

This is more an allegory about how he himself was rejected by the chief priests and scribes. All three synoptic authors state that it was recognised as such by them adding fuel to their motives for killing him



- The attempts of the Jewish religious hierarchy to catch Jesus out with:
  - the question about tribute to Caesar
  - the Sadducees' question about resurrection and whose wife a woman will be who married seven brothers
  - the question about the greatest commandment
- Jesus puts the Pharisees on the defensive with his question about whether the Messiah can really be called the Son of David
- Jesus' castigation of the Pharisees and Scribes, with Matthew in particular (ch.23) presenting Jesus' seven fold indictment of them for their hypocrisy and vanity.
- Jesus' prophecy of the persecution of his followers
- Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.
- The future coming of the Son of Man

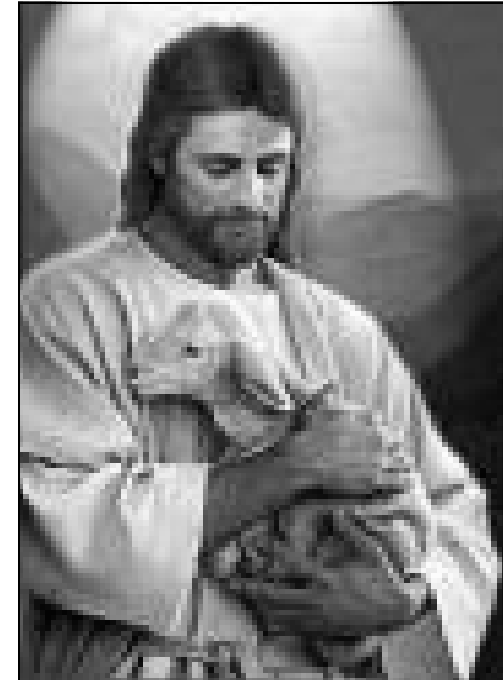
In addition, Matthew (ch.21) and Mark (ch.11) record the parable of the barren fig tree as an example of faith and the power of prayer. Matthew has additional material but its placement in this period is unlikely to be accurate given the consistency demonstrated above.

## Jesus a Challenge to the Religious Authorities

Jesus' actions in the Temple were a direct challenge to the Chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees. It is as if Jesus wanted to provoke a reaction from them. But this was not what the people expected. They wanted Jesus to initiate some kind of uprising to restore the Davidic kingdom, not for him to preach against their religious leaders. The tension felt in the gospels between Jesus and the Pharisees in particular is of a different kind to the original drama of his entry into Jerusalem. Once that initial excitement had passed the people would have felt deflated and disappointed by Jesus. The time had become ripe for his death.

# Jesus in the Gospels

## 16. The Importance of Palm Sunday

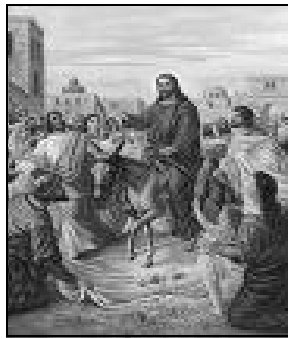


## Questions For Reflection

1. Why did Jesus ensure he entered Jerusalem on a donkey?
2. What was the main content of Jesus' teaching in that final week?
3. What is the significance of the parable of the Wicked Tenants?

## Jesus Prepares to Enter Jerusalem

The synoptic gospels describe how Jesus, when he approached Bethphage and Bethany by the Mount of Olives, sent ahead two disciples to get a donkey for him. There are only slight variations in the Gospels (Mtt.21// Mk.11//Lk.19), and it is clear that Jesus had already made preparations for his entry, presumably with other disciples who lived in the village.



Matthew, intent on showing Jesus fulfilling OT prophecies to the letter (Zc.9), describes the disciples collecting a donkey **and** a colt, with Jesus riding on both. Mark and Luke state that the two disciples were challenged when they went to collect the donkey ‘by some men standing there, why are you untying the colt?’ (Mark), ‘the owners said why are you untying it?’ (Luke). The degree of detail given supports the view that this event was subsequently recognised by the disciples as very important. Jesus was undertaking a prophetic Messianic act.



John’s Gospel does not give this degree of detail. In fact, he states that Jesus ‘found a young donkey’, but he too (ch.12) describes the glorious entry into Jerusalem, noting that another reason the crowd came to see Jesus was because of the sign he had given with the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

That the entry into Jerusalem had special significance can be gauged by the response it engendered in the people, placing their cloaks and palms on the road in front of Jesus and singing the psalm (Ps.118) of Messianic praise. Mark and Luke make it explicit that the people took him to be coming as king ‘blessed is **the coming kingdom** of David our father’ and ‘blessed is he who is coming **as king** in the name of the Lord’. Luke adds the detail that the Pharisees asked Jesus to stop the crowd making this claim. Jesus, however, gives support for the adulation ‘if these keep silent, the stones will cry out’.

It is clear that Jesus is making an open statement that he is the expected Messiah. This contrasts with the other occasions when he chose to avoid being declared Messiah (Jn.6) and told his disciples to keep it secret (Mtt.16 and 17).



## Jesus’ Cleansing of the Temple

The drama of the entry into Jerusalem is maintained in Matthew and Luke with Jesus immediately going to the Temple and expelling the money changers. Mark, however, loses the momentum of the occasion and simply describes Jesus surveying the Temple before returning to Bethany. Mark states that the expulsion of the money changers took place the next day. John’s Gospel does not place it at this time at all, instead recording it at the outset of Jesus’ ministry (Jn.2). This is unlikely as it would have led to Jesus’ arrest, as he was not then a famous figure. It is more likely that Matthew and Luke are correct. Jesus’ acclaim from the crowd would have prevented any action against him at the time, and would have intensified the expectation of the crowd about his Messianic intentions.

It is clear, though, that Jesus’ actions were looked on with dismay and anger by the Scribes and Pharisees, and Luke records (ch.19) that they plotted to kill him but lacked a way to do so because of his popularity. John, however, states that the decision to kill Jesus was taken much earlier (Jn.7) after the discourse on the Bread (Jn.6), and there had in fact been two attempts to stone him (Jn.8 and 10), but was given immediate impetus with the miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn.11) ‘it is better for one man to die for the people’.

## Jesus’ Teaching in the Temple

The synoptic gospels portray a consistent description about Jesus’ teaching in the days after his entry into Jerusalem:

- Jesus has his authority questioned by the chief priests and Scribes and answers with a question about the origin of John’s baptism
- The parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mtt.21// Mk.12// Lk.20)