

publicly in the Temple court and had nothing to hide.⁷ At the inquiry before Caiaphas an attempt was made to convict him of a threat to the safety or sanctity of the Temple, on the ground that he had undertaken to destroy it and replace it in three days with 'a house not made with hands'.⁸ But it proved impossible to get witnesses to agree on what he had actually said. He had certainly foretold the destruction of the Temple, and that in itself was as dangerous an utterance for the speaker as Jeremiah's similar language about Solomon's Temple had been over six hundred years before.⁹ He had also spoken, according to John the Evangelist, of building a new Temple in three days.¹⁰ But a charge of speaking 'against' the Temple could not be fastened on him; had such a charge been proved it would have been constructive blasphemy in Jewish law and would also have been an offence in Roman law, which protected the safety and sanctity of the Temple.¹¹

There was another possible way of procuring a conviction against him. He himself had always been reticent about the Messiahship, whatever claims his enthusiastic followers might make on his behalf. If only a straightforward claim to be the Messiah were forthcoming from him, this could readily be represented to Pilate as a claim to be king of the Jews, and Pilate could be relied upon to take appropriate action. Caiaphas accordingly asked Jesus directly if he was the Messiah. Jesus' affirmative reply may have been couched in terms which threw the responsibility for choosing that word on the high priest—but it was sufficiently affirmative to give the high priest and his colleagues the pretext they sought for bringing a watertight case against him before Pilate. Jesus, however, said more, and gave his judges material for convicting him also of blasphemy, a capital crime in Jewish law (as the claim to be Messiah was not). 'From now on', said Jesus, 'you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven'.¹²

The claim to be Messiah carried with it the claim to be the one addressed by God in the oracle of Psalm 110:1, 'Sit at my right

⁷ John 18:19.

⁸ Mark 14:58.

⁹ See p. 190 with n. 39.

¹⁰ John 2:19.

¹¹ Cf. Acts 6:11ff, where Stephen's 'blasphemous words against . . . God' consist in his speaking 'against this holy place' and in particular predicting its destruction. See p. 221.

¹² Mark 14:62 // Matt. 26:64 // Luke 22:69. See p. 176.

hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'. That the person so addressed was the Messiah appears to have been generally agreed upon by Jewish interpreters at this time. One who claimed to be the Messiah might therefore, as a corollary, speak of sitting at God's right hand; but to speak thus explicitly would be regarded as going to the very limit of daring, and the same attitude would be taken to one who, claiming to be the Messiah, accepted the corollary that because the Messiah is addressed by God as his Son in Psalm 2:7, he himself therefore was the Son of God. But Jesus evidently drew both these corollaries.¹³ Not only so; in speaking of the Son of Man as coming with the clouds of heaven he applied to himself the language of Daniel 7:13f. There is evidence for certain strands of Jewish interpretation of Daniel's reference to 'one like a son of man' which viewed this figure as almost the peer of God. This interpretation appears, for example, in the older Greek version of Daniel, where the 'one like a son of man' comes on to the scene 'as an ancient of days'.¹⁴ We may have an echo of it in Revelation 1:12ff, where John has a vision of 'one like a son of man' (identified by him with the risen Christ) who is described in terms partly borrowed from Daniel's description of the Ancient of Days; we may have a further echo of it in the shocked reaction of Rabbi Aqiba's colleagues when he suggested that the 'thrones' which were placed in Daniel 7:9, immediately before the judgement scene, might be intended respectively for the Ancient of Days (as the context shows) and for 'David', that is the Davidic Messiah. 'Aqiba', they protested, 'how long will you profane the divine glory?'—for the interpretation which identified the 'one like a son of man' with the Messiah was felt to border on blasphemy, the more so in view of the Christian acceptance of it.¹⁵

Jesus, then, was pronounced guilty of blasphemy, and might have been executed by stoning (although the Roman governor's sanction would technically have been necessary before the execution could

¹³ In the high priest's question, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?' (Mark 14:61), the designation 'the Son of the Blessed' is an official synonym of 'Messiah'. To Jesus himself the consciousness of being in a special sense the Father's Son was no merely official relationship but something intensely personal, the basic assurance of his inner life (see the discussion of *Abba* on p. 170).

¹⁴ Gk. ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν, where the Theodotianic version has the literal ἕως τοῦ παλαιοῦ τῶν ἡμερῶν.

¹⁵ TB *Hagigah* 14a; *Sanhedrin* 38b.