



Jesus and Jerusalem and the “Things That Make for Peace”

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“Jerusalem, Jerusalem! The city who kills the prophets and stones the ones who have been sent to her. How many times I wanted to gather together your children in the same way that a hen gathers together her nestlings under her wing! And you did not want to do so.” (Luke 13:34 and Matt 23:37)¹

Now as [Jesus] came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If only you knew, especially you, on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” (Luke 19:41–42)

Jerusalem almost functions as a character in the Gospels. Jesus speaks to her and mourns over her. She is a not just a setting; she also has defined characteristics. The city provides a framework for Luke’s Gospel, is the scene of repeated visits and controversies in John, and is where the climax of Jesus’s story occurs in all four Gospels. In this essay, I show how Jerusalem functions in the life of Jesus and

¹ All translations by Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman.

The city of Jerusalem is intimately and centrally connected to the Gospel narratives about Jesus the Christ, in such a way that the author suggests that the city itself become another character in that narrative. Understanding the history and religious symbolism of the city adds another layer of meaning to the understanding of Holy Week, Good Friday, and Easter.

how it continues not only as a location to visit but as an orienting point in our own Christian reflection.²

JESUS AND JERUSALEM IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Broadly speaking, Matthew, Mark, and Luke depict Jesus's ministry occurring in Galilee until he heads to Jerusalem. There are no clear references to visits to Jerusalem before his final journey there.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus's ministry is located in Galilee, but scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem go to Galilee to confront him (Mark 3:22; 7:1). In 10:32, Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem that will culminate in his crucifixion and resurrection. At the resurrection scene, the young man tells the women that the disciples should go back to Galilee, where Jesus will appear to them. All of Jesus's actions in Mark lead to the key events that will happen in Jerusalem, but Galilee figures just as prominently.

The Gospel of Matthew's references to Jerusalem in relation to Jesus are similar to Mark, and Galilee also is given significance. Matthew adds an additional tragic element associated with Jerusalem when Jesus laments over her in 23:37. Jerusalem is both the object of God's affection and the locus of violence against God's messengers. Though Matthew does not make a clear association, there is also an interesting connection between the wise men's visit to Herod in 2:1 and Jesus's trial before Pilate in 27:11. Both events most likely occurred in the palace that Herod the Great built on the northwestern side of the city, where the Tower of David complex is located today and where remnants of it have been located.³ We can imagine the wise men standing before Herod in the reception hall, asking, "Where is the one who was born King of the Jews?" (Matt 2:2). It is ironic, then, in 27:11 when Jesus stands before Pilate and asks him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

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Jerusalem and the temple have a central role and provide an organizing reference in Luke's Gospel. The story begins in the temple with the annunciation to Zechariah (Luke 1:5–23). Forty days after Jesus is born, Joseph and Mary bring him to the temple for purification rites, and they encounter Simeon and Anna, who confirm the divine appointment of the child (2:22–38). The family returns to

² This essay also serves as a guide to sites in Jerusalem connected with Jesus that can be visited today. For pictures and locations of places mentioned, see: www.ScrollandScreen.com/Jerusalem.

³ The Gospels use a Latin loanword, *praetorium*, to indicate this palace. Robin Ngo, "Tour Showcases Remains of Herod's Jerusalem Palace—Possible Site of the Trial of Jesus," *Biblical Archaeology Society*, <https://tinyurl.com/yamrkqqq>.

Nazareth, but 2:41–51 tells the story of a trip to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. The twelve-year-old Jesus remains behind in the temple courts engaged in discussion with the Jewish teachers. Luke, like Matthew, includes the story of Jesus being tested by the devil, and both report the instance where Jesus is taken up to the pinnacle of the temple. Matthew writes that it takes place in the “holy city,” while Luke specifically notes that it is “Jerusalem.” More notable, however, is that while this test is the second one in Matthew, it is the concluding one in Luke, and thus, Jerusalem is the setting for the climax of Jesus’s ordeal.

