

CHAPTER 11

LAST PUBLIC MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM

Part 10: The Formal Presentation of Christ to Israel and the Resulting Conflict

[*Harmony*, Part 10, pp. 168-186]

As Luke's and John's gospels show us how Jesus returned to Jerusalem, all four gospels pick up the account of Jesus' words and deeds in the capital city. Even so, usually John records events not mentioned in the Synoptic gospels. While John has already emphasized Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem at previous times, only with this last visit do the other three gospels tell of Jesus' ministry there.

The last week of Jesus' life was spent in and around Jerusalem. During the first part of the week Jesus presented himself to Jerusalem officially as their Messiah by riding the donkey into the city, in accordance with prophecy. He also demonstrated his office by cleansing the temple and confronting the false religious leadership of the nation. The second half of the week was more retired, as Jesus spent time with his friends and disciples. This part of the outline deals with the first part of that eventful week.

Triumphal Entry and the Fig Tree

This section clearly shows how Jesus chose this significant time to offer himself to Israel as her rightful Messiah. The fig tree episode shows the results of Israel's rejection of him.

Sec. 128: Arrival at Bethany, Triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Bethany, the town of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, was about two miles to the southeast of Jerusalem. Jesus apparently stayed there often. When he arrived it was six days before Passover (John 12:1; unless we translate the phrase, "before the six days of Passover"). Some scholars

believe the anointing by Mary mentioned in John 12:2-8 happened immediately, while others, following Matthew and Mark, place it several days later (for a discussion, see *Harmony*, p. 168, n. *m*; and below, Harmonistic Problem #9 after Section 141).

All four gospels record the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Jesus purposely performed this action, in many ways unlike his earlier retreats and withdrawals when praised by the crowds. The prophecy fulfilled was in Zech 9:9, fulfilled quite literally. The manner of obtaining the donkeys reveals his miraculous knowledge, and God's control of all events. Note also that the people called out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," attributing to Jesus the dignity of divinity and Messiahship (see Ps 118:25-26). Jesus accepted this worship and acclaim, and defended those who proclaimed it (Matt 21:16; Luke 19:40; Spurgeon has an excellent devotion on "the stones will cry out" in his *Morning and Evening* for March 23).

The scene of Jesus weeping over the city is fraught with pathos, even as he prophesied its coming destruction (Luke 19:41-44). Mark adds the ominous notice that Jesus "looked around at everything" before he left the city and returned to Bethany for the night (Mark 11:11). He would postpone the cleansing of the temple for the next day.

Sec. 129: Cursing of the fig tree having leaves but no figs, Second cleansing of the temple

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (fulfilled in Sec. 131) was a symbolic miracle showing the coming judgment on Israel.

For the second time Jesus cleansed the temple—finishing his ministry there in the same manner as he had begun it (see Sec. 31, and Harmonistic Problem #4). While John recorded the first cleansing, the Synoptics record the second one. Here Jesus was more stern—instead of accusing them of turning the temple into "a market," he now said they turned it into "a den of robbers" (quoting Isa 56:6-7). The chief priests were now more firmly committed to killing him, yet they feared a public reaction.

Sec. 130: Request of some Greeks to see Jesus and necessity of the Son of Man's being lifted up, Different responses to Jesus and Jesus' response to the crowds

John points out that even as the Jewish leaders had concluded to put Jesus to death, the Gentiles were coming to him. This was illustrated by these Greeks seeking an audience with Jesus. They approached Philip (a Greek name), who went to Andrew, Peter's brother.

In his answer, Jesus is not said to have answered the Greeks, but rather went on to speak of his own death, which would "draw all men" unto himself. Jesus also expressed his own

personal concern and anxiety over his approaching Passion (John 12:27); a heavenly voice from the Father reassured him.

The fact that the Jewish leaders and most of the people did not truly believe in Jesus was a wonder to John. He explained it by quoting the prophet Isaiah (53:1; 6:10). Those leaders who did believe were quiet, fearing for their own safety.

Sec. 131: Withered fig tree and the lesson on faith

Matthew does not mention the time between the cursing of the tree and the fulfillment, but Mark does say that it was withered the next day, and also mentions that Peter was the one who asked about it. Jesus told the disciples that they would be capable of such miracles (especially of judgment—cf. the mountain being cast into the sea). Their faith would be the key to these great works.

Luke mentions that Jesus spent his evenings on the Mount of Olives, probably in prayer, and then went into the city in the day time to teach in the temple (Luke 21:37-38).

Official Challenge to Christ's Authority

The series of debates between Jesus and the various factions of his enemies occupies the next section. These controversies are found only in the Synoptics. John's gospel has already included many similar controversies between Jesus and the Jerusalem leaders in earlier chapters. We notice all three groups of Jesus' opponents challenge him: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians, as do also various practical groups—teachers of the law, priests, and leaders of the lay people, the elders.

