

# Gospel Chronologies, the Scene at the Temple, and the Crucifixion of Jesus

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## I. The Death of Jesus and the Scene at the Temple

The single most solid fact we have about Jesus' life is his death. Jesus was crucified. Thus Paul, the gospels, Josephus, Tacitus: the evidence does not get any better than this.<sup>1</sup> This fact, seemingly simple, implies several others. If Jesus died on a cross, then he died by Rome's hand, and within a context where Rome was concerned about sedition. But against this fact of Jesus' crucifixion stands another, equally incontestable fact: although Jesus was executed as a rebel, none of his immediate followers was. We know from Paul's letters that they survived. He lists them as witnesses to the Resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-5), and he describes his later dealings with some (Galatians 1-2). Stories in the gospels and in Acts confirm this information from Paul.

Good news, bad news. The good news is that we have two firm facts. The bad news is that they pull in different directions, with maximum torque concentrated precisely at Jesus' solo crucifixion. Rome (as any empire) was famously intolerant of sedition. Josephus provides extensive accounts of other popular Jewish charismatic figures to either side of Jesus' lifetime: they were cut down, together with their followers.<sup>2</sup> If Pilate had seriously thought that Jesus were politically dangerous in the way that crucifixion implies, more than Jesus would have died;<sup>3</sup> and certainly the community of Jesus' followers would not have been able to set up in Jerusalem, evidently unmolested by Rome for the six years or so that Pilate remained in office. The implication of Jesus' having died alone is that Pilate did not think that he, or his movement, truly was politically dangerous.

If Pilate knew that Jesus was not dangerous, we have two further questions. Why, then, did he kill Jesus? And why, specifically, by crucifixion? At this juncture most historians, like the gospel narratives that we all ultimately rely on, turn for explanation to the chief priests. Both the Synoptic tradition and John, though very differently, posit priestly initiative behind Jesus' arrest. Secondary support for this view of priestly initiative comes from 1 Thess 2:14-15<sup>4</sup> and from Josephus.<sup>5</sup> Ancillary considerations might support this conjecture, a prime one being that Caiaphas held the office of high priest from 18 to 36 C.E. Presumably he had excellent working relations with whichever prefect was in power. If he wanted a favor — like getting Jesus out of the way — Pilate might have been happy to oblige. Priestly hostility to Jesus also obliquely solves the puzzle, “Why only Jesus?” The priests typically were concerned to minimize bloodshed. Jesus alone is the target of their animosity or concern, so Jesus alone, they tell Pilate, need die. Pilate obliges the priests.

Whence their mortal enmity? On this point, despite surpassingly different, indeed incommensurate, portraits of Jesus, his mission, and his message, most scholars agree: Jesus' action in the Temple court before Passover moved him into the cross-hairs of Jerusalem's priests, and sealed his fate. At this point, the quest for the historical Jesus segues into the quest for the historical action in the Temple. What did Jesus do there, and what had he meant by it?

Known in church tradition as the “Cleansing of the Temple,” Jesus’ disruption in the Temple court had long been seen as his protest against commerce in the Temple precincts. When scholars held this view, they took their cue from the evangelists themselves, who (albeit with variations) presented Jesus as protesting against such activity.

And he entered the Temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the Temple, and he over-turned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. And he taught to them and said, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” (Mark 11:15-18)

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the moneychangers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and the oxen, out of the Temple; and he poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold pigeons, “Take these things away; you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” (John 2:13-16)

It was E.P. Sanders, in Jesus and Judaism, who did most to dissolve this earlier reading.<sup>6</sup> He did so by pointing out that it made no historical sense. The function of Jerusalem’s temple — as indeed of any ancient temple — was to serve as a place to offer sacrifices. Money changing and the provision of suitable offerings were part of the support services offered at the Temple to accommodate pilgrims. Did Jesus then mean to repudiate Temple sacrifice itself? That would have been tantamount to rejecting the better part of the five books of Torah, wherein God had revealed the protocols and purposes of these sacrifices to Israel. If Jesus, by this gesture, were targeting not the support services but some sort of priestly malfeasance that might have stood behind them, no trace of this protest remains either in the gospels (nothing of the sort figures in the accusations against Jesus brought at his “trials”) or in later Christian tradition (Paul, for instance, says nothing of the sort). And finally, on either reconstruction, Jesus would have failed utterly to communicate his message to his earliest followers, who after his death continued, on the evidence, to live in Jerusalem, to worship at the Temple, and to revere the Temple and its cult as a unique privilege granted by God to Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Sanders’ analysis shifted academic discussion from what Jesus (supposedly) said to what he did, namely, overturning the moneychangers’ tables. Interpreters of this scene as a “cleansing” had viewed Jesus’ action through the lens of the spoken lines attributed to him in Mark and in John. Sanders separated the two, focused on deed rather than word, and reinterpreted the action of overturning tables as a symbol of (apocalyptic) destruction. To make his case, he presented an interpretive context of other predictions of the Temple’s destruction and/or restoration culled from the gospels, from other early Christian writings, and from other early Jewish texts composed in the period to either side of Jesus’ lifetime. Sanders then argued that Jesus’ reported gesture, not the evangelists’ various redactional activity around Jesus’ speech, revealed Jesus’ actual meaning. By overturning the tables, said Sanders, Jesus symbolically proclaimed the Temple’s impending destruction. This encoded not a critique of the current Temple, but a prophecy concerning the final Temple. Destruction precedes renewal; the Temple’s re-establishment, the establishment of God’s

kingdom. In brief, argued Sanders, the meaning of Jesus' action, the content of his enacted prophecy, cohered with and reaffirmed the central message of his mission: the Kingdom was at hand.

Other Jesuses soon followed suit. Jesus the existential Galilean hasid (Vermees), Jesus the wandering Jewish Cynic peasant sage (Crossan), Jesus the anti-purity activist (Borg), Jesus the angry critic of racist, nationalist Judaism (Wright): all enacted a prophecy of the Temple's impending destruction. The meaning attached to that destruction varied according to the message of the particular Jesus.<sup>8</sup> That the historical Jesus did enact this scene in the Temple, however, and that he thereby prophesied the Temple's destruction, is, in current scholarship, virtually boilerplate.<sup>9</sup> So too, in scholarly opinion, is the fundamental consequence of Jesus' action: he thereby alarmed and alienated the priests, who saw his prophecy as a threat. Their alienation in turn explains why Jesus died. The initiative for his execution came from the priests. The priests signaled Pilate; and Pilate (for whatever reason — these vary, too) complied.<sup>10</sup>

This new historiographical paradigm has at least two consequences relevant to our present topic. First, by establishing a line that runs straight from the action in the Temple courts to Jesus' death on the cross, it recapitulates the defining elements of Mark's Passion narrative.<sup>11</sup> Second, and again in accord with Mark, scholars focus on an issue that Mark itself dramatically highlights, especially in its depiction of the Sanhedrin "trial": Jesus' identity. As with Mark, so with these scholarly reconstructions: Who or what *Jesus* thought he was fundamentally accounts for why he died.

