

## **The Procession of the Palms** **THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

### **Zechariah 9:9-10**

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
nonviolent (*praus*) and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the war-horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall command peace to the nations;  
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

### **The Entry (Mark 11:1-11)**

And when they come near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends forth two of his disciples, and tells them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it you will find a tethered colt upon which no one among men has yet sat; untie and bring it. And if anyone says to you, ‘Why do you do this?’ say, ‘The master has need of it, and he is sending it here again right away.’”

And they went and found a colt tethered at a door, outside in the open street, and they untie it. And some of the bystanders there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” And they spoke to them as Jesus instructed, and they let them go.

And they bring the colt to Jesus, and they place their cloaks upon it, and he sat on it.

And many persons spread their cloaks in the road, but others stalks of straw, cutting them from the fields. And both those going ahead and those following after cried out,

“*Hosanna!*

Blessed is the one coming in the name of the LORD;  
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David;  
*hosanna* in the highest places!”

And he entered into Jerusalem, into the Temple; and on looking around at everything, the hour now being late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

### **The Choice (Mark 15:6-15)**

Now at a festival [Pilate] released to them one prisoner, whomever they requested. And the one called “the son of the father” (bar-Abbas) was bound together with the rebels, those who had committed murder during the insurrection. And the crowd went up and began to request he act toward them as he usually did.

And Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you wish that I might release to you the king of Judaeans?”

For he knew that the chief priests had handed him over through malice. But the chief priests agitated the crowds, so that he might instead release bar-Abbas to them.

And in reply Pilate again said to them, “What then should I do with him you call the king of the Judaeans?”

And again they cried out, “Crucify him!”

But Pilate said to them, “Why, for what evil did he commit?”

But they cried out the more, “Crucify him!”

And Pilate, deciding to appease the crowd, released bar-Abbas to them, but having flogged Jesus he handed him over that he might be crucified.