During Jesus’s ministry in Galilee, at the Transfiguration, Luke adds the observation that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about his “exodus, which he was going to fulfill in Jerusalem” (9:31). Shortly thereafter is the “hinge” of Luke in 9:51, when Jesus leaves Galilee and “sets his face to go to Jerusalem.” The long journey to Jerusalem, therefore, is conducted under the shadow of what is to happen there, and Luke includes Jesus’s lament over the city he loves but which will be the death of him (13:34). When Jesus does arrive in Jerusalem, he again grieves over her inability to realize what is needed for her to experience peace (19:41–42).⁴ As with the other Gospels, Jesus’s triumphal entry, crucifixion, and resurrection are reported in their Jerusalem context, but Luke also describes Jesus’s ascension from the Mount of Olives. For Luke’s Gospel, therefore, Jerusalem is featured at the beginning, is highlighted in the Transfiguration account, and is the site of the culmination of all Jesus came to accomplish. While Jerusalem serves as the book-ends for the Gospels, it also serves as the centerpiece of Luke-Acts and the larger perspective of the church’s expansion into the Roman Empire. A broad outline of Luke and Acts is this: Jerusalem > ministry in Galilee > journey to Jerusalem > JERUSALEM > growth of the early church starting in Jerusalem > Paul’s journey to Rome. For Luke, Jerusalem is the key to understanding Jesus’s mission rooted in Jewish history and the starting point of the message “that repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

JESUS AND JERUSALEM IN JOHN

While the Synoptic Gospels only depict Jesus’s ministry being in Galilee preceding the final journey to Jerusalem, John’s Gospel is organized by Jesus repeatedly visiting Jerusalem for the Jewish festivals spanning three Passovers and is the basis for the claim that Jesus had a three-year ministry. Each visit is marked by increasingly hostile controversies that will culminate with Jesus’s crucifixion. Jerusalem is portrayed negatively in John from the outset as the place where Jesus’s opponents, “the Judeans,”⁵ are located. After the miracle of changing water into wine in Cana

⁴ Dominus Flevit Church on the western slope of the Mount of Olives overlooks Jerusalem and the Temple Mount in commemoration of this event.

⁵ Translated as “the Jews” in many English versions, the term can refer ethnically to those of Jewish heritage, geographically to those who live in Judea (in which Jerusalem was located), or narratively to the Jewish

of Galilee (John 2:13), Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for Passover, one of the three annual pilgrimages Jewish males strove to observe. In John, this is the occasion for the cleansing of the temple, a symbolic action set at the beginning of Jesus's ministry that foreshadows his death and resurrection. It generates Jesus's long discussion with Nicodemus in chapter 3 that reflects more confusion than hostility at this point. Jesus goes back to Galilee, stopping on the way in the Samaritan city of Sychar, where he assures the woman he meets at the well there that a time will come when people will worship God neither on Mount Gerizim *nor in Jerusalem* (4:19–26). Jesus returns again to Jerusalem for another festival in 5:1 and heals the paralyzed man at the Beth-zatha (Bethesda) Pool.⁶ This generates a controversy that marks the beginning of the Jewish authorities' attempts to kill Jesus (5:16–17). He goes to Galilee in 6:1 and returns to Jerusalem for the Festival of Booths in 7:2–10, and again his teaching causes problems. He also heals the blind man at the Siloam Pool (ch. 9), which eventually leads to an attempt to stone Jesus during the festival of Rededication (Hanukkah; 10:22–39). Jesus goes east across the Jordan for a time, then comes back to Bethany just east of Jerusalem. His restoration of Lazarus to life (ch. 11) leads to the authorities' plan to execute Jesus (11:53). Again Jesus retreats for a while to a spot near the wilderness before coming back to Bethany and Jerusalem for the last time to celebrate Passover (11:54–12:8). John's Gospel consistently depicts Jerusalem negatively. It is the home of the Jewish authorities who regularly oppose Jesus and ultimately instigate his death. By the time this Gospel is written post-70 CE, Jerusalem and the temple are no longer relevant, and John's community affirms Jesus's statement that "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (4:23).