Putting the matter between Jesus and the priests in this way foregrounds a kind of principled religious disagreement between them. Indeed, some scholars argue explicitly that any plausible reconstruction must posit such a disagreement. "Jesus cannot be separated from his Jewish context," N.T. Wright has opined, "but neither can he be collapsed into it so that he is left without a sharp critique of his [Jewish] contemporaries."<sup>12</sup> John P. Meier holds the existence of such a principled disagreement as one of his five criteria of historicity: "The criterion of Jesus' rejection and execution looks at the larger pattern of Jesus' ministry and asks what words and deeds fit in with and explain his trial and crucifixion. A Jesus whose words and deeds did not threaten or alienate people, especially powerful people, is not the historical Jesus."<sup>13</sup> The Temple scene not only makes Jesus conspicuous, then; it hints at the reasons for Jesus' religious offensiveness to the priests. These reasons have to do specifically with what Jesus thought of himself. "A Jew from the Galilean countryside who presented himself in Jerusalem during the great feasts as a prophet possessing charismatic authority over Law and temple could be assured stiff opposition."<sup>14</sup> "Toward the end of his life, Jesus apparently . . . made symbolic claims to Davidic messiahship."<sup>15</sup>

The priests, in such reconstructions, are the prime movers behind Jesus' death. Alerted by Jesus' gesture, they thereby divine how Jesus sees himself and his own authority. Offended, they arrange his death. Wright, in this connection, explicitly distinguishes Pilate as the "sufficient cause" of Jesus' crucifixion," but the priests as the "necessary cause."<sup>16</sup> Taking note of the pattern of killing the leader without molesting his followers, Meier refines this picture further, correlating Jesus' death to that of John the Baptist: "Antipas had decided . . . that an ounce of prevention by way of execution was worth a pound of cure by way of military action. A single execution — we hear nothing of subsequent persecution, let alone execution, of John's disciples — forestalled a possible uprising at a later date. At a certain point, after increasing tensions each time Jesus visited

Jerusalem during the feasts, and especially after Jesus staged provocative, prophetic acts by his entry into Jerusalem and by his ‘cleansing’ of the temple just before the Passover of A.D. 30, Caiaphas and Pilate adopted the ‘Antipas solution’: cut off the head of the movement with one swift, preemptive blow.”<sup>17</sup>

The problems with Meier’s description help to clarify the problems with Wright’s. The analogue to Antipas’ execution of John – off-stage, separated from any followers, in the socially and politically controlled environment of a prison – would have been a similarly off-stage execution of Jesus. Instead, if modes of executions can be said to have opposites, Pilate did just the opposite. He executed Jesus in public, center-stage, with crowds of enthusiasts in situ. His decision to execute Jesus as he did is precisely the point at which analogies to the Baptizer’s death (pace Meier) break down.

Pilate’s decision, not to execute, but specifically to crucify, remains opaque, if we take the priests as our point of orientation. No amount of religious tension between Jesus and the priests can account for Pilate’s decision to kill Jesus by crucifixion. Priestly involvement on issues of religious principle – vaguely motivated by Jesus’ assertion, somehow, of his own religious identity – might seem to answer the question, Why did Jesus die? But it fails to answer — or even to address — the more specific question, namely, Why was Jesus crucified?<sup>18</sup>

We are so habituated to knowing that Jesus was crucified that we fail to notice how awkwardly that fact fits with the rest of what the gospels relate. If Pilate were simply doing a favor for the priests, he could have disposed of Jesus easily and without fanfare, murdering him by simpler means. (I repeat: Pilate’s actually thinking that Jesus did pose a serious revolutionary threat – the simplest implication of crucifixion – is belied by Jesus’ solo death.) So too with the priests: if for whatever reason they had wanted Jesus dead, no public execution was necessary, and simpler means of achieving their end were readily available.

Further, Jesus’ public death ill accords with the narrative contexts developed in both Mark and John, which each insist that Jesus was so popular with the holiday crowd that he was arrested by stealth. What we know from Josephus further complicates the question. Both priests and prefects or, later, procurators, always had a vested interest in avoiding noisy popular confrontations because, when trouble erupted, such episodes put them, and their positions, at risk.<sup>19</sup> A slow, public execution of an extremely popular figure during a potentially turbulent holiday risked inflaming popular protest. For all these reasons, then, a surreptitious murder— prompted, perhaps, by the priests; effected, quite easily, by Pilate — would make the most sense. Instead, deliberately and despite Jesus’ off-stage arrest,<sup>20</sup> Pilate chose to execute him slowly, flamboyantly, and in public. And then he made no move, at that point or later, against any of Jesus’ followers.

How does thinking with John’s gospel help us to address these difficulties?

## **II. The Temple’s Destruction and Jesus’ Prophecy**

Current scholarly consensus, affirming Mark’s chronology, holds that a) Jesus predicted the Temple’s coming destruction; b) he symbolically enacted this prediction by overturning the tables in the Temple court; c) the priests, construing this prediction as a threat against the Temple, moved

to arrest and execute Jesus and d) on their initiative, Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified. Let's untangle these various threads.

**Did Jesus predict the Temple's destruction?** John Meier, famously meticulous, states in his most recent volume of *A Marginal Jew* that Mark 11:15-17 and John 2:13-17 "narrate [his emphasis] versions of the so-called cleansing . . . which most likely is a symbolic, prophetic action by which Jesus foretells and, in a sense, unleashes the imminent end of the present temple."<sup>21</sup> Pointing to sayings material in Mark, Q, L, and John wherein Jesus prophesies the end of the present Temple, Meier appeals both to multiple attestation and to coherence. These multiply-attested pronouncements about the Temple's destruction, he suggests, establish the historicity of the prediction. Invoking coherence, he then argues that they cast light on the scene at the Temple: "The sayings about the Temple explain the otherwise puzzling prophetic action of Jesus in the temple." In short, he concludes, Jesus really did predict the Temple's destruction, and he specifically enacted his prediction by overturning the tables in the Temple court.

Independent attestation is an essential tool in evaluating historicity. The verses adduced by Meier are these:

(1) **Mark 13:2**: "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

(2) **Mark 14:58**: "We [Mark designates them as false witnesses] heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'"

(3) **Q (Matt 23:38 // Luke 13:34)**: "Behold, your [i.e., Jerusalem's] house is forsaken [and desolate]."

(4) **Luke 19:41-44**: "And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.'"