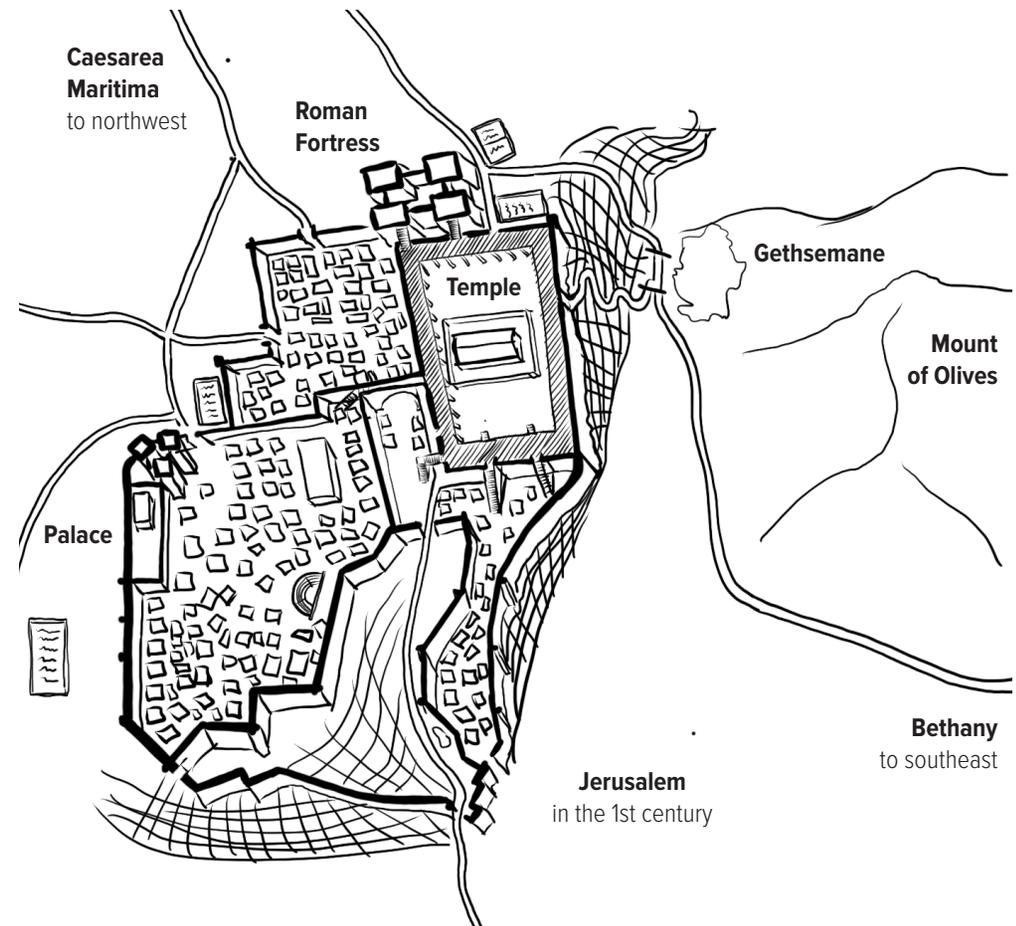
## Reading/Translation Notes

Primary translation by David Bentley Hart

- **Nonviolent** (*hoi praeis*, “the meek”) From the Girardian Lectionary: “This may be the weakest translation in the Beatitudes. ‘Gentle’ is a more common translation of the Greek word *praus*; I think ‘nonviolent’ is an even better rendering in today’s context. *Praus* is not common in the Bible,” occurring only 2 unique times in the Gospels:
  - “Blessed are the meek [*praus*], for they will inherit the earth.” (Mt 5:5)
  - “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle [*praus*] and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Mt 11:29)
- **bar-Abbas**: Aramaic for “son of the father.” He is called “Jesus bar Abbas” in some ancient manuscripts of Matthew which 3rd-century church father Origen was particularly upset about. Matthew refers to Barabbas only as a “notorious prisoner”. Mark and Luke further refer to Barabbas as one involved in a *stasis* (“riot”), probably “one of the numerous insurrections against the Roman power” who had committed murder. John refers to Barabbas as a *lēstēs* (“bandit”), “the word [1st-century Jewish historian] Josephus always employs when talking about Revolutionaries.”
- **son of Humanity** (*uios tou anthropou*): Jesus’ preferred title is often translated “Son of Man,” but *uios* means “member of” as well as “child” (the “children of Israel” = “Israelites”) and *anthropou* is not male-only. “The Human One” (CEB) is a good translation.

### Resources used

- *The New Testament* translation/notes by David Bentley Hart
- *The Last Week* by Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan
- *The Girardian Lectionary* online commentary



### Jerusalem

- Established as capital of Israel after capture by King David around 1000 BCE.
- First temple built by slave labor by Solomon around 957 and completely destroyed in 586. Second temple built 50-100 years later and expanded under Herod the Great in 20 BCE.
- A center of devotion and destination of pilgrimage, it was also the center of a “domination system” of the ancient world, as the minority elite were political oppressors and economic exploiters (taking 50-70% of money for top few) legitimated by religious structure and doctrine.

## Notes from “The Last Week”:

- As Jesus entered from the east, down from the Mount of Olives, another procession entered from the west.
- “...Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judah, and Sumaria, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. Jesus’ procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate’s proclaimed the power of empire.”