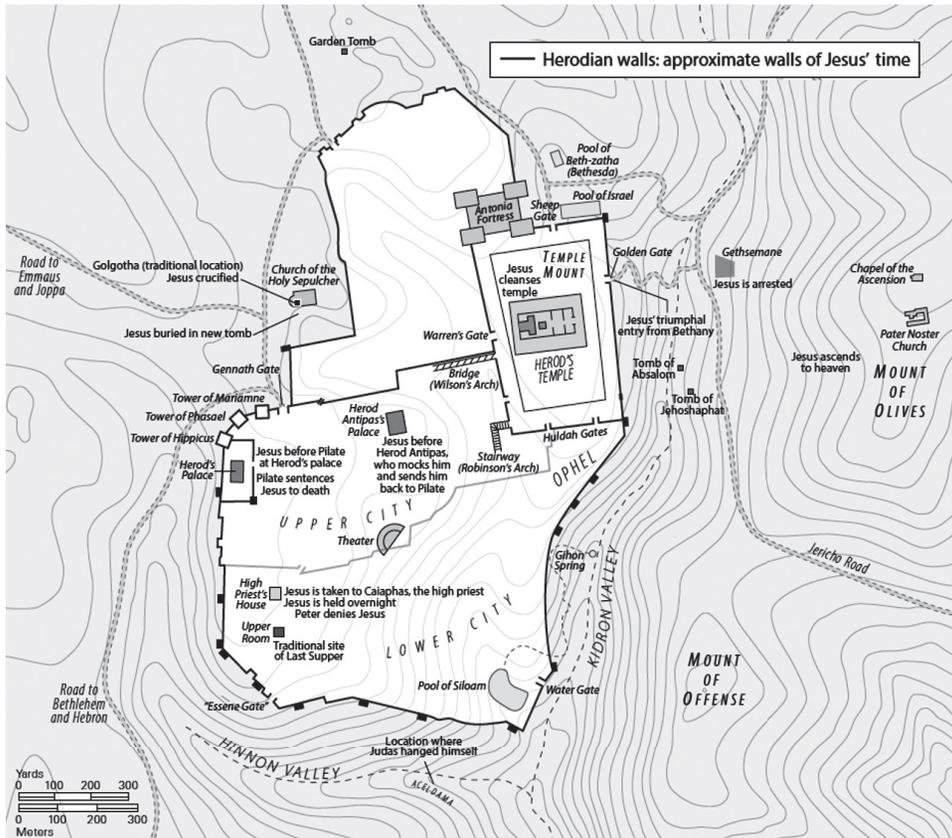
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JESUS'S ACTIVITIES DURING THE FINAL WEEK IN JERUSALEM

In the church's liturgical cycle, Jerusalem is the focal point during Holy Week. It is difficult to outline a definitive schedule of Jesus's activities during that last week. There is the additional complication that in the Synoptic Gospels Passover is on Thursday, so Jesus's last meal commemorates that event, but in John, Passover is on Friday, so the Thursday meal is not a Passover one. Instead, Jesus, the "Lamb of

authorities. This last category denotes Jesus's adversaries, first identified in John 1:19 as ones who interrogate John the Baptizer.

⁶ This pool has been discovered north of the Temple Mount. In the second century CE, an Asklepion, a Greco-Roman healing center, was built at the site, perhaps because it was remembered as a Jewish healing site most famous for Jesus's miraculous healing (John 5:2–9).



Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem: Map 58, page 142 in Mark Vitalis Hoffman and Robert A. Mullins, *Atlas of the Biblical World* (Fortress, 2019). Used with permission. Not displayed is Bethany, which is about 1.5 miles east of Jerusalem on the southeastern side of the Mount of Olives.