(5) **John 2:19**: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

To these verses we might add several others: (6) the derision of passers-by at the crucifixion in **Mark 15:29-30**: "Aha! You who would destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!" (7) the accusation against Stephen brought by "false witnesses" in **Acts 6:13-14a**: "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place [=the Temple] and the law; for we have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place;" and (8) the concern evinced by the chief priests and Pharisees gathered at their council in **John 11:48**: "If we let him go on thus [i.e., performing spectacular signs so that many believe in him, vv. 45-47], everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our place [= the Temple] and our nation."

Undeniably, all of these sayings taken together represent some sort of multiply-attested tradition. We might note that those places that name Jesus as the agent of destruction, and that shape the prophecy like a threat, specifically disavow the prediction (Nos. 2, 6, 7, all testimony from “false witnesses”). Straightforward predictions naming no specific agent, in contrast, simply stand (Nos. 1, 3, and 4, which encompasses the entire city, not only the Temple). John names different agents altogether, “the Jews” in one instance (No. 5, where “temple” refers to Jesus’ body) and the Romans (No. 8).

How do we assess the historicity of this tradition specifically with reference to Jesus? Multiple attestation of itself demonstrates not authenticity, but antiquity: a given tradition predates its various manifestations in different witnesses, if those witnesses are independent. What is attested still needs to be critically assessed. Most scholars see traditions about Mary’s virginity at the time of Jesus’ conception, for example, attested independently in both M and L, as evidence for the ways in which early Christians, c. 90 C.E., had begun reading the LXX, not as evidence for the actual sexual status of Jesus’ mother c. 6 B.C.E.<sup>22</sup> Jesus raises the dead both in the Synoptics and in John. Scholars usually do not infer, on the strength of this independent attestation, that such traditions preserve historically true reminiscences of what Jesus of Nazareth actually did, but of what he was thought to have done — a big difference.<sup>23</sup> So too here: What our evidence tells us is that traditions that Jesus predicted or perhaps threatened the temple’s destruction predate their appearance in these various post-destruction Christian texts.

Predate by how much? Do they go back to Jesus of Nazareth? Here again we have to sort through the individual sayings, and also consider the date of composition for this literature generally. Which traditions predate the Temple’s actual destruction in 70? Appeal to criteria of authenticity help, but only to a degree. The predictions-as-threat (Nos. 2,6, and 7), might seem to pass not multiple attestation (Luke displaced the Markan trial saying to Stephen’s “trial” in Acts) so much as embarrassment. Jesus was understood to have threatened the Temple’s destruction. These post-70 writers, who for other reasons hold that Jesus will return, know full well that Jesus himself did not destroy the Temple. Titus did. Their disconfirmed dominical tradition, domesticated by being disowned, therefore might be authentic.<sup>24</sup>

No. 3, the Q-saying, might seem a good candidate, since Q is generally held to have been assembled earlier than Mark, and the putative date of Mark’s composition hovers around 70. But the saying itself, reminiscent of Jeremiah and Lamentations, comes in a context where Jesus delivers a sort of passion prediction, linking the city’s impending rejection of him (it does not want to be gathered under his protective wings) with its own impending destruction. This prediction thus seems after the fact — or, rather, after two facts, that of Jesus’ death c. 30 and after the city’s “death” in 70. No. 4 seems contoured fairly obviously in light of the War, a form of “prediction” that Luke also uses in 21:20 (“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near”). Nos. 2 and 6, from Mark, by invoking “in three days,” explicitly associate the Temple’s destruction/rebuilding with Jesus’ crucifixion/resurrection. No. 5, from John, minus the motif of the three days, does so explicitly. Here, the destruction/rebuilding of the Temple symbolizes (for those who know) the central Christological drama.

Can we realistically set these sayings, which broadcast such pellucid knowledge of Jesus’ death or death-and-resurrection and of the city’s siege and/or destruction, within Jesus’ own

lifetime? They state so clearly what had already happened by the time these texts were written, or at least what the early church believed: Jesus had been crucified; the Temple had been destroyed; God, through Rome, had punished Jerusalem's Jews for their rejection of Christ; the true temple, Christ's body, had been raised in three days, and so on. Dissimilarity, too, is an imperfect criterion for establishing authenticity; but surely, at some point, it must come into play.

Of those sayings on our list, then, only Mark 13:2 and John 11:48, relatively unadorned by later Christological concerns, have the best chance of fitting back into a context around the year 30. The Johannine passage has the added virtue of attributing historically plausible sentiments to its characters. Indeed, like much else in John's handling of issues around Jesus' passion, this scene, unlike its Synoptic counterparts, is surprisingly unfreighted by theological concerns. The feared agent in the potential destruction, however, is not Jesus, but Rome.

Mark 13:2, likewise theologically spare and untethered in any obvious way to later events or theological tropes, may be authentic. Jesus names no agent, but his pronouncement is clear. In favor of the authenticity of Mark 13:2, in a general way, three considerations (all carefully rehearsed and argued by Sanders). First: Jewish apocalyptic literature to either side of Jesus' lifetime also speaks of the current Temple's destruction and occasionally of its replacement by a superior, final Temple. The existence of this motif enhances the possibility that Jesus, preaching the coming Kingdom, may also have spoken in these terms. Second: in Josephus, we have secure evidence of an irrefutably genuine prophecy of the Temple's and the city's destruction by another Jesus — Jesus son of Ananias — in the year 62 CE (B.J. 6.5.3 §300-309). So: not all predictions come after the fact. Third: Mark's prediction is not accurate in its details, the way inauthentic, post facto prophecies, because they can be, often are. In point of fact, not every stone was thrown down: those of the retaining wall supporting the Temple Mount did and do continue atop each other.

Of the longer list of sayings, few emerge as strongly plausible candidates for a pre-70 date of origin. Standard operating procedure when assessing a text's period of composition, further, tends to diminish confidence in a pre-destruction date. Ordinarily, prophecies contained in an ancient text provide scholars with a rough a terminus a quo, which is to say, non ante quem. Daniel's "abomination of desolation" is the clue to his writing not earlier than Antiochus IV's placement of his statue in the Temple. By the same reasoning, the Temple's destruction — linked as it is in so many ways in these stories to Jesus' death, or death and resurrection, and/or to the city's devastation — would itself be the source of evangelical "predictions." If the prophecy of destruction, articulated clearly in Mark 13, is indeed after the fact, then the likelihood of that same prophecy's being encoded in Jesus' Temple action — obscured by the evangelists, revealed in our days by scholarly decoding — diminishes accordingly.

So far I have framed the question of Jesus' prediction, his action, and whether his action encoded his prediction, in terms of the stories and sayings in the gospels and Acts. Straining these texts through the mesh of our various criteria of authenticity, I have argued, leaves us with no residuum securely datable to pre-70 — nor, indeed, to c. pre-30. But before we leave this question, we still have one more source to consider: Paul.

