

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 318

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 18:19-24

Topic: Jesus before Annas

Date: 18th August 2004

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John's latest prayer letter: http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/prayer_ltr_08_04.pdf

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John 18:19-24 MKJV Then the high priest asked Jesus of His disciples and of His teaching. (20) Jesus answered him, I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where the Jews always resort, and I have said nothing in secret. (21) Why do you ask Me? Ask those who heard me what I have said to them. Behold, they know what I said. (22) And when He had spoken this way, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Do you answer the high priest so? (23) Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me? (24) Then Annas had sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Annas is a fascinating bible character and is perhaps the chief villain of the New Testament after Judas. The next three paragraphs are an edited version of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia entry on Annas:

A high priest of the Jews, the virtual head of the priestly party in Jerusalem in the time of Christ, a man of commanding influence. That he was an adroit diplomatist is shown by the fact that five of his sons (*Ant.*, XX, ix, 1) and his son-in-law Caiaphas (John 18:13) held the high-priesthood in almost unbroken succession. Another mark of his continued influence is, that long after he had lost his office he was still called "high priest," and his name appears first wherever the names of the chief members of the sacerdotal faction are given. Acts 4:6, "And Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest." Annas is almost certainly called high priest in John 18:19, John 18:22, though in John 18:13, John 18:24 Caiaphas is mentioned as the high priest. Note especially the remarkable phrase in Luke 3:2, "in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas," as if they were joint holders of the office.

The explanation seems to be that owing to age, ability and force of character Annas was the virtual, though Caiaphas the titular, high priest. He and his family were proverbial for their rapacity and greed. The chief source of their wealth seems to have been the sale of requisites for the temple sacrifices, such as sheep, doves, wine and oil, which they carried on in the four famous "booths of the sons of Annas" on the Mount of Olives, with a branch within the precincts of the temple itself. During the great feasts, they were able to extort high monopoly prices for theft goods. Hence, our Lord's strong denunciation of those who made the house of prayer "a den of robbers" (Mark 11:15-19), and the curse in the Talmud, "Woe to the family of Annas! Woe to the serpent-like hisses" (Pes 57a).

As to the part he played in the trial and death of our Lord, although he does not figure very prominently in the gospel narratives, he seems to have been mainly responsible for the course of events. Renan's emphatic statement is substantially correct, "Annas was the principal actor in the terrible drama, and far more than Caiaphas, far more than Pilate, ought to bear the weight of the maledictions of mankind" (*Life of Jesus*). Caiaphas, indeed, as actual high priest, was the nominal head of the Sanhedrin which condemned Jesus, but the aged Annas was the ruling spirit. According to John 18:12, John 18:13, it was to him that the officers who arrested Jesus led Him first. "The reason given for that proceeding ("*for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas*") lays open alike the character of the man and the character of the trial" (Westcott, in the place cited). Annas (if he is the high priest of John 18:19-23, as seems most likely) questioned Him concerning His disciples and teaching. This trial is not mentioned by the synoptists, probably because it was merely informal and preliminary and of a private nature, meant to gather material for the subsequent trial. Failing to elicit anything to his purpose from Jesus, "Annas therefore sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest" (John 18:24 the King James Version is incorrect and misleading) for formal trial before the Sanhedrin, "but as one already stamped with a sign of condemnation" (Westcott).

Jesus had upset Annas' temple trade by overturning the tables in the Temple and criticizing the High Priest's successful commercial venture that turned a house of prayer for all nations into a "den of thieves". Thus the irate Annas became the human driving force behind the crucifixion of Christ. Find an expert ecclesiastical politician, who loves money, and you will always find a major enemy of the true gospel of Christ.

Jesus refused to answer Annas questions about "His disciples and His teaching". Why this discourtesy? Because Jesus knew that Annas was not interested in the answer. Rather he would have used any answer to trap Christ and persecute Jesus' disciples. We are not obliged to answer anyone who asks us a question – especially if they will malign us for our answer.

Ecclesiastical authority is not necessarily the voice of God. Annas certainly wasn't! And many popes and pastors and elders have been almost as evil. When Jesus refuses to comply with the ecclesiastical power-broker He is literally "slapped down" and put in chains. Christians who stand up for the true gospel of the cross and of life in the Spirit will often be "slapped down" by worldly power-brokers in religious institutions.

What should we do in such situations? Exactly as Jesus did – ask them to show the merit of their case and to demonstrate what the problem is. "Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" If we genuinely are wrong, then we can repent, but if they cannot find any genuine fault, then we have a testimony – even if it is ignored. Jesus refused to be intimidated by religious authority that was obviously divorced from the Spirit of God – and we should take a similar stand.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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