Sec. 132: Questioning of Jesus' authority by the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders, Jesus' response with his own question and three parables

First to challenge him were the chief priests and elders (probably primarily Sadducees). They asked his authority for disrupting the temple operations and teaching things they do not approve. His response was a question—what about John the Baptist? Since they would not answer (revealing their hypocrisy), Jesus refused to answer them.

Jesus went on to employ three lengthy parables, showing how the leaders had forsaken their place and blessing, and how the blessing of the kingdom would come to others (the Gentiles). These parables, most completely presented in Matthew, were the man with two sons, in which the unlikely son finally obeyed the father; the landowner and the vineyard, again showing the taking of the kingdom from the Jewish leaders and giving it to others; and the

wedding banquet, showing how the unlikely were finally admitted to the wedding feast, while the original guests and those seeking to “crash the party” were put out. The Jewish leaders knew very well that these parables were directed against them (Matt 21:45 and parallels).

Sec. 133: Attempts by Pharisees and Herodians to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar

The Pharisees and Herodians tried next. The Pharisees hated Roman domination, while the Herodians tried to adjust to it. Between the two of them, Jesus was sure to make enemies. He asked for a coin, and was given the Roman denarius, with Caesar’s image stamped on it. Their question tried to force him to take sides, but Jesus upheld the good points of both positions by his famous answer, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Sec. 134: Sadducees’ puzzling question about the resurrection

So far, all the groups had failed. Now the Sadducees tried again, with a theological question this time. The Sadducees denied the resurrection, also the existence of human or angelic spirits (see Acts 23:8). They posed a situation in which a widow of seven husbands was raised with them in the resurrection—whose wife would she be? This must have been an old war horse with them, often used to stump Pharisee opponents.

Jesus replied that they did not understand the power of God, which would make people in the kingdom age different, not given to marriage, or the Scriptures, which predicted the resurrection of the patriarchs when it promised to Moses that God would give him the land of Palestine because of his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:6). (This passage, by the way, would support the doctrine of the resurrection taking place as a prerequisite to fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant.) This answer was so devastating that even some Pharisees praised him (Luke 20:39).

Sec. 135: A Pharisee’s legal question

Finally, the Pharisees tried one more time. They sent a learned representative to test him by asking which was the greatest commandment of the Law. Jesus answered, as he had before, with the two great commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; see Sec. 103). Jesus added the word “mind” to the list in Deuteronomy, perhaps to subtly convict the Pharisee that our intellect must serve God, even in theological disputes. To the Pharisee’s credit, he acknowledged the wisdom of Jesus’ answer, and even added more OT justification for it. Jesus saw this honesty in him, and encouraged him, telling him that he was “not far from the kingdom of God.” This was the last attempt of the Jewish leaders to trap Jesus in argument (Mark 12:34).

Christ's Response to His Enemies' Challenges

Now that Jesus' enemies had exhausted themselves in trying to trap him in argument, Jesus turned his attack against them, both in argument and in denunciation.

Sec. 136: Christ's relationship to David as son and Lord

Jesus now asked the Pharisees a question. David called the Messiah to come his "Lord" in Psalm 110:1, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" If he is David's son (thus human), how can David call him "my Lord" (thus divine)? The Pharisees had no answer for this, to the delight of the crowd.

Sec. 137: Seven woes against the teachers of the law and Pharisees, Jesus' sorrow over Jerusalem

This condemnatory speech is recorded mostly in Matthew, which was written especially for Jews. Six times he begins with the exclamation, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" (Matt 23: 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). He adds several variations, including "Woe to you, blind guides!" (v. 16, and "You blind fools!" in v. 17), and "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" (v. 33).

Reading through this speech, we can see various doctrines of the Pharisees which contradicted the true interpretation of the OT law. Also, even the good things they taught often were contradicted by their evil practices (Matt 23:3).

The editors of the *Harmony* note that this, along with the two temple cleansings, shows most clearly the wrath of Jesus against those false teachers who fail to enter his kingdom, and lead others astray as well (p. 184, n. f).

The denunciation ends with a reference to two murdered men: "righteous Abel," and "Zechariah son of Berekiah." It is possible that these men were chosen, being the first and last cases of murder written of in the OT (2 Chr 24:20-21, with 2 Chronicles being the last book).

After delivering his scorching condemnation, Jesus was filled with pity for the city and nation, since they had rejected him and faced destruction and misery. This sentiment echoes that expressed earlier (Sec. 113, 128).

Sec. 138: A poor widow's gift of all she had

In striking contrast to the gloom of spiritual darkness characterizing Israel's leaders, this simple act of genuine piety by a poor woman captured Jesus' attention. There was a righteous remnant in Israel.