Paul's letters antedate the gospels by one or two generations. He is the only writer we have who unquestionably lived before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. He knew Peter, John, and probably others of the original disciples (Gal 1:18, 2:9). His instructions to his gentile congregations on the impending arrival of God's kingdom — associated, in this post-resurrection phase of the

movement, with Jesus' glorious second coming — are a vivid and vital part of his gospel. The eschatological trajectory, which we can trace from the Baptizer through Jesus to those of his followers who see Jesus raised, fundamentally propels Paul's message.

Here is the problem. If Jesus had made such a spectacular prophecy (Mark 13:2) or had enacted it at such a key moment in his mission (Mark 11:15-18, as decoded by moderns); if Paul were colleagues with the men who must themselves have known that prophecy (they had been with Jesus in Jerusalem); and if Paul himself throughout his letters specifically proclaimed the signs of the coming Kingdom, then why does Paul evince no knowledge of Jesus' prediction?

We have only seven letters from Paul. He was an active apostle for close to thirty years. Clearly he dictated more than seven letters in all that time. The greater part of his correspondence is lost — among which, for all we know, his definitive description of Jesus' action in the Temple's court and prediction of the Temple's destruction.

Yet in the letters that we do have, Paul's eschatological teaching represents tradition that, he himself claims, goes back to Jesus and to earliest paradosis.<sup>25</sup> In the extant letters, where he instructs his congregations on what to look for as they await the returning Christ, Paul could easily and naturally have mentioned Jesus' teaching about the Temple — had he known it. Somewhere after 1 Thess 4:15, "For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord" — that first the Temple will be destroyed as a sign that Christ is about to return (cf. Mark 13). Or at Philippians 4:5: "The Lord is at hand! Once this Temple is no more, as he said, it will be rebuilt in glory, at the End of the Age." Or somewhere in 1 Corinthians 15, where he reviews the sequence of events at the End. Or in Romans. In chapter 8, where he talks about the transformation of the universe, and the signs that the saved await as they groan. After chapter 11, when all Israel and the full number of the Gentiles are saved. In chapter 15, when he speaks of the offering of the Gentiles that he is about to take to Jerusalem as if he were in priestly service "to this earthly Temple which, as you know, will soon be no more, having been replaced by the glorious final Temple of God." But Paul says nothing of the sort. Anywhere.

Taken by itself, this argument, ex silentio, is pretty flimsy. Historical evidence survives through happenstance from this period of the movement, and we should not make too much of Paul's "silence" on this particular point.

But neither, I think, should we ignore it. There are plenty of things in Paul's letters that the later gospels do not have, and there are plenty of things that the gospels say about Jesus that Paul does not have. But the eschatological traditions in Paul are his clearest, strongest link to the earlier movement around Jesus in both its pre- and post-resurrection phases. It was on the basis of his conviction that God's kingdom approached — which he shared with the original apostles and, *mutatis mutandis*, with Jesus himself — that Paul (and other Jews like him) dedicated himself to a gentile mission. It was on the basis of the movement's success in the Diaspora in turning gentiles from idols to the God of Israel that Paul held Jesus to be God's "son . . . descended from David according to the flesh," (Rom 1:4: 15:8-13).<sup>26</sup> If Jesus had predicted the Temple's destruction as a sign of the End of the Age, and if Paul himself also speaks of such signs — including those which he insists that he has "by the word of the Lord" — then it is at least odd, I think, that he evinces no knowledge whatsoever of Jesus' prophecy.

If this prophecy originates after 70, of course, then it is not odd at all.



### III: Temple and Messiah

**What did Jesus do on the Temple Mount, and what did it mean?** Mark and John both seem to have inherited a story about Jesus' overturning the tables of the moneychangers. They place the incident at radically different points in their respective stories, and each gives Jesus different lines to speak. For these reasons, I assume their independence. (That is, I do not think that John read Mark and then decided to disconnect Mark's story about Jesus' action from events in Jesus' final week, bump the episode forward, change Jesus' speech — though not Jesus' point — and then heighten the drama by adding stampeding quadrupeds.) Mark's Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11; John's Jesus, stern and uncharacteristically direct, says simply, "Take these things away. You shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." Though each evangelist glossed Jesus' speech differently, both saw in the gesture the same meaning: Jesus condemned getting and spending in the Temple.

Sanders has argued — I think definitively — that the meaning the evangelists give to this episode is impossible to attribute to Jesus of Nazareth. We then have two historical possibilities. Either the story of Jesus' action is authentic, and each evangelist independently misinterpreted it, with individual variations, in exactly the same way. Or, the story, despite being independently attested in Mark and John, is inauthentic. That is, its origins are to be sought not in Jesus' mission, but in the aftermath of the War, when early Christians, like other Jews, attempted to explain how God could permit so great a catastrophe.

I do not think that Jesus predicted the Temple's destruction. I doubt the authenticity of the action attributed to him in the Temple. But even if the traditions of Jesus' predicting the Temple's destruction were authentic, this still would not help us to discern and establish the meaning of Jesus' action in the Temple court — even if that event, too, were authentic. Our two evangelical witnesses make this point for us. Evidently Jesus' action (saying that it happened) was so obscure that they, its most ancient publicists, completely misunderstood his meaning. Why else would they have so misconstrued it?

If Jesus actually had overturned the temple's tables, and if he actually had thereby intended to symbolize its destruction, then the evangelists — and the human links in the chain of transmission that brought them this story — completely missed his point. Ostensibly inheriting two authentic predictions of the Temple's destruction, Jesus' action and Jesus' saying, they understood only one of them. They thereby missed as well their opportunity to have Jesus' action state what they otherwise put forthrightly into his mouth, namely, that the Temple's days were numbered. This prompts the question: If the significance of the gesture were so opaque and confusing to these later Christians — and especially to Mark, for whom the destruction of the Temple is a major theme — how clearly could the crowds of Jesus' contemporaries have understood him? And how, then, would the priests have become involved?

This connection between Jesus' action (as a prophecy of destruction) and the priests' reaction fuels most of the recent reconstructions of this part of Jesus' mission. It rests on Mark. Thinking with our literary evidence, as I attempted to do above, brings us to an impasse: we cannot settle questions of authenticity. How then can we close the gap between Jesus and the priests? Let us consider these traditions within a different sort of interpretive context. What was the physical environment within which Jesus' putative action took place?

The Temple court, in Jesus' day, was enormous. The wall surrounding Herod's man-made mesa ran almost nine-tenths of a mile. It enclosed an area of approximately 169,000 square feet. Sanders, in his vivid description, translates the square footage of this space into more visualizable units: into this area twelve soccer fields, stands and all, could be fit. When necessary (as during the great pilgrimage holidays especially Passover), it could accommodate perhaps as many as 400,000 pilgrims.<sup>27</sup> Around the perimeter of the outermost courts, protected from sun or rain by the stoa or the Royal Portico, the tables of those who sold could be found.

