

Matthew 21:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

Analysis

The chief priests and the elders came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things?—The Sanhedrin's delegation (ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ πρεσβύτεροι, archiereis kai presbyteroi) demands Jesus's credentials. **By what authority** (ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, en poia exousia) questions His legal right to cleanse the temple and teach.

They rejected Jesus's miracles, fulfillment of prophecy, and divine wisdom—what more authority did they need? Their question was trap-setting, not truth-seeking. They wanted Jesus to claim divine authority explicitly so they could charge Him with blasphemy, or admit He lacked rabbinic credentials so crowds would dismiss Him.

Historical Context

The Sanhedrin (70 members) controlled temple operations and religious teaching. Only authorized rabbis could teach there—requiring formal training under recognized teachers. Jesus lacked their pedigree (John 7:15), yet taught 'as one having authority' (Matt 7:29). His temple cleansing directly challenged their jurisdiction.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. When people demand credentials instead of evaluating truth claims, what does this reveal about their hearts?
2. How do you respond when God's Word challenges your authority or comfortable religious traditions?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἐλθόντι	αὐτῷ	εἰς	τὸ	ἱερὸν	προσῆλθον	
And	when he was come	unto him	into	G3588	the temple	came	
G2532	G2064	G846	G1519		G2411	G4334	
αὐτῷ	διδάσκοντι	οἱ	ἀρχιερεῖς	καὶ	οἱ	πρεσβύτεροι	
unto him	as he was teaching	G3588	the chief priests	And	G3588	the elders	
G846	G1321		G749	G2532		G4245	
τοῦ	λαοῦ	λέγοντες	Ἐν	ποία	ἐξουσίαν	ταῦτα	
G3588	of the people	and said	By	what	authority	these things	
	G2992	G3004	G1722	G4169	G1849	G5023	
ποιεῖς	καὶ	τίς	σοι	ἔδωκεν	τὴν	ἐξουσίαν	ταύτην
doest thou	And	who	thee	gave	G3588	authority	G3778
G4160	G2532	G5101	G4671	G1325		G1849	

Additional Cross-References

Acts 4:7 (Parallel theme): And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

Exodus 2:14 (Parallel theme): And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.

Matthew 26:55 (Temple): In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

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