God” (John 1:29, 36), is crucified at the same time as the Passover lambs are being sacrificed at the temple on Friday.

Also try to imagine what Jerusalem was like that week. Estimates of the population of Jerusalem in Jesus's time vary widely (20,000–100,000 or possibly more),⁷ and it would have been multiplied many times over with pilgrims there for Passover. Gethsemane and Pilate's palace are the two spots farthest apart but are less than a mile distant. With so many people in so small a space, the concern of Pilate and the Jewish authorities about avoiding a riot was well founded. The schedule presented here is a harmonization based on the Synoptics and augmented with details from John.

⁷ Hershel Shanks, “Ancient Jerusalem: The Village, the Town, the City” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May/June 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/wdu7hrx>.

- **Saturday:** Jesus is in Bethany and his feet are anointed by Mary (John 12:1–9).
- **(Palm) Sunday:** Jesus heads toward the Mount of Olives, enters into Jerusalem, and weeps over the city (Matt 21:1–11; 23:37–39; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:29–44; John 12:12–19).⁸ He looks around the temple and returns to Bethany.⁹
- **Monday:** As Jesus goes back to Jerusalem, he curses the fig tree along the way and drives out the vendors from the temple.¹⁰ Jesus returns to Bethany (Matt 21:12–23; Mark 11:12–25; Luke 19:45–48).
- **Tuesday:** As Jesus and the disciples go back to Jerusalem, they observe the withered fig tree (Mark 11:20–25). Jesus teaches in the temple,¹¹ and on the return to Bethany, Jesus delivers the eschatologically charged Mount of Olives discourse (Matt 21:23–24:44; Mark 11:27–13:37; Luke 20:1–21:36).
- **Wednesday:** It is not clear what Jesus does, but it is perhaps on this day that Judas makes his deal with authorities to hand Jesus over to them (Matt 26:14; Mark 14:10; Luke 22:3).
- **Thursday:** Jesus instructs his disciples to prepare for their (Passover) meal (Matt 26:17–20; Mark 14:12–17; Luke 22:7–14).¹² Following the meal they go to Gethsemane, a garden east of the Temple Mount just across the Kidron Valley on the lower slope of the Mount of Olives (Matt 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46; John 18:1).¹³ Jesus is arrested and

⁸ Visitors to Jerusalem can walk a traditional Palm Sunday route from the ridge of the Mount of Olives, past the Dominus Flevit Church, through the Garden of Gethsemane, down into the Kidron Valley, and up from there to the Temple Mount. Any kind of commotion on the Mount of Olives would have been easily noticed from the Temple Mount. Though the picture is not explicitly drawn in the Gospels, Jesus's entry on a donkey from the east stands in contrast to Pilate's entry, perhaps on a white horse, in an extravagant procession from the west from his residence at Caesarea Maritima.

⁹ Why does Jesus stay in Bethany? The usual thing to do would be to stay with friends or relatives who would extend the expected hospitality. The Gospel evidence is not consistent, but John reports that Jesus stayed in Bethany at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (John 12:1; Matt 26:6; Mark 14:3).

¹⁰ The vendors and moneychangers were probably located in the Royal Portico on the southern side of the Temple Mount.

¹¹ It is likely that Jesus would have taught in Solomon's Portico along the eastern side of the Temple Mount.

¹² The upper room site is usually located on Mount Zion (the Western Hill) inside the walls in the southwest corner of the city. The Cenacle is the traditional place most often visited. Though speculative and disputed, there is some evidence to suggest that this is in the general area. Given the crowds of people in Jerusalem all needing a place to eat the Passover in the city, how did the disciples manage to find a room on the very day of the Passover? If the southwest quarter of the city was the Essene quarter, then the chance of obtaining a room was better, because the Essenes used a different calendar and did not celebrate Passover on the same day as the rest of the Jewish community. This possibility might also explain the odd note in Mark 14:13 and Luke 22:10 where Jesus says that the disciples should follow a man carrying a jar of water. This would usually be a woman's task, but the Essenes were a male community and carried their own water.