The very size of this place shrinks the significance of Jesus' putative gesture. And the precise circumstances of that gesture — during the days of mandatory purification between the eighth and fourteen of Nisan, in the week before the feast — makes the odds of its having a disturbing impact even less likely. Our visual imagination hampers us here. Gustav Doré set the stage for later cinematographers, and we effortlessly and customarily “see” this scene with dramatic clarity.

A better visual analogy might be Bruegel's Fall of Icarus – or Where's Waldo? These courts, in this season, during this particular week, would have been jammed with humanity, tens of thousands of people. Imagine Jesus walking over to some of the vendors who sat at the edges of this huge area, and overturning their tables. Now ask yourself: How many people would have been able to see him? Those in his retinue and those standing immediately around him. But in the congestion and confusion of the holiday crowd, how many could have seen what was happening, say, twenty feet away? Fifty feet? Shrunken by the size of the Temple's outer court, muffled by the density of the pilgrim crowds, Jesus' gesture — had he made it — would simply have been swallowed up. Hermeneutically inaccessible (on the evidence of the evangelists), Jesus' gesture would have visually inaccessible as well. Why, then, on the basis of this gesture, would the priests worry?

**Who did Jesus think he was, and what did he think he was doing?** The next point along the Markan trajectory is the questioning before the high priest. Various historians, following Mark, will argue that Jesus' gesture provided some sort of clue (whether to the high priest, to the historian, or both) about what Jesus thought about himself. Often, it turns out, Jesus is revealed to have thought of himself as the messiah — a messiah with a difference, but some sort of messiah nonetheless. Interpretations of his action in the Temple are pressed into service to explain how he understands this role. Once the high priest realizes how Jesus conceives his own mission and message, Jesus' fate is sealed: Pilate, and the cross, are the next stops on the way.

The problem with any of these speculations is not their plausibility or implausibility. Some reconstructions are more plausible, others (much) less so. Trying to figure out how Jesus looked at himself is a normal and legitimate historical question, no less or more exotic than trying to answer similar questions about other figures from the past. The problem with the introduction of this question at this juncture in his story, however, is the way that it confuses and distracts from the effort to attain a plausible answer to the question, Why did Pilate have Jesus (alone) crucified?

This entire historiographical construction is driven fundamentally by the chronology of Mark's gospel. That chronology in turn is driven by Mark's dramatic revelation of Jesus' christological identity — dramatically foreshadowed from chapter 8 on; expressed with high artistry in his presentation of Jesus' Sanhedrin trial. Christology is a central and appropriate concern of

Christian theology. I think, both as an historian of Christian origins and as a student of Christian theology, that historical Jesus research can and should matter to the way that modern theologians do their business.<sup>28</sup> But Jesus' christological self-identity – if he even ever had one – cannot account for his public, political crucifixion. If we want to understand why he died as he did, we have to look elsewhere — which means, we have to free ourselves from the dramatic power of Mark's presentation. Here, thinking with John can help.

1. **John's narrative chronology**. Scholars, in a general way, have approvingly noted from time to time that John's presentation of Jesus' making frequent trips back and forth to Jerusalem seems more likely than his going to Jerusalem, as an adult, only once for his final Passover. Various efforts are occasionally made to combine the two chronologies, Mark's and John's, so that one can be accommodated to the other. Some of these efforts occasionally correspond to more ambitious arguments — famously, those of Dodd and of Robinson — that urge the superiority or greater antiquity of particular traditions that John preserves.

My argument here is much simpler. I have little reason to think that John's chronology in its details is any more historically accurate than Mark's. But the sort of itinerary suggested by John helps to make sense of what else we know about Jesus. Pilate killed Jesus alone, and none of his followers. This fact implies that Pilate knew that Jesus was not dangerous in any way that a Roman prefect would worry about. Jesus was not advocating armed revolt, he was not fomenting tax rebellion, he was not encouraging resistance, defiance, or revolution. Jesus was not dangerous, and Pilate knew it. The men around Jesus also were not dangerous, and Pilate knew this, too. The easiest way to explain Pilate's acquaintance with Jesus' politically non-threatening message is the way that John's gospel supplies. Jesus had repeatedly gone up to Jerusalem for the holidays — precisely when the prefect would have been there too — and proclaimed his message of the coming Kingdom. He did so where he (naturally) would have found the largest audience: in the precincts of the Temple (cf. John 18:20).

Thanks to Jesus' multiple holiday journeys to Jerusalem, Pilate — and for that matter, the priests also — would have known the content and tenor of Jesus' message well before the trip to the city that proved to be his last. This explains why only Jesus died. But this also means that, when Jesus did die, neither his message itself nor his view of himself can have been the precipitating factor leading to his crucifixion.

2. **John's Christology** is so theologically developed, and it so monopolizes his story, that it, more than any other single factor, has prevented John's being regarded as a valuable source for reconstructing the historical Jesus. But by offering us the story that he does, John provides us with a historiographically useful example to meditate on. On the issues of Christology and the reasons for Jesus' death, John offers a reverse image of Mark, whose reticent, theologically closed-mouthed hero ends up dying on a cross precisely for his own Christology.<sup>29</sup> John's Christologically-vocal Jesus, by contrast, dies for reasons of state.

John's chief priests fear that Rome, spurred by Jesus' mounting popular following, will take aggressive action against the nation. John's Jesus has no Sanhedrin trial, just a spare interview with Annas, who questions him “about his disciples and his teaching,” (18:19). The reasons provided by the Fourth Evangelist for his priests' anxieties, and the depiction he gives of his protagonist's hearing are, by contrast to the Synoptics, extremely non-dramatic, parsimonious and plain. They are

intrinsically more realistic. This does not make them *eo ipso* more historical: verisimilitude by itself does not and cannot establish historicity. But it does mean that, on these issues – and specifically on the irrelevance of Jesus’ theological identity to the priests’ concern – John gives a more plausible picture.

John’s hypertrophied Christology floats far above his narrative while accounting for none of it. His Jesus and his priests do not even discuss it. Jesus’ view of himself causes absolutely no concern to the priests. In brief: John’s gospel demonstrates the irrelevance — or perhaps better, the sheer unnecessary — of Christology as a factor in accounting, in a historically credible manner, for the priests’ involvement in Jesus’ death. The point is made compositionally by the way that John’s very high Christology contributes so little to his plot (such as it is). And the same point is made narratively, by the way that John positions Jesus’ action in the Temple at the very beginning of his story.