- Pilate’s procession demonstrated Roman imperial power and Roman imperial theology. They came for Passover to assert their control as the Jews celebrated liberation from an earlier empire.
- Pilate lived at Caesarea Maritima on the coast year-round and only came to Jerusalem during major feasts when there could be political trouble.
- Imagine: “cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. Sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful.”
- Roman theology proclaimed the emperor as the Son of God (since Augustus in 31 BCE). The theology said he was born of his mother Atia but conceived by Apollo. he was called “son of God”, “Lord,” and “Savior,” one who brought “peace on earth.” After death he ascended into heaven to take his place among the gods, while the next emperor took up the same titles and theology.
- Jesus’ counter-procession is also planned and intentional. “...it looks like a planned political demonstration.” A confrontation between two kingdoms.
- Jerusalem depicted as Sodom and Gomorrah by prophets. A symbol of the contrast between what it should have been and what it was.
- Herod had built luxurios quarters for the temple and his palace. Stunning buildings at the expense of starving peasants.
- The temple became the center of economic and political power as well as religious after 6 CE, and needed much collaboration with Rome to maintain order and peace.
- There were 18 high priests from 6–66 CE: Caiaphas took up half that time (18–36 CE)! He had to be good at politics.
- In addition to Jesus, the Zealots and the Essenes saw the temple and priests as as much of a threat as Rome.
- The Gospel of Mark is written during the Jewish War of 66–70. It is a wartime gospel, and the temple is being destroyed.
- Jesus’ message throughout Mark is not about himself: it is always about the *kingdom of God* and the *way* (*hodos* translated “way, path, or road” throughout the Gospel).
- To “repent” is to change your route or to “go beyond the mind that you have.” Jesus asked for commitment to this new kingdom, and he asked it of peasants and outcasts!
- For Mark:
  - Following Jesus means following him on *the way*.
  - *The way* leads to Jerusalem.
  - Jerusalem is the place of *confrontation with the authorities*.
  - Jerusalem is the place of *death and resurrection*.
- For his audience, the question is clear: what procession are we following? That of the oppressor or the liberator? The way of life or the way of death?
- The crowd who chooses Barabbas must be a different crowd from the palm-wavers, to be let into the Palace.
- Barabbas is best understood as a parable: by 66 CE, as this gospel was being written, the people of Israel had chosen the way of violence over the way of peace in establishing their kingdom.

