

Mark 11:1-11

All four of the gospels give some version of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem before the passion scenarios begin to play themselves out. While the basic thrust of the story presented by each gospel writer is the same, each narrative embellishes, tones down and picks up on different currents that ripple under the main flow of the outline. It is ironic — and as such, ultimately helpful to Mark's presentation — that this unit is listed under the heading: "Jesus' Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem." In Mark, despite his characteristic attention to details and narrative nuances, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem appears as neither truly "triumphal" nor clearly messianic.

Mark opens his story by describing a setting that has definite Old Testament roots. Zechariah 14 describes the coronation scene of Yahweh, the "divine warrior." Scholars have long made the connection between Zechariah 14 and Mark 11, despite differences in their tones and topics. In verse 1, as Mark develops the setting for his scene, he specifically identifies the geographical location.

First, he notes that Jesus and his disciples finally "were approaching Jerusalem." The journey toward the Holy City and all the events to unfold here are at last completed. But Mark also notes that their path leads them "near the Mount of Olives." Zechariah 14 specifically recalls that the coronation march for the divine warrior-king begins at the Mount of Olives. In Jewish tradition, this is the place where the triumphal entry of the new messianic ruler of the city will start.

What most distinguishes Mark's version of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem from that of the other gospels is the ending. Instead of Jesus immediately continuing on to the temple and further demonstrating his power and authority by throwing out the merchants and money-changers, Mark has Jesus simply slip off into the night. Mark's conclusion in verse 11 is laughable. Jesus, who has just celebrated a messianic-type entrance into the city, symbolically "claiming" Jerusalem as his own, calls a sudden halt to his messianic mission because it is past his bedtime! "It was already late," writes Mark. So Jesus and the disciples go back outside the city to Bethany and retire for the night.