

2005

Jesus in Jerusalem: Visualizing the Synoptic Accounts of Jesus' Final Week

Matthew L. Skinner

Luther Seminary, mskinner@luthersem.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Skinner, Matthew L., "Jesus in Jerusalem: Visualizing the Synoptic Accounts of Jesus' Final Week" (2005). *Faculty Publications*. 294. https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/294

Published Citation

Skinner, Matthew L. "Jesus in Jerusalem: Visualizing the Synoptic Accounts of Jesus' Final Week." In *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction*, edited by Mark. Roncace and Patrick Gray, 280–82. Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 49. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty & Staff Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. For more information, please contact tracy.iwaskow@gmail.com, mteske@luthersem.edu.

an eagle from one of the walls of the temple, apparently on grounds that the image transgressed the first commandment. As a result, these teachers and their accomplices were pursued and executed at the order of Herod. This account helps students see Jesus' own actions in the temple as provocative events in a particular political and religious context. Not unlike Mathias and Judas, Jesus attempted to remove something that he believed to be wrong with the temple; not unlike them, he may also have suffered arrest and execution as a direct result.

(b) Jesus son of Ananus (*War* 6.300–309), 63–70 C.E.: The second story is the account of Jesus son of Ananus, a prophet active during the Jewish Revolt who prophesied the destruction of the temple. This prophet also suffered interrogation and physical discipline from the temple authorities. Students comment upon this passage in class; then they address what it might teach us about the original context of Jesus' own prophecies regarding the temple (one may also include reference to Mic 3:12; Jer 7, 26; cf. Ezek 7–10). The study of such contemporary prophetic figures may help students to see Jesus' temple prophecies as actions that were integrally related to a particular setting in history.

3. Forming Conclusions: The class concludes with a discussion of how these texts might help us better understand Jesus' last days historically: In light of the two accounts from Josephus, could Jesus' actions in the temple have led directly to his arrest and crucifixion? By comparing the activity of Jesus and his contemporaries, students may begin to develop an eye for seeing Jesus as an historical figure whose activity was integrally related to the religious and political context of Palestinian Judaism.

For further reading, see J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 354–60; V. Eppstein, "The Historicity of the Cleansing of the Temple," *ZNW* 55 (1964): 42–58; C. A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *CBQ* 51 (1989): 237–70; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 61–76.

C. D. Elledge

182. JESUS IN JERUSALEM: VISUALIZING THE SYNOPTIC ACCOUNTS OF JESUS' FINAL WEEK

One of my goals for courses on the Synoptic Gospels is for students to probe the literary coherence of the gospel narratives. This requires, among other things, careful consideration of the narrative and theological

relationships between the Passion narratives and the accounts of Jesus' public ministry. I want students to answer the question: "What provokes the Passion, and how does the action against Jesus follow as a consequence of his public ministry?" One approach toward an answer requires giving careful attention to the stories of Jesus in Jerusalem, where the hopes surrounding his arrival eventually yield to the apparent tragedy or injustice of his execution. I use an exercise that introduces these passages (relevant sections of Mark 11:1–15:15; Matt 21:1–27:26; and/or Luke 19:29–23:25) by asking students to consider the gospel narrators' points of view, particularly the imagined contours, scope, and symbolic potential of the scenes.

The chief objective of this simple exercise is to open students' eyes to the importance of perspective and imagination in the interpretation of these and any other narratives. To accomplish this, the exercise asks students to read these familiar texts carefully and visualize the scenes as an ancient person familiar with the settings and political climate might have done. In their reflections on these texts, students typically discover the depth to which their previous exposure to films, images, and liturgies has influenced their own perspectives on these accounts.

Students complete the exercise in small groups. I assign each group one or more significant passages, such as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–10 or par.), his action in the temple (Mark 11:15–19 or par.), occasions of his public teaching (Mark 11:27–12:44 or par.), the Passover meal (Mark 14:12–31 or par.), Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:43–52), and the trials (Mark 14:53–15:15 or par.). Each group must outline a cinematographic plan for filming their scenes by creating a comprehensive inventory of what is required to stage them. The inventory should include a description of the setting and its geographical connections or proximity to the larger cityscape, a list of the major characters present and any necessary props, and an estimate of the number of extras needed to portray the crowds. I may encourage artistic students to sketch storyboards.

Afterward, with the entire class assembled or in clusters of small groups, students discuss the evidence or assumptions that led to the interpretive decisions they made in the process of creating their cinematographic plans, and why these decisions matter for an "appropriate" understanding of the scenes. I am present to pepper their conversations with questions. For example, when talking about staging Jesus' entry into Jerusalem I might ask: What difference does it make if we conclude that twenty or two-hundred people witness Jesus riding the colt? Does it matter that Mark and Luke place this event outside of the city proper, and should we care *how far* away from Jerusalem Jesus is? Can we assume that Roman soldiers are present when people shout royal acclamation about Jesus? As students discuss their plans (especially if I have

asked them to conduct research outside of class to complete the project), key historical and textual details usually capture their attention. For example, students discover that the size of the temple complex affects their conception of the extent and visibility of Jesus' actions in Mark 11:15–16, or that the volatile political climate of Jerusalem during Passover week entails consequences for envisaging Jesus' approach to the city and his conduct within it. These reflections thus lay the foundation for the class's subsequent inquiries into the implications that these details pose for an understanding of the gospels' narrative rhetoric and its theological significance. For example, I usually have classes studying Mark reflect on whether Mark 11:15–19 portrays Jesus performing an isolated yet meaningful prophetic demonstration or a massive show of force that demands widespread notice. Together we consider how interpretations of this pericope have implications for grasping a gospel's explanation of the causes and significance of the Passion.

In this introductory exercise my priorities focus on raising questions and examining assumptions, not yet contending for particular interpretations. Nevertheless, I find that this project creates an effective means of exposing the theological and interpretive raw material in these scenes. Although my pedagogical objectives and teaching context lead me to emphasize the symbolic, thematic, or theological effects of the Jerusalem stories from a single gospel, other teachers might effectively adjust the exercise to concentrate on related issues, including the physical locations and historical events that the biblical texts attempt to represent, or the evangelists' redactional activities. (For a similar exercise, see §257.)

Matthew L. Skinner

183. CHRISTOLOGY SLIDESHOW

This exercise is designed to introduce the topic of Christology in the Gospels. I invite the students to imagine that they are constructing a course entitled "Portraits of Jesus in the Gospels." I ask, "When you picture Jesus, what do you see? What color is his skin, his hair, his eyes? Is he tall or short, clean or dusty? Describe his demeanor." I then show the images listed below and ask them to think about which of the slides, if any, best approximates their own image. It is advisable to number the slides and provide a handout with the numbers and titles for purposes of discussion after the viewing.

Upon completion of the slideshow, I ask them to share which images struck them. Which felt familiar and which felt strange or challenging? I