

Who was Annas in the Bible?

Annas in the Bible was a powerful high priest who played key roles in the execution of Jesus Christ and in the persecution of the early church. Annas was appointed high priest of the Jerusalem temple around AD 6 by Quirinius, the Roman governor of Syria. He officially served as high priest until AD 15, when he was removed from office by Valerius Gratus, procurator of Judea. However, Annas continued to exercise considerable influence as head over the high priestly clan for many years after that, including the time of John the Baptist's and Jesus Christ's public ministries: "During the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2).

Five of Annas's sons, the most notable being Eleazar, and his son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas, succeeded Annas in the office of high priest. Caiaphas was, in fact, the official Roman-appointed high priest at the time of Jesus Christ's arrest, trial, and execution: "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas" (Matthew 26:3).

Annas was born into an affluent and influential family. His name in Greek is Hannas, meaning "the Lord is gracious." As leader of the Sanhedrin, Annas sat at the height of Jewish aristocracy. He was wealthy, well-educated, and in league with the ruling Roman authorities. Even when he no longer formally held the title of high priest, Annas continued to command the power of the office.

After Jesus was arrested, He was taken first to Annas for a preliminary investigation, proving that Annas's high priestly status stretched beyond the official position: "Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus.

They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year” (John 18:13). When Annas had finished questioning Jesus about “his disciples and his teaching,” he sent Him to Caiaphas (John 18:19-24).

Later, Annas was involved in the persecution of the early church and appeared at the trial of Peter and John in Acts 4:1-22. After the healing of a lame beggar, Peter and John preached boldly in Jerusalem. The two disciples were arrested by the Sadducees and held in custody overnight. The next day, several members of the high priest’s family, including Annas and Caiaphas, were gathered with other Jewish rulers, elders, and teachers. They had Peter and John brought before them for questioning: “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved’” (Acts 4:8-12).

Peter and John spoke so boldly against Annas and the other religious leaders that the witnesses were astonished by their courage. The Jewish officials commanded them to stop speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus, but Peter and John replied, “‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened” (Acts 4:19-21).

While Annas and other Jewish leaders tried to intimidate the early believers and prevent the spread of Christianity, their opposition only served to fan the flames of the gospel. With all the people praising God for the wonderful works being done, the Sanhedrin's threats did no good. Any further punishment of the disciples would have been a lost cause. Like these early believers, we, too, can stand against even the most difficult opposition with holy courage and proclaim God's message of salvation.