

Sanhedrin 43a and the New Testament

The Gemara portion of **Sanhedrin 43a** in the Babylonian Talmud contains various historical errors. The name "Yeshua" is substituted here, in place of the vulgar slur that the original contains.

(1) The Gemara says:

"For forty days before the execution [of Yeshua] took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy.'

"Any one who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover."

Error 1: That Yeshua was in Jewish custody for at least 40 days prior to his execution.

Fact: Yeshua went to Jerusalem one week before Passover of his own volition. Members of the Sanhedrin "plotted together to seize Yeshua by stealth, and kill him...lest a riot occur among the people" (Matt 26:5). He was arrested the night he and his disciples celebrated Passover or the pre-Passover (Matt 26:45-56), and was given three trials during the night (Matt 26:57-68), then executed the following morning (Matt 27:26-38), on the second day of Passover.

Error 2: That he was tried for "sorcery" and for leading Jews into "apostacy."

Fact: These charges are not reported in the NT accounts. The chief priest was offended that Yeshua would call himself the Messiah and say he was God's Son (Matt 26:62-65). The charges filed with Pilate by members of the Sanhedrin and probably the Sadducees were for sedition (Matt 27:1—against Rome).

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(2) The Gemara says:

"He was connected with the government [or royalty, i.e., influential]."

Error 3: He had no links to members of the Jewish "government" or "royalty."

Fact: Though of the House of Judah, on Miryam's side, he was raised in the town of Nazaret in Galilee.

(3) The Gemara says:

"Our Rabbis taught: [Yeshua] had five disciples, Matthai, Nakai, Netzer, Buni and Todah."

Error 4: The NT does not mention the names Nakai, Netzer, Buni or Todah.

Fact: Only Matthai (Matthew) is mentioned as a disciple of Yeshua. The other names probably do not refer to real men, for the rest of this passage interprets their names symbolically in the fashion of pilpul discussions.

According to the Sanhedrin passage, Nakai is said to mean "innocent"; Netzer means "an abhorred offshoot"; Buni is a distortion of Beni, "my son"; and Todah means "thanksgiving."

A biblical verse is then cited in order to prove that these men were all worthy of execution—along with Yeshua. There is no NT record of Yeshua's disciples being executed by the Sanhedrin, except for Stephen (Acts 7). Church history contains various legends how the original Twelve Apostles were imprisoned or executed.

Source: J. Schachter, translator; I. Epstein, editor *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin* (London: Soncino Press, 1987)

A complete list of Talmudic and Midrashic references to Yeshua, the disciples, and early encounters with the so-called "Minim" (believers) is found in the old work of R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (orig. 1903; New York: Ktav Pub. Co., reprint. no date).

[See [What are the Mishnah & Talmud?](#), a short intro by Chaim Potok.]

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