

Jesus of Nazareth:
Jesus in historical context
Signs and Miracles

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This presentation series is dedicated to the memory of **Jim Kettlewell**, a lifelong learner and an inspiring friend.

Historical approaches to scripture

- Deep study of historical context to mentally recreate the world of the text through focusing on
- Outside verification
 - Josephus; Roman records, etc.
- Number of sources
 - all four gospels = more evidenced
- Lack of fit with tradition or overall message
 - "I do not bring peace but a sword"
- Earliest documents
 - Mark, Q, Paul's letters

Who was Jesus of Nazareth?

The Two Previous Sundays:

- What does it mean that the early church referred to Jesus as Jesus of Nazareth?
- Why did he forbid others to call him "Messiah" or "King"?
- What did it mean in his time to call oneself "Messiah" or "King"?
- Why did he refer to himself until his trial as "the Son of Man"?

Today:

- What was the role and function of his miracles?
- How were his words and actions related the powers of his day?

Next Week

- How is this related to the Early Church leadership as focused in James, his brother?

Series:

What can we learn about the historical Jesus from the period history and his use of rhetoric? How can this enhance our understanding of Jesus and the Early Church?

Jesus of Nazareth begins his ministry

Quotes from the Bible from Bible Gateway NIV <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

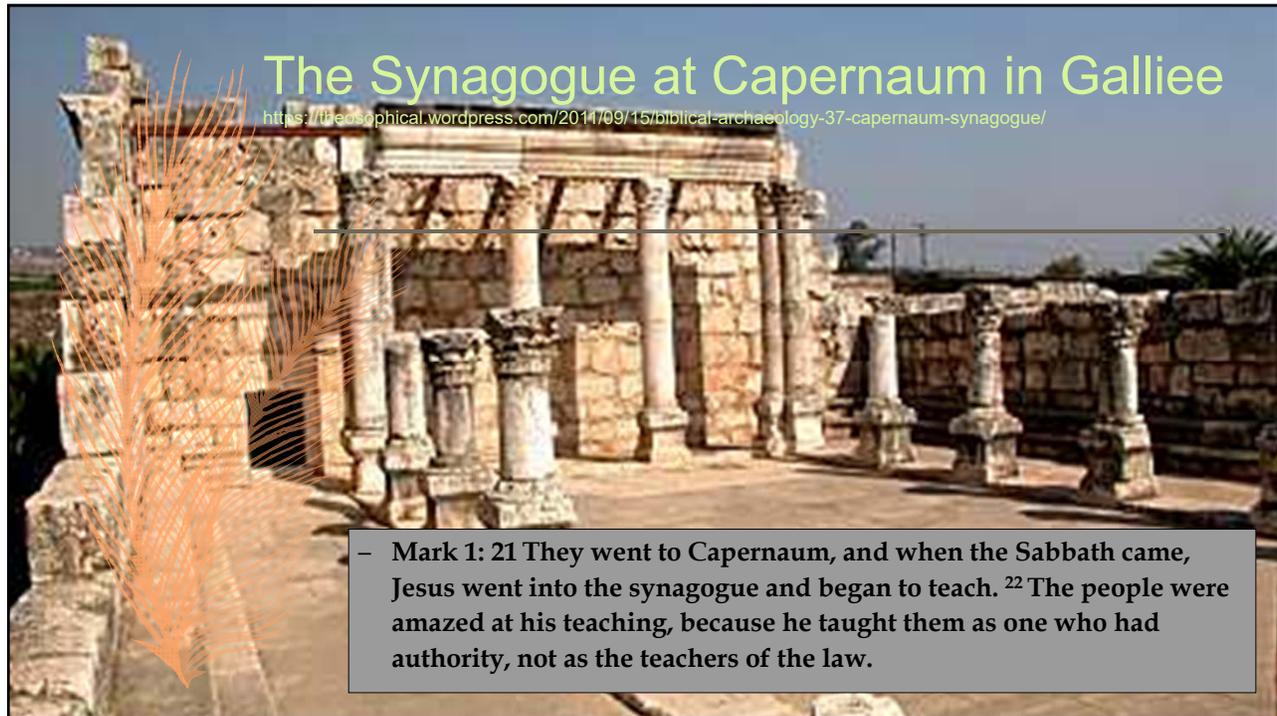
- The Gospel of Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, followed by Jesus' baptism and temptation.
- After John is imprisoned by Herod Agrippa, Jesus begins his ministry.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

- He then chooses four of his disciples, all fishermen.

