

I. Introduction

A. The Passion of Jesus is central to Christian identity

B. Mel Gibson's new movie, *The Passion of the Christ*



C. Approaching the Passion of Christ as historians

II. The Last Week of Jesus

A. The Chronology of the Last Week

- Jesus enters Jerusalem at Passover time
- Jesus disrupts the Temple operations
- Jesus teaches in the Temple area
- Jewish authorities conspire to kill Jesus
- Judas' betrayal of Jesus
- Jesus' last supper with disciples on evening of arrest
- Jewish authorities arrest Jesus that night
- Jesus appears before the Jewish authorities during the night
- Jesus appears before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate the next morning
- Jesus is crucified with a placard saying "King of the Jews"
- Jesus is buried by Joseph of Arimathea

B. Jesus' symbolic actions

C. Jesus' three symbolic actions during the final week

1. First: Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey

Matthew 21:1-11. 21:1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 21:2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 21:3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." 21:4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

21:5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
[Zech 9:9]

21:6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 21:7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 21:8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.... 21:10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 21:11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." (NRSV)

2. Second: Disrupting the Temple operations

Mark 11:15-18. 11:15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves; 11:16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 11:17 He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations [Jer 7:11]'? But you have made it a den of robbers [Isa 56:7]." 11:18 And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. (NRSV)

a. Did Jesus cause a disturbance in the Temple?

b. Was Jesus' disturbance in the Temple a *cleansing* (trying to start a reform) or was it a *prediction of its destruction*?

3. Third: The Last Supper

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, **“Take; this is my body.”** 14:23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 14:24 He said to them, **“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.** 14:25 Truly I tell you, **I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”** (NRSV)

4. Conclusion

III. Passion Narrative Difficulties

A. Gospels view events as fulfillment of Scripture

- Dividing Jesus garments fulfills Ps 22:18 (Mk 15:24 & Jn 19:24)
- Pilate washing hands recall Deut 21:6-9 (Mt 27:24)
- Jesus’ betrayal by Judas fulfills Ps 41:9 (Mk 14:21)
- Jesus alludes to OT scripture—Exod 24:8, Jer 31:31, Zech 9:11—when he describes the significance of the bread and wine at the last supper (Mk 14:22-25)
- The scattering of disciples fulfills Zech 13:7 (Mk 14:27)

B. Seven saying on the cross echo or quote scripture

	Matt	Mark	Luke	John
1. Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.			23:34	
2. Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother.				19:26-27
3. Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.			23:43	
4. <i>Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani</i> (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?) [Ps 22:1]	27:46	15:34		
5. I thirst. [Ps 69:21]				19:28
6. It is finished.				19:30
7. Father, into your hands I place my spirit. [Ps 31:5]			23:46	

D. There is a tendency to record traditions that echo scripture in more subtle ways

- Washing of Pilate's hands (Matt 27:24 = Deut. 21:6-9)
- Crucifixion of Jesus (Mk 15:24; Jn 19:23 = Ps 22:16)
- Offering vinegar to Jesus (Mk 15:36; Jn 19:28-30 = Ps 69:21)
- Spitting at Jesus while he is beaten (Mk 14:65, 15:19 = Isa 50:6)
- Wagging of heads in derision by those wading by cross (Mk 15:29-30 = Ps 22:7)
- Words of mockery hurled at Jesus while on cross (Mt 27:43 = Ps 22:8)
- Gazing on cross from afar by his acquaintances (Lk 23:49 = Ps 38:11)

E. A tendency to shift responsibility for Jesus' death from the Romans to the Jews

- Mark: Pilate only reluctantly hands Jesus over to be crucified (Mk 15:10)
- Matthew: Adds a scene where Pilate's wife has a dream and intercedes for Jesus because he is a "righteous man" (Mt 27:18-19). Adds another scene where Pilate washes his hands of the matters and the Jews say, "Let his blood be on us and our children" (Mt 27:25).
- Luke: Adds a scene where Pilate sends Jesus to Herod Antipas for judgment. And he has Pilate declare that Jesus was innocent three times (Lk 23:4, 6-16, 22), whereas Matthew has Pilate declare Jesus innocent once (Mt 27:24).
- John: Pilate declares Jesus innocent three times (Jn 18:38; 19:4, 6).

IV. Historical Difficulties: What day was the crucifixion?

A. Jewish reckoning

- A "day" went from sunset to sunset (not 12 midnight)
- The "Day of Preparation" was on 14th Nisan
- The "Passover Day" was on 15th Nisan

B. Synoptics — Jesus was executed on *Passover Day* (Nisan 15)

- Jesus' last meal was a Passover meal on Thursday evening (15th Nisan) (Mk 14:12-16)
- Jesus was crucified on Friday on Passover Day (15th Nisan)

C. John — Jesus was executed on the *Day of Preparation* (Nisan 14)

- Jesus' last meal was on Thursday evening before Passover (14th Nisan)
- Jesus was crucified on the Day of Preparation Friday (14th Nisan) (Jn 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42)

D. Handling the conflicting data

E. Historical Difficulties: The Trial

- A. What was the "trigger event" that led to Jesus' arrest and trial?

B. What kind of Jewish inquiry or trial took place?

1. Formal trial in Mark and Matthew (Mk 14:53-15:1; Mt 26:57-27:2)
2. An inquiry in Luke (Lk 22:54-23:1)
3. A conversation in John (Jn 18:12-28)

C. What were the charges brought before Pilate?

1. No specific charges brought to Pilate (Matt 27:1-2, 11-14; Mk 15:1-5)
2. Political charges brought to Pilate (Lk 23:1-5)
3. Religious charges brought to Pilate (Jn 18:29-30; 19:6-7)

D. How many trials were there?

1. Two trials—a Jewish trial and a Roman trial
2. One trial—a Roman trial
3. No trials

V. Crucifixion

A. Examples of Roman crucifixion

B. Jesus' death by crucifixion is historically certain

VI. How Did Jesus View His Death?