

Mark 11:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.

Analysis

And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him (ἐζήτουν πῶς αὐτὸν ἀπολέσωσιν)—Jesus' temple cleansing and denunciation crossed a line. The verb *ezētoun* (ἐζήτουν, "sought") in the imperfect tense indicates continuous, deliberate plotting. The verb *apolesōsin* (ἀπολέσωσιν, "destroy") means to kill, not merely discredit—Jesus' confrontation provoked murderous intent from religious authorities. The **scribes** (γραμματεῖς, *grammateis*) were legal experts and theologians; **chief priests** (ἀρχιερεῖς, *archiereis*) were temple aristocracy. Together they formed the Sanhedrin's core, wielding religious and political power.

For they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine (ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ αὐτόν· πᾶς γὰρ ὁ ὄχλος ἐξεπλήσσετο ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ)—the leaders feared Jesus not theologically but politically. He commanded popular support. The verb *exeplēseto* (ἐξεπλήσσετο, "was astonished") means overwhelmed, amazed—Jesus' teaching carried authority unlike the scribes' (Mark 1:22). The leaders' fear of losing influence drove their murderous plot. Ironically, they feared man rather than God, fulfilling Jesus' prediction that religious authorities would reject and kill the Messiah (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34).

Historical Context

The chief priests controlled temple operations and enriched themselves through the commercial system Jesus disrupted. Archaeological and historical sources confirm that the high priestly families (particularly Annas and Caiaphas) operated a lucrative business monopoly in the temple courts. By cleansing the temple, Jesus threatened their economic base and religious authority. The scribes, as guardians of Torah interpretation, resented Jesus' claim to interpretive authority independent of rabbinical tradition. Both groups had already clashed with Jesus over His authority, Sabbath observance, association with sinners, and criticism of their hypocrisy (Mark 2:1-3:6). The temple cleansing was the final provocation. They couldn't arrest Jesus publicly because of His popularity (v. 18, 32; 12:12; 14:2), so they sought opportunity to seize Him secretly—accomplished through Judas's betrayal (14:10-11, 43-50). Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin was a sham (14:53-65), with false witnesses and predetermined verdict. They delivered Jesus to Pilate for execution (15:1-15), manipulating Roman authority to accomplish their goal.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does the religious leaders' immediate plot to kill Jesus reveal about hearts hardened against truth when it threatens power, wealth, or status?
2. How does their fear of losing popular support rather than concern for truth demonstrate that political calculation often masquerades as religious conviction?
3. In what ways might church leaders today risk opposing God's work when it threatens institutional control, traditional authority, or financial interests?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἤκουσαν οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ
And **heard** ^{G3588} **the scribes** **And** ^{G3588} **chief priests** **And**
G2532 G191 G1122 G2532 G749 G2532

ἐζήτουν πῶς αὐτοῦ ἀπολέσουσιν· ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ αὐτοῦ
sought **how** **him** **they might destroy** **they feared** **for** **him**
G2212 G4459 G846 G622 G5399 G1063 G846

ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἐξεπλήσσετο ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ
because **all** ^{G3588} **the people** **was astonished** **at** ^{G3588} **doctrine**
G3754 G3956 G3793 G1605 G1909 G1322

αὐτοῦ
him
G846

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 7:28 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

Mark 12:12 (Parallel theme): And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.