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

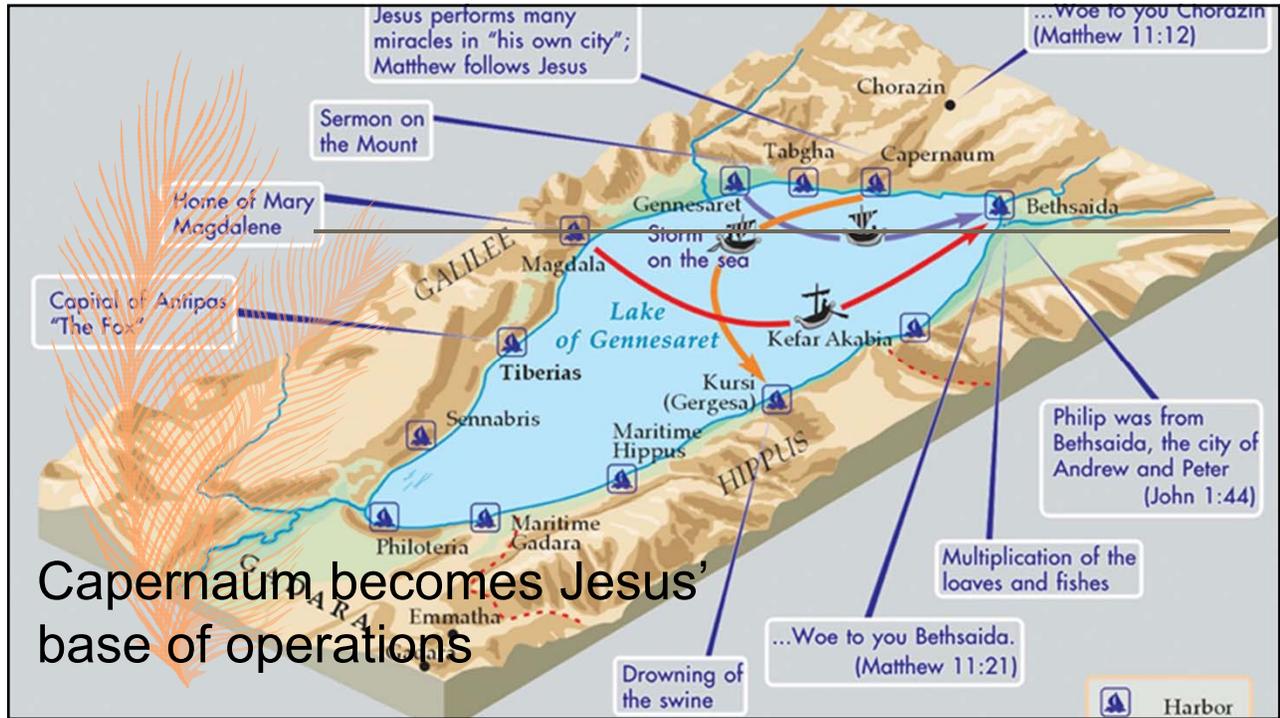
¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted^[1] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.