<b>Mark 11:1-11 and 15:6-15</b>	<b>Matthew 21:1-17 and 27:15-26</b>	<b>Luke 19:28-46 and 23:13-25</b>	<b>John 11:55-57; 12:12-19 and 18:38b-40</b>
<p>And when they come near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends forth two of his disciples, and tells them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it you will find a tethered colt upon which no one among men has yet sat; untie and bring it. And if anyone says to you, 'Why do you do this?' say, 'The master has need of it, and he is sending it here again right away.'"</p> <p>And they went and found a colt tethered at a door, outside in the open street, and they untie it. And some of the bystanders there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they spoke to them as Jesus instructed, and they let them go.</p> <p>And they bring the colt to Jesus, and they place their cloaks upon it, and he sat on it. And many persons spread their cloaks in the road, but others stalks of straw, cutting them from the fields. And both those going ahead and those following after cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; hosanna in the highest places!"</p> <p>And he entered into Jerusalem, into the Temple; and on looking around at everything, the hour now being late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.</p>	<p>And when they came near to Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples out, telling them, "Go into the village opposite you, and you will at once find a tethered ass, and a foal with her; untie them and bring them to me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say that 'the Lord has need of them'; and he will send them along right away." And this occurred that there might be fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet when he said, "Tell the daughter of Zion: See, your king comes to you, gentle and mounted upon an ass and upon a foal, a son of a beast of burden." And the disciples, going and doing as Jesus directed them, brought the ass and the foal, and covered them with their cloaks, and he sat down upon them.</p> <p>And the largest crowd spread their own cloaks in the road, but others cut branches from the trees and spread them in the road. And the crowds preceding him and those following him cried out, saying, "Hosanna to the son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest places." And as he entered Jerusalem the whole city was in commotion, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee."</p> <p>And Jesus entered the Temple and threw out all those selling and buying in the Temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those selling doves, and he says to them, "It has been written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a robbers' den." And the blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. But, seeing the wonders he performed and the children crying out in the Temple and saying 'Hosanna to the son of David,' the chief priests and the scribes were indignant, and said to him, "Do you hear what they are saying?" And Jesus says to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nurslings you have provided praise?'" And leaving them he went forth, outside the city to Bethany, and lodged there for the night."</p>	<p>And having said these things he journeyed on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. And it happened that, as he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Mount of Olives, he sent out two of his disciples, saying, "Go into the village opposite, on entering which you will find a tethered colt upon which no one among men has ever yet sat, and untie it and bring it. And, if anyone asks, 'Why are you untying it?' you will answer thus: 'Because the Lord has need of it.'" And, going away, those who had been sent found it just as he had told them. And, as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "Because the Lord has need of it." And they led it to Jesus and, throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.</p> <p>And as he proceeded people spread their own cloaks on the road. And, as he drew near to the path descending from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of disciples began joyfully to praise God in a loud voice on account of all the deeds of power they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven and glory in the highest places." And some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, admonish your disciples." And in answer he said, "I tell you, if they should fall silent the stones would cry out."</p> <p>And as he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, and said, "If you had known on this day, even you, the things that lead to peace—but now they have been hidden from your eyes, because the days will come upon you when your enemies will erect a rampart against you and will encircle you and will press in upon you on every side, and will dash you to the ground, and your children within you, and will leave not a stone upon a stone in you, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."</p> <p>And entering the Temple he began expelling those who were selling there, saying to them, "It has been written, 'And my house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a robbers' den."</p>	<p>Now the Passover of the Judaeans was near, and many went up to Jerusalem from the countryside before the Passover so that they might purify themselves. So they looked for Jesus and, standing in the Temple, they said to one another, "How does it seem to you? That he will not come to the feast at all?" And the chief priests and Pharisees had issued orders that, should anyone know where he is, he should report it, so that they might seize him...</p> <p>The next day the great crowd that had come to the feast, hearing that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches from the palm trees and went forth to meet him and cried out,</p> <p>"Hosanna, blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord, and the king of Israel!"</p> <p>And Jesus, having found a young ass, mounted it, just as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; see, your king comes seated on the foal of an ass."</p> <p>His disciples at first did not understand these things, but when Jesus was glorified they then remembered that these things had been written concerning him, and also that they did these things to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he had called Lazarus forth from the tomb and raised him from the dead bore witness. Hence the crowd also met him, because they heard that he had performed this sign.</p> <p>So the Pharisees said to themselves, "You see that this avails us nothing—look: The world has gone after him."</p>
<p>Now at a festival he released to them one prisoner, whomever they requested. And the one called bar-Abbas was bound together with the rebels, those who had committed murder during the insurrection. And the crowd went up and began to request he act toward them as he usually did.</p> <p>And Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you wish that I might release to you the king of Judaeans?" For he knew that the chief priests had handed him over through malice. But the chief priests agitated the crowds, so that he might instead release bar-Abbas to them. And in reply Pilate again said to them, "What then should I do with him you call the king of the Judaeans?" And again they cried out, "Crucify him!" But Pilate said to them, "Why, for what evil did he commit?" But they cried out the more, "Crucify him!" And Pilate, deciding to appease the crowd, released bar-Abbas to them, but having flogged Jesus he handed him over that he might be crucified.</p>	<p>Now, for the festival it was the governor's custom to release to the crowd one prisoner, whomever they wished. And they had at that time a notable prisoner named <i>Jesus bar Abbas</i>. When therefore they were assembled Pilate said to them, "Whom do you wish I should release to you, bar-Abbas or Jesus, who is called the Anointed?"</p> <p>For he knew that they had handed him over through malice. But as he sat upon the dais his wife sent word to him, saying, "Let there be nothing between you and that just man; for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him." But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds that they should ask for bar-Abbas and should destroy Jesus. And in reply the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you wish that I should release to you?" And they said, "Bar-Abbas." Pilate says to them, "What then should I do with Jesus, who is called the Anointed?" They all say, "Let him be crucified!" But he said, "Why, for what evil did he commit?" But they cried out the more, saying, "Let him be crucified!"</p> <p>And Pilate, seeing that it is bootless, and that unrest is being produced instead, took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; you will see to it." And in reply all the people said, "His blood be on us and on our children." Then he released bar-Abbas to them, but having flogged Jesus he handed him over so that he might be crucified.</p>	<p>And Pilate, summoning together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said to them, "You brought this man to me as one corrupting the people, and look: I have examined him before you and in this man have found no element of the things you accuse him of. But neither has Herod; for he sent him back to us. And look: Nothing has been done by him deserving of death; Therefore I will punish him and release him." [For it was necessary for him to release one man to them for the festival.]</p> <p>But they shouted out, the whole crowd altogether, saying, "Take this man and release bar-Abbas to us!"—This man was in prison for an insurrection that had occurred in the city and for murder. But again Pilate called out to them, wishing to release Jesus. But they went on shouting, saying, "Crucify, crucify him!"</p> <p>But he said to them a third time, "But what evil has this man done? I have found in him no cause for death. I shall therefore punish and release him." But they insisted with loud voices, asking that he be crucified, and their voices prevailed. And Pilate decided that what they had demanded would happen; and he released the man thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they had asked, but Jesus he delivered over to their will.</p>	<p>And, having said this, he went outside again to the Judaeans and tells them, "I find absolutely no case against him. But it is a custom among you that I should release one of you at the Passover; do you want me to release the king of the Judaeans, therefore?"</p> <p>So again they cried out, saying, "Not this man, but bar-Abbas!" (And bar-Abbas was a <i>bandit</i>.)</p>