

# 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

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**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 ἔξουσίᾳ, 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

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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

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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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

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καὶ ἐλθόντι αὐτῷ εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν προσῆλθον  
And when he was come unto him into the temple came  
G2532 G2064 G846 G1519 G3588 G2411 G4334

αὐτῷ διδάσκοντι οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι  
unto him as he was teaching the chief priests And G3588 G3588 G4245  
G846 G1321 G3588 G749 G2532 G1321 G4245

τοῦ λαοῦ λέγοντες Ἐν ποίᾳ ἔξουσίαν ταῦτα  
of the people and said By what authority these things  
G3588 G2992 G3004 G1722 G4169 G1849 G5023

ποιεῖς καὶ τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἔξουσίαν ταύτην  
doest thou And who thee gave authority G3778  
G4160 G2532 G5101 G4671 G1325 G1849

## Additional Cross-References

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**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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