the same way as the Greeks and Romans, whose gods married one another, committed adultery and produced numerous divine or half-divine offspring. Nevertheless, they believed that the Messiah would be much more than a mere man, and for this Messiah it would not be blasphemy to refer to himself as the Son of God. This brings us back to the fact that supreme court of the Jews condemned Jesus for claiming to be the Christ without hearing a single argument supporting what he said about himself.

THE EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF JESUS

However the evidence in favor of this claim of Jesus was substantial, and all of it was available to the judges. These men had the duty to consult the scripture to see if the prophecies concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus. But they did not do this. Consider these proofs that would have been able to convince fair and objective men:

1. According to Daniel 2:44, the kingdom of the Messiah, promised for more than a thousand years, had to be established in the time of the Roman emperors. The Romans were the uncontested masters of the world at the time of Jesus. The time was right, because it was necessary that the Messiah come during this time in history.
2. According to Micah 5:2, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. The leaders of the Jewish people understood this prophecy very well. Because they knew that Jesus lived in Galilee, they supposed, wrongly, that he was born in Galilee. If they had asked a few questions, they would have discovered that, due to the census,

- Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7) as the entire world knows today.
3. Matthew 1:22,23 tells us that the conception of Jesus by a virgin was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14. Matthew said, "So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"
 4. All the Jews knew that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. A title commonly used to speak of the Messiah was "Son of David." Indeed, Jeremiah 23:5-6 says, "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.'" The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show clearly that Jesus was a descendant of David. From a legal point of view, he was a descendant of David through his adoptive father, Joseph. From a biological point of view, he was a descendant of David through his mother Mary, who was also a descendant of David. The people recognized this fact. When Bartimaeus, the blind beggar near Jericho, called to Jesus, he cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:48).
 5. The Jews understood that, according to the prophets Isaiah and Micah, God would send a messenger to prepare the way for this great person, the Messiah. Malachi 3:1 says: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight." In chapter 4, Malachi associated this messenger with the prophet Elijah. All the members of the Sanhedrin knew very well that a prophet called John the Baptist had appeared about four years earlier. They had sent some priests to find out about him for them. According to John 1:23, they had received this response: "He said, 'I am "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.'" The next day Jesus had come to be baptized by John. This same John was the one who testified publicly that Jesus was the one who was to come, the Son of God (John 1:29-34).
 6. The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus had worked a lot in the region of Galilee, north of Palestine, an area inhabited both by Jews and by many Gentiles, or non-Jews. These leaders must also have remembered that scripture had foretold activity by the Messiah in this region. Matthew reminds his readers, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned'" (Matthew 4:12-16).
 7. All Jews expected, and correctly so, that the Christ would do miracles. They thought of passages such as Isaiah 35:5,6: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing..." The people saw the miracles of Jesus and took them as evidence that He was the Messiah. Matthew 12:22,23 says, "Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" John 7:31 says, "And many of the people believed in Him, and said, 'When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?'" The leaders of the people were well aware of the miracles of Jesus but instead of believing, they wanted to kill Jesus and even destroy some of the evidence of his miracles. After he resurrected Lazarus from the dead, "...the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, 'What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.'... Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death... Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on

account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus” (John 11:47,48,53; 12:9-11).

Many more facts could be added to the list. According to Zechariah 9:9, the Messiah would make his entrance into the city of Jerusalem seated on an ass. This is what Jesus had done less than a week earlier. According to Psalm 41:10, the Christ would be betrayed by a close friend, and according to Zechariah 11:12,13, he would be sold for the sum of 30 pieces of silver—the exact amount the chief priests had paid to Judas Iscariot to deliver Jesus to them.

CONCLUSION

If the Sanhedrin had taken the time to listen calmly to the evidence, could they have condemned Jesus for having said he was the Christ, the Son of God? Certainly not. In their prejudice, their jealousy, and their hatred for the one who had denounced their hypocrisy, they rejected their savior and that of the whole world. And what about you? What will you decide about Jesus of Nazareth?