¹³ Why did they not return to Bethany as before? According to Deuteronomy 16:1–8, the Passover needed to be celebrated within the limits of Jerusalem. Gethsemane was close enough to be so, but Bethany was not. The approximate area of the Garden of Gethsemane can be visited and has olive trees that are about one thousand years old and whose root stock is even older. The Church of All Nations is there, built over a rock that tradition holds is the spot where Jesus prayed.

brought to the high priest’s house for interrogation, where Peter denies Jesus three times (Matt 26:57–75; Mark 14:53–72; Luke 22:54–71; John 18:13–37).¹⁴

- **Friday:** After a quick morning meeting of the Sanhedrin,¹⁵ Jesus is delivered over to Pilate, who was staying in Herod the Great’s palace on the western side of Jerusalem (Matt 27:1–14; Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–5; John 18:28–38). When Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean, he tries to hand off responsibility to Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, who also was in Jerusalem for Passover and was likely staying at the old Hasmonean palace (Luke 23:6–12). When Jesus refuses to perform any miracles for Herod, he sends him back to Pilate. After further questioning, Pilate presents Jesus to the crowds outside his palace at a spot called the Stone Pavement (Hebrew: *Gabbatha*).¹⁶ The crowds choose to have Barabbas freed, and Jesus is led away to be crucified (Matt 27:15–31; Mark 15:6–20; Luke 23:13–25; John 18:39–19:16).¹⁷ The location of Golgotha was outside the city wall but still in a prominent location to achieve maximum effect as a Roman warning to anyone who would threaten their peace. Jesus died shortly before sunset and was buried nearby (Matt 27:32–61; Mark 15:21–47; Luke 23:26–56; John 19:17–42).¹⁸
- **Saturday:** Guards are posted at the tomb (Matt 27:62–66). After sunset, when the Sabbath ends, women buy spices to bring to the tomb the next morning (Mark 16:1).
- **Sunday:** The resurrection accounts in the Gospels are difficult to harmonize, but after the tomb is discovered to be empty, Jesus appears variously to some women, notably Mary Magdalene; the disciples; and the two

¹⁴ There is a site on the Western Hill in Jerusalem that has traditionally been identified as the high priest Caiaphas’s house, over which the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu (“cock’s crow”) has been built. Roman-era ruins are present.

¹⁵ The location of the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where the Jewish council met, is disputed. The most likely location is one of the rooms on the south side of the temple.

¹⁶ The Stone Pavement / Gabbatha is a raised area almost certainly outside the western wall of the palace, accessible through a gate that is now blocked but still visible.

¹⁷ The traditional route Jesus took from Pilate’s headquarters to Golgotha is known as the *Via Dolorosa*. It became a pilgrimage path in the eighteenth century, but it began with the assumption that when Pilate, as a military man, was in Jerusalem, he would have stayed at the Antonia Fortress on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. The path thus starts there and works its way west and south through the streets of Jerusalem via fourteen stations to arrive at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As I have noted, it is now clear that Pilate stayed at the Herodian palace on the western side of the city.

¹⁸ The traditional site of Golgotha and Jesus’s tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has solid claim to being approximately in the correct location. It was outside the city wall in Jesus’s time in a prominent location in what had been a quarry. There is evidence that it was also being used as a garden (John 19:41–42), and graves were dug into the sides of the quarry. Further, places that have been identified as sacred tend to stay that way. After the second Jewish war in 135, Emperor Hadrian constructed a temple to Aphrodite / Venus on the spot. Helena, Emperor Constantine’s mother, reclaimed the site in the fourth century and built the first church there. Recent renovations of the site did confirm that the Aedicule where the tomb was located covers the original ground rock.

travelers going to Emmaus (Matt 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–49; John 20:1–23).

