

The Synoptic Gospels

Week 5

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Outline

Passion Week

- Triumphal Entry

- Confrontations with the Leaders

Last Supper

- Chronological Questions

- Passover

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Triumphal?

Although this is the triumphal entry, the actual entry must have looked rather unremarkable. Typically, such a victor's entry would be with a large war horse.

Sometimes kings would ride donkeys and other unassuming animals during times of peace, which seems to be at the center of the citation:

Zechariah 9:9—[Rejoice greatly,] O daughter of Zion! [Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!] Behold, your king is coming to you; [He is just and endowed with salvation,] Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

9:10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; And the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.

For Jesus to ride a colt into Jerusalem was a very bold statement of identification as the Messiah and harbinger of End Times.

Harmonizing Scripture

At this point, many of you have noticed differences even among the synoptics. Here are some devices that ancient authors use (Licona, 20):

1. Transferral—when an author intentionally places the words of one person into the mouth of another (Did the Centurion speak to Christ or his friends? Wife of Zebedee or the sons?)
2. Displacement—When an author intentionally places an event at a different point in time (Jesus probably cleared the temple early in his ministry as in John)
3. Compression—When an author intentionally portrays events within a smaller time frame (Fig tree?)
4. Spotighting—When an author focuses attention on a figure during some scene while others who were present are ignored (Colt in triumphal entry, Bartimaeus)
5. Simplification—When an author adapts material by omitting or altering details that complicate the overall narrative (Cursing of the Fig Tree? 2nd Demoniac?)

None of these inherently undermine the accuracy of the account.

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Jesus-Initiated Confrontations

Jesus doesn't wait for the Jewish leadership to come to him to start a fight.

What is Jesus communicating with these comments or actions?

1. *Stones Cry Out* (Luke 19:40)
2. *Whose son is the Christ?* (Mt 22:41ff; Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20:41-44)
3. *Clearing the Temple* (Mt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-11; Lk 19:29-44)

Jesus-Initiated Confrontations

What is Jesus communicating with these comments or actions?

1. *Stones Cry Out*

- He's clearly affirming the praise he's receiving
- Cf. Psalm 19—Natural World bears witness to God's glory
- Cf. Luke 3:8—God does not need man to praise him. Sadly, mute stones better recognize their Creator than His greatest creation.

2. *Whose son is the Christ?* (More later)

- He's signaling that he's greater than the greatest king, so...!
- He's identifying himself as the Melchizedek priest!

3. *Clearing the Temple*

- Note: Deut 14:25 prescribes exchanging money for animals for those who live far away, indicating that the exchange practice itself isn't the issue.
- Note: Doves and money exchangers are mentioned each time, implying a deliberate exploitation of the poor.
- Only a prophet (or greater!) would do something so scandalous.

Sequence of Traps

The leaders lay a series of traps for Jesus. Let's examine how Jesus responds.

1. *By What Authority?*

- If Jesus says God, he's blaspheming; if he says man, then he's out of line
- Lesson—Asking questions, reversing the burden of proof or silence is a powerful response to dishonest questions (Cf. Mt 10:16; Prov 26:4)

2. *Should we pay taxes to Caesar?*

- The trap is that if he says yes, then he's a Roman sympathizer; if he says no, then he's dangerous radical.
- Money of little value compared to devoting our lives to God

3. *Whose Wife?*

- If Jesus picks any one of the men, then he's being totally arbitrary.
- Lesson—Not only will we be “alive” in some sense after death, but a central aspect of human experience (like marriage) will be absent (married to Christ?)

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When Was Passover?

What is clear is that Jesus was crucified on Friday. All four gospels signal that the Sabbath was about to begin. (Mt 27:62, 28:1; Mk 15:42; Lk 23:54; Jn 19:31).

But we discover the following tension between the Synoptics and John:

- The Synoptics signal that the Last Supper occurred on the first day of Unleavened Bread (Mt 26:17, Mk 14:12, Lk 22:7) and so this was Jesus' Passover celebration (Mt 26:19, Mk 14:16, Lk 22:13).
- But John suggests that the Passover hadn't started yet, when he writes that, "they did not enter into the Praetorium in order that they might be defiled but might eat the Passover." (18:28)

Before digging in, it should be noted that from a historical standpoint, we have a pretty good case that Jesus was crucified in very close proximity to the Passover. Exactly how it fits in will take some work.

An Interpretative Model

As a backdrop, the Passover lamb is to be slaughtered on the evening of 14 Nisan (Ex 12:6, Lv 23:5; Nm 9:3-5) and consumed before sunrise.

The best explanation is that Galileans & Pharisees celebrated Thursday evening, Judeans & Saducees celebrated Friday evening:

1. This requires examining how the two groups counted days:
 - G&P count from sunrise to sunrise: 14 Nisan starts Thursday morning
 - J&S count from sunset to sunset: 14 Nisan starts after sundown on Thursday.
2. Ceremonial features of the Last Supper make more sense as a Passover celebration: eating at night was otherwise unusual; Jesus ate in Jerusalem and then stayed in Jerusalem; if not the Passover, what is this special meal?
3. The disciples private explanations of Judas leaving (John 13:29) only make sense if the Last Supper were a Passover meal
 - Gifts for the poor was a common practice on the night of Passover
 - Purchasing items for the Feast in the middle of a meal, in the middle of the night does not make sense if Passover were the next day; replenishing supplies does.

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Christ, Our Passover Lamb

Based on the Last Supper, what can we learn about Jesus' relationship to Passover?

- To discuss a new ritual during Passover implies that communion is a successor and/or superseding ritual.
- If Jesus were just any man, it would be absolutely inappropriate to talk about himself at all during Passover, let alone introduce a new ritual, let alone a new ritual that he claims is about him! (Lord-liar-lunatic)
- “Blood poured out for the many” is an overt reference to the slaughtered lamb of the Passover, indicating a typological element
- Based on the chronology discussed above, Jesus would have died when the Judeans were slaughtering their lambs.

Of course, the rest of the NT affirms the relationship between these; nevertheless, we can recover a fair amount from a careful analysis of the Synoptics.

The Message

These are tremendously significant deeds and words. It is a pity that we are so familiar with them they tend to lose their impact. For they throw floods of light on Jesus' own view of his death. (Stott, 70)

1. *The Centrality of Jesus' Death*—Jesus establishes only one ritual in his life for his followers (communion) and it has to do with his sacrifice.
2. *The Purpose of His Death*—His death is not just for sacrifice but is the inauguration of the New Covenant. (This is not as clear until now.)
3. *The Need to Appropriately His Death Personally*—The eating and drinking is a symbolic application of Christ's substitution for our sin.
4. *The Communal Aspect of Coming Under His Death*—The eating and drinking together is symbolic of our common fellowship in humility under the work of Christ.

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