We could see the same thing by looking directly at Mark. Mark uses the action in the Temple to set up the Sanhedrin trial which in turn sets up the dramatic Christological confession, thence Pilate, thence death. By having John as a counter-story to think with, we see that much more clearly how plot-driven the Markan denouement is.<sup>30</sup> We see how Mark uses Jesus’ action in the Temple to bring the priests on stage. And we see how the beautifully-crafted, historically impossible Sanhedrin trial serves chiefly as a dramatic vehicle for Mark’s Christological proclamation. John helps us to see — if we are taken in by Mark’s artistic power — that Jesus’ own messianic identity simply cannot account for his public, Roman execution, nor can it provide a realistic reason why the priests would want Jesus out of the way.

What, then, of the historical Jesus? How does either of these stories, written some forty to sixty years after his death, help us to understand what happened in Jerusalem during Passover season around the year 30? Here I would turn our attention to an event in Jesus’ last week mentioned by both Mark and John: his entrance into the city not later than 8 Nisan, the week before the feast. Both evangelists present Jesus as *fêted* into Jerusalem, acclaimed in messianic terms by enthused pilgrims. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!” (Mark 11:9-10). “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13). Then, again according both gospels, something curious happens: Nothing.

Why not? How could any reasonably competent prefect let such a messianic demonstration pass? Why aren’t the priests on alert? Sanders has proposed one answer: the demonstration, looming large in the gospel stories, may actually have been inconspicuous, quiet, and small. “I can only suggest that Jesus’ demonstration was quite modest;” “Perhaps only a few disciples unostentatiously dropped their garments in front of an ass, while only a few quietly murmured ‘Hosanna’.”<sup>31</sup> The demonstration is so quiet that Jesus, so to speak, slips in under the radar. For Sanders, the Temple action is what alerts the priests, and begins the final stages of the drama.

Perhaps. With no better evidence, I propose a different argument.<sup>32</sup> Once the floating story of Jesus’ overturning the tables in the Temple court is bracketed out, the same narrative structure for Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem emerges in both Mark and John. In both, Jesus progresses from the Triumphal Entry (where he is hailed as the harbinger of the messianic kingdom) to teaching, unimpeded, in and around the Temple in the days before the feast, to his secret arrest (he is so

popular, claim the evangelists, that the priests cannot risk arresting him openly) and thence to his death. Let us take the Triumphal Entry at face value, as the evangelists present it: a joyous, public, eminently visible demonstration of enthusiasm. The crowd of holiday pilgrims loudly endorses both the message (“the Kingdom of our father David that is coming”) and its messenger, Jesus (who “comes in the name of the Lord”).

Why do Pilate and Caiaphas not act? Because they knew from all his other trips to the city that Jesus perennially proclaimed the Kingdom, and that he expected God, not armies, to establish it. In brief, he’s harmless and they know it. So, even after the Triumphal Entry — an unprecedented show of enthusiasm: pilgrims have not acted like this before — Jesus proceeds, as he always does, to teach to the holiday crowds in the Temple. Thus far, business as usual.

But within days Jesus will be dead on a cross: not business as usual. How is this particular trip up to Jerusalem different? Those who follow the Markan chronology will answer, This is the year that Jesus performs his prophetic action in the Temple, which both announces the Temple’s doom and, at the same moment, tips off the priests to his religiously offensive view of himself. I have argued against this reconstruction on several grounds: a) insecurity about whether Jesus ever predicted the Temple’s destruction; b) uncertainty about the significance and impact of the gesture at the temple, even if he had made it; c) dissatisfaction with the major question it does not and cannot answer: Why death by crucifixion?

At this point, I think that we should turn and face where the cross in any place points us to: this same holiday crowd in Jerusalem. Most scholars attribute to the authorities a fear that Jesus’ activities might result in riot: that concern accounts for his death. I agree. The precise reasons for this riot remain murky — though, again, Jesus’ perceived threat to the Temple, enacted prophetically in its courts, is often mobilized to fill in the blanks. But why would such a gesture encourage or initiate riot? Because Jesus’ prophecy of destruction would upset the crowd? Offend them? Inspire them to some sort of revolt against Rome? And if the precipitating factor were Jesus’ (religiously offensive) construction of his own (messianic?) identity, the priests and Pilate could have disabused him of his views simply by murdering him, thereby avoiding the attention of the labile public and, thus, any risk to their own positions.

If we face the crowd, rather than try to peer into the heads of the priests or of Jesus himself, we will start our reconstruction not at the Temple mount, but on the road up to Jerusalem around the 8<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. A straight line connects the mood and acclamation of the Triumphal Entry to the titulus on the cross. The identification of Jesus as “King of Israel” unites the two. But, if Jesus, whenever he came to the city, had proclaimed the coming Kingdom, why then do all these things happen now?

Perhaps, this particular year, on this particular holiday, Jesus proclaimed this Passover as the last before the coming of the Kingdom. The acclaim as he went into the city, the traditions about his resurrection that form immediately after his death, his apostles’ decision to remain, after all, in Jerusalem: all these point to an extreme intensity of eschatological expectation.<sup>33</sup> They prompt the question: Had Jesus, for this Passover, shifted his proclamation of the Kingdom from “soon” (Mark’s hē basileia ēggiken) to “now”?

If so, who would have elided Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom to an identification of Jesus himself as its king? Jesus himself is one possibility, though in my opinion an unlikely one: the traditions in the gospels, despite the evangelists own convictions, are too reticent on this score. His immediate followers? Again, I think this unlikely: Jesus' charismatic mission would give them plenty of reason to think of him as a prophet, little to think of him as a king. And, as Sanders has pointed out, all the evangelists thought of Jesus as "Christ"/messiah/king, each makes his claim differently, and none can cite secure tradition. Had Jesus himself or his earliest followers in his lifetime claimed the title or role, however he or they might have modified its traditional meanings, the evangelists would have had an easier time making their case.<sup>34</sup>

The most likely candidates for those who identified Jesus as a Davidic sort of messiah on his last trip to Jerusalem are the pilgrim crowds. They are the least familiar with Jesus' movement. They are, at this penultimate hour, caught up in expectation of the Kingdom. They are also the ones least socialized to the pacifist tenor of his message. They provide the numbers for the crowds milling about the city when "sedition is most apt to break out," (B.J. 1.4.3 §88).

They also – and they alone – account most precisely for Jesus' mode of death. Had Pilate just wanted to do Caiaphas a favor, a simple murder would have been adequate, and much easier. Had both Caiaphas and Pilate only been concerned to convince Jesus, or Jesus and his inner circle, that his messianic self-designation — wed, as they knew full well, to absolutely no sort of practical seditious intent or plan — was wrong, the same solution obtains. Had they only wanted to silence a popular figure whose preaching might lead to riot, then a quiet, off-stage execution — exactly like Antipas' move against the Baptizer — would have risked less, and sufficed perfectly well.