- **Sometime later:** John 20:24–29 reports the appearance of Jesus to the disciples and Thomas a week later in the same room as before. Luke 24:50–53 seemingly indicates that Jesus led the disciples to Bethany and ascended on that Easter Sunday. Acts 1:1–12, however, describes the ascension occurring forty days later on the Mount of Olives.¹⁹ Matthew, Mark, and John report appearances of Jesus in Galilee instead (Matt 28:16–20; Mark 16:6–7; John 21:1–23).

From a Jewish historical and theological perspective, Jerusalem is the necessary location for someone to be revealed as the Messiah, the King of the Jews, but Jesus transcends those expectations by inaugurating the dominion of God that no longer is grounded in Jerusalem.

JESUS, JERUSALEM, AND US

Today Jerusalem is still at the center of political and religious unrest, susceptible to violence at any time. So, how are we as Christians to regard Jerusalem in light of Jesus? The apostle Paul provides some cues. Quoting Scripture, he identifies Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection in Zion as both the source of salvation and the cause for stumbling.²⁰ Paul will have difficulties with the early Christian leadership in Jerusalem, but he is still committed to bringing an offer to support the saints there. As a Jew, he still participates in worship at the temple, but that visit will also occasion his arrest. Paul expresses this tension between the actual city and its greater significance with an allegory in Galatians 4:25–26: "Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved, along with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, who is our mother." The physical Jerusalem under Roman law was enslaved, but the quintessential Jerusalem is a heavenly entity.

Even more dramatically, the book of Revelation offers a vision not of a restored earthly Jerusalem but of a heavenly one designated "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). There is no need of a temple, "for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, is her temple. . . . The glory of God enlightens her, and the Lamb is her lamp, and the nations will walk by her light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into her" (Rev 21:22–24). Jesus's identity is embedded with Jerusalem, not the earthly city but the eschatological reality.

¹⁹ Unless Luke intends to record two different ascensions, it is possible to locate his accounts in the same area, since one would pass over the Mount of Olives on the way to Bethany. Tradition has it that early Christians met in a cave near the crest of the Mount of Olives to worship. Helena built a church there in the fourth century. Today this is the Pater Noster Church. Another spot, on top of the crest less than one hundred yards away, was later identified as the "actual" site. The Chapel of the Ascension is built over it.

²⁰ Rom 9:33 quoting Isa 28:16, and Rom 11:26 quoting Isa 59:20.

Paul wrote before the destruction of the temple, and Revelation was written after it, but neither revere the actual city of Jerusalem or seek to claim it as part of Jesus’s promise. Origen in the third century similarly argued against an earthly understanding of a promised land in Judea, but rather, “Both Judea and Jerusalem were the shadow and figure of that pure land, goodly and large, in the pure region of heaven, in which is the heavenly Jerusalem.”²¹ Eusebius, however, writing about the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in the fourth century, wonders if “on the very spot which witnessed the Savior’s sufferings, a new Jerusalem was constructed. . . . And it may be that this was that second and new Jerusalem spoken of in the predictions of the prophets.”²²

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Why the changed perspective? Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 legalized Christianity, and his mother, Helena, took the initiative in claiming sites connected with Jesus and building churches on them. The possibility of possession is the problem. Thus begins the tragic and violent history of fighting over these holy places that has involved Christians, Jews, and Muslims to this day.

Visiting Jerusalem and walking where Jesus walked can be a powerful spiritual experience. Spending time in Gethsemane or going up the temple steps is like stepping into history and can provide a moving sense of what it must have been like for Jesus. Jerusalem indeed provides a tangible grounding for faith, but Jesus’s own teaching and example encourage us to look beyond the stones and to see and seek the things that make for peace. ☩

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²¹ Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.28–29, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, ANF IV, <https://tinyurl.com/tvkcotd>.

²² Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.33: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, NPNF II, <https://tinyurl.com/vfnjl7a>. Perhaps the “prediction” refers to Rev 21:2.