But instead, Jesus was crucified. Crucifixion has a different social semiotics. Crucifixion is crowd control. It presupposes — indeed, it requires — a watching crowd as its context and as its political raison d'être. No audience, no reason to bother. For that very same reason, it risked riot, if Jesus were so popular (Mark 14:2; John 12:19). But it was an elegant, simple and powerful way to disabuse the crowds gathered for the holiday of their burgeoning messianic convictions. Jesus of Nazareth, Pilate announced emphatically though the cross, was not the King of the Jews.

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I am clean out of evidence, and have been for a while. I offer the above argument in the effort to get us to think a little more critically about the new academic orthodoxy regarding Jesus and the Temple. I urge us to be a little more aware of the degree to which we have introjected Mark and his concerns, specifically his concern about Jesus' messianic identity, into our historical reconstructions. And I want to argue that John is useful historically, in many different ways, when trying to assemble the bits and pieces we have into a plausible picture of Jesus of Nazareth.

Further: using John's chronology — or, better, a John-like chronology — rather than that offered by the Synoptics can also help us to work with all the other data that we have about and from the early post-Resurrection movement, especially in ways that can lead us, albeit obliquely, back into their pre-history in Jesus' mission. In particular, thinking with John can caution us on the consequences of appealing to Galilean regionalism and to non-eschatological kerygmas when we look at this earliest period. John's Jerusalem-centered mission, oft-disregarded, has the undeniable virtue of conforming to what else we know about the post-resurrection Christian movement. It too was Jerusalem-centered. Jesus and his closest followers may indeed have hailed chiefly from the

Galilee, but once the community reassembled after the trauma of Jesus' death, convinced of his resurrection and impending return, the capitol became their home (Gal 1:18, 2:1; Acts passim; Josephus *A.J.* 20.9.1 §200). Within just five years of Jesus' death, evidence abounds for the widespread and rapid dissemination of his mission in its new phase. *Ekklēsiai* appear in the villages of Samaria and Judea as well as in the Galilee (Acts 8:1-4; 9:31; Gal 1:22; cf. John 11:18 Bethany in Judea); in Lydda and, on the coast, Joppa (Acts 9:32, 42) and Caesarea (Acts 10); farther north, in the Syrian cities of Damascus (Gal 1:17; Acts 9:10ff.) and Antioch (Gal 2:11; Acts 11:20). For the movement's first generation, Jerusalem remained the hub; and it was from Jerusalem that they fanned out to bring "the word of the Lord" to the rest of Israel, and indeed to the world (Rom 15:19).

Put simply: the whole — Jesus' mission and message — is greater than its parts. Speculating about some sort of rural Galilean quintessence to the movement (whether pre- or post-crucifixion) only makes what we know to have been the case that much harder to account for. And what we know is that Galileans routinely made the trip to Jerusalem for the holidays, and that the Temple (as poor Petronius discovered) was of no less concern to them than to their Judean cousins.<sup>35</sup> What we know — implied even in Mark; stated but not recounted in Luke; broadcast by John — is that Jesus during his mission had taught in Jerusalem more than once; I think, probably repeatedly.<sup>36</sup> What we know is that, shortly after his death, his movement settled in Jerusalem and spread quickly in both regions, in Judea and the Galilee, in town and country both.

Mark's narrative chronology narrows the scope of Jesus' mission even as it reduces his ambit. It reinforces and geographically expresses Mark's peculiar Christological theme of concealment (in the Galilee) and revelation (in Jerusalem). Looked at in this light, Jesus' itinerary in Mark ranks least among the historically reliable data to be gleaned from that gospel. John's chronology, too, betrays evidence of theological shaping, especially in the ways that certain of his Jesus' speeches or acts resonate with a setting in Jerusalem. But in presenting a Jesus who routinely preaches to all Israel from the Temple during the great pilgrimage holidays, the Fourth Gospel articulates narratively what we have good reason to think was the case historically, namely, that Jesus of Nazareth had a broad conception of his own mission. Notoriously inattentive to the sequence of Jesus' movements, monopolized by its very high, very non-eschatological Christology, the Fourth Gospel allows us to glimpse a shape to Jesus' mission that coheres precisely with those eschatological images, patterns, and behaviors still visible in so much of our other data from the Synoptics and from Paul.

Finally, by thinking with John, we can begin to be more cautious in our use of Mark on the specific issue of Jesus' supposed action in the Temple. Mark's version of the Temple scene has been pressed into service — ingeniously, variously, all-but-universally — to explain how and why the priests became involved in Jesus' arrest, and why they call for his death. Focused on Mark's scene, scholars have generated elaborate theories about Jesus' supposed messianic identity, and about the priests' uncanny ability to divine it from his supposed prophetic act. The scene's dramatic power has cloaked its own anachronism and its practical implausibility, while sponsoring the same in diverse scholarly reconstructions. And while driving us to construct some sort of primary religious disagreement over Christology between Jesus and the priests, it has diverted us from noticing the fundamental oddness of the very event that it is mobilized to explain: Jesus' death on the cross.

The Synoptic tradition is no less theologically contoured than John's. John is no less historically valuable and useful than the Synoptics. The obligation to sort through both traditions, to discern what is useful historically, fundamentally rests with us. Their utility is determined not by the evangelists' concerns (which were never and could never be historical in the ways that ours are), but by ours. By framing our questions around what we do know and what we can know, we can learn more from them, and can assess what they tell us. My fundamental plea is not that we adapt an either/or approach, with John now favored over Mark. We need both Mark and John; and we need to be shrewd about how we use them. Together, their two quite different perspectives create the sort of stereoscopy by which we might glimpse, emerging from the later evangelical traditions about him, a three-dimensional image of the historical Jesus, and a clearer view of why he died on a cross.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, A.J. 18.3.3 §64; Tacitus, Annals 15.44. See discussion with copious bibliography in John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 1.56-92.

<sup>2</sup> John the Baptizer's death does not conform to this pattern. Antipas arrested him, imprisoned him, and executed him: all fairly orderly. See Meier, A Marginal Jew (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 3. 625. John does not seem to have amassed a standing group of followers: People went to him but did not linger; other charismatics amassed large groups of followers. See E.P. Sanders, The Historical Figure of Jesus (London: Penguin Books, 1993); also Paula Fredriksen, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) 190f., 244.

<sup>3</sup> I have no reason to question that men other than Jesus were executed at the same time that he was (e.g., the two lēstai of Mark 15:27 and parr.). But these men were not part of Jesus' circle.

<sup>4</sup> If the Ioudaioi who "killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets" are a) the priests and b) not a post-Pauline interpolation. I do not like theories of interpolation, but have yet to find a compelling response to the points raised by B. Pearson, "1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A deutero-Pauline Interpolation," in Harvard Theological Review (1971) 79-94.

<sup>5</sup> AJ 18.3.3 §63-64, if the protoi are the chief priests.

<sup>6</sup> E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 61-90.

<sup>7</sup> On the absence of criticisms about the way the priests ran the Temple in early Christian tradition, Sanders, Historical Figure, 255-56. On the Temple as God's earthly dwelling-place, Matt 23:21; Rom 9:4 (in Paul's Jewish Greek, δόξα rests on the Hebrew kavod); specifically on cult, loc. cit. λατρεία/avodah. On Paul's entirely normative appreciation of the Temple and its cult generally, Paula Fredriksen, "Ultimate Reality in Ancient Christianity: Christ, Blood Sacrifice, and Redemption," in Ultimate Realities: A Study of the Comparison of Religious Ideas, ed. Robert C. Neville (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 2000) 62-68; on that of Jesus and the early movement, Meier, Marginal Jew 3. 498-502.



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<sup>8</sup> The subsequent use to which other scholars have put Sanders' insight, and the meanings that they have given to Jesus' action as a prophetic enactment of impending destruction, alas, have let the old "cleansing" argument in the back door: see Paula Fredriksen, "What you See is What you Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus," in Theology Today (1995) 81-91; eadem, "Did Jesus Oppose the Purity Laws?" in Bible Review (June, 1995) 94-97.

<sup>9</sup> Though cf. Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple," CBQ 51 (1989) 237-70.

<sup>10</sup> The priests construe Jesus' action as a prophetic threat to the temple, and this "seals his fate," Sanders, Historical Figure, 265; more vaguely, Geza Vermes, The Religion of Jesus the Jew (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) x; John Dominic Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994) 132-133, also vague; N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 493-611.

<sup>11</sup> So too R.J. Miller, "Historical Method and the Deeds of Jesus: Test Case of the Temple Demonstration," in Foundations & Facts Forum 8 (1992) 5-30.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, Jesus and Victory 98, my emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> Meier, A Marginal Jew 2.6. Same point, made slightly differently, in 1. 177 and in 3.11-12. "Execution" points toward Roman agency in Meier's formulation, but "rejection" implies the priests and thus, more broadly, religious differences.

<sup>14</sup> Meier, Marginal Jew 3. 618, my emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Meier, Marginal Jew 3. 634.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, Jesus and Victory, 552.

<sup>17</sup> Meier, Marginal Jew 3. 625.

<sup>18</sup> Meier combines all these issues: "The precise reason(s) why Jesus' life ended as it did, namely, by crucifixion at the hands of the Roman prefect on the charge of claiming to be King of the Jews, is the starkest, most disturbing, most central of all the enigmas Jesus posed and was." Marginal Jew 3. 646. I doubt that Jesus claimed in any way to be King; but if he did, Pilate could have disabused him of the idea by simple murder. Crucifixion aims to disabuse *others*.

<sup>19</sup> On patterns of accountability: Josephus B.J. 1.33.3 §651-55; A.J. 17.6.2-4 §149-67 (Herod's golden eagle); A.J. 18.4.1 §85-89, Vitellius sacking Pilate and Caiaphas over Samaria; B.J. 2:12.3-7 §232-44, a similar affair; B.J. 2.15.3-5 §320-325, the priests attempt to turn the crowd in Jerusalem from violent protest. See further Sanders, Historical Figure, 15-32, 266; Fredriksen, Jesus of Nazareth, 252-54.

<sup>20</sup> A mote of support: Paul's use of paredidoto in 1 Cor 11:23 — "handed over"? "betrayed"? — might suggest a surreptitious arrest. In the Synoptics, the priests effect the ambush with a Jewish

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*ochlos* (Mark 14:43 and parr.); cf. the Roman *speira* of John 18:3, 12, whose chain of command runs through Pilate, not the priests.

<sup>21</sup> My emphasis; Meier, Marginal Jew 3. 501. Fundamental to both Meier's discussion and my own is Sanders, Jesus and Judaism .

<sup>22</sup> Meier, Marginal Jew 1. 316-332; Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke (New York: Doubleday, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> On miracles generally, Meier, Marginal Jew 2. 509-1038, specifically on raising the dead, 773-873.

<sup>24</sup> See esp. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism , 71-76; Historical Figure, 265-73. I am unpersuaded. A glance at any synopticon reveals how readily Matthew and Luke altered or dropped "dominical" traditions from Mark, when they needed to. I cannot see how the supposed dominical status of a tradition would a) compel them to repeat it but b) at the same time disown it.

<sup>25</sup> Esp. 1 Thess 4:13-18, which Paul has "by the word of the Lord;" cf. also 1 Cor 15, which begins a list of witnesses to the risen Christ and then segues into a description of Endtime events. See Fredriksen, Jesus of Nazareth, 74-154.

<sup>26</sup> For the full argument, Fredriksen, Jesus of Nazareth, 119-37.

<sup>27</sup> These figures come from E.P. Sanders, Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE- 66 CE (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) 47-145; esp. p. 127 for the size of pilgrim crowds.

<sup>28</sup> On this point, Paula Fredriksen, "What does Jesus have to do with Christ? What does Knowledge have to do with Faith? What does History have to do with Theology?" in Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice, ed. A. M. Clifford and A. J. Godzieba (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Press, 2003) 3-17; on historical Jesus research and modern Christologies, William P. Loewe, "From the Humanity of Christ to the Historical Jesus," in Theological Studies 61 (2000) 314-331; John P. Meier, "The Present State of the 'Third Quest' for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain," in Biblica 80 (1999) 459-487, at 485f.

<sup>29</sup> Keenly observed by D. Moody Smith, John Among the Gospels (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) 218-221.

<sup>30</sup> For a similar conclusion, from an utterly different starting point, Burton Mack, A Myth of Innocence: Mark and the Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> Sanders, Historical Figure, 254; Jesus and Judaism , 306, 308. David Catchpole, more radically, argues that the whole story is a fabrication: see "The 'Triumphal' Entry," in Jesus and the Politics of his Day ed. E. Bammel and C.D.F. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 319-34.

<sup>32</sup> This section synthesizes Fredriksen, Jesus of Nazareth, 235-66.

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<sup>33</sup> A further index of eschatological conviction is the earliest movement's policy on gentiles, requiring that they abandon their indigenous cults but *not* convert to Judaism, Fredriksen, Jesus of Nazareth, 125-37; 173-78.

<sup>34</sup> Sanders, Historical Figure 240-43. Meier, Marginal Jew 3. 634, announces that, in vol. 4, he will argue otherwise.

<sup>35</sup> On Galilean pilgrims to Jerusalem: Rioting on Shavuot, A.J. 17.10.2 §54; supporting Judean strikers before Caligula's statue, 18.7.2-3 §263-72; on Galilean pilgrims murdered in Samaria, 20.6.1 §118-120.

<sup>36</sup> Jesus' instructions to his disciples on preparation for the Passover meal presupposed previous contact with people within the city, Mark 14:12-14; Luke's chief priests charge that Jesus "stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place [Jerusalem]," Luke 23:5.