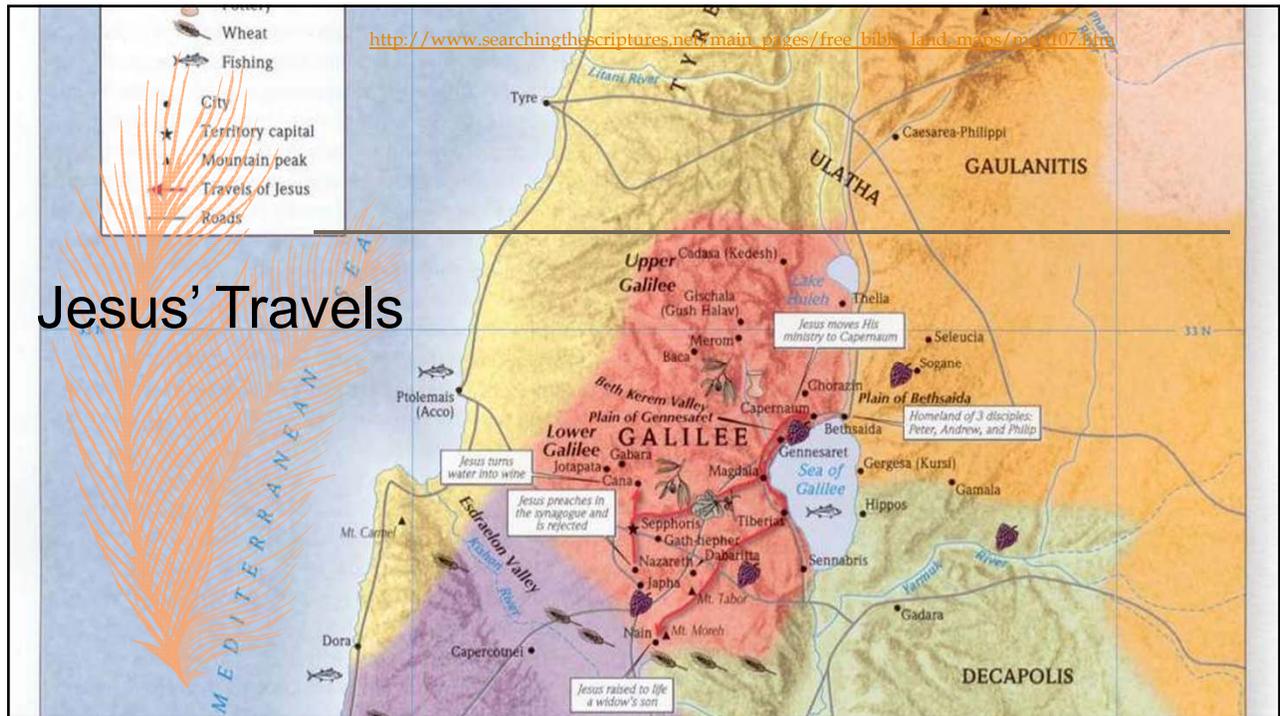
Jesus starts from Capernaum

Quotes from the Bible from Bible Gateway NIV <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

- ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!”
- ²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.
- ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”



Capernaum becomes Jesus' base of operations



Jesus' Travels

Jesus heals the sick and drives out demons

Quotes from the Bible from Bible Gateway NIV <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

- ²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.
- ³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

The Scriptures use three terms for acts of divine intervention

"sign." *semeion* . "a sign, mark, indication, token" (W. E. Vine). Signs were usually **intended to demonstrate to the observer something more than the sign itself.**

- "wonders" (*teras*). "something strange, causing the beholder to marvel" (Vine). **The "wonder" itself is the center of attention, and not necessarily that to which it points.**

- "miracles" (*dunamis*). "power, inherent ability, used of works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means" (Vine). ... the thought should have to do with **the power behind the act itself.**

Taylors Church of Christ. "SIGNS, WONDERS AND MIRACLES"
http://www.taylorschurch.com/signs_wonders_and_miracles.php

Professional Wonder Workers

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 103)

- "Jesus was surely not the first exorcist to walk the shores of Galilee. In first-century Palestine professional wonder worker was a vocation well established as that of woodworker or mason, and far better paid. Galilee especially abounded with charismatic fantasists claiming to channel the divine for a nominal fee."
- What concerned the priests and scribes was the SOURCE of Jesus' activities. The signs and wonders Jesus performed were a direct threat to their authority.
- What was most surprising was that he accepted no fee.

Jesus' Miracles

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 104-5)

- "there is more accumulated historical material confirming Jesus's miracles than there is regarding either his birth ... or his death"
- None can be historically validated (from sources outside the Gospels)
- [But] "There was never any debate, either among his followers or his detractors, about his role as an exorcist and miracle worker"

1/3 of the Gospel of Mark "consists solely of his healings and exorcisms" (105)

At no point in the gospels to Jesus' enemies ever deny his miracles, though they do question their motive and source.

Jesus was not the only miracle worker of his day.

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 105 -6

- "**Honi the Circle Drawer:** " Drew a circle on the ground during a drought and said, "I swear by your great name that I will not move from here until you have mercy on your sons." The rains "came at once." He was killed in Jerusalem at Passover. [Josephus *Antiquities* 14.2.1 21]
- "Honi's grandsons **Abba Hilqiah** and **Hanan the Hidden** were also widely credited with miraculous deeds;
- **both lived in Galilee around the same time as Jesus."**

More on Honi

<http://www.josephus.org/HoniTheCircleDrawer.htm>

More on Abba Hilqiah

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112367/jewish/Abba-Chilkiah.htm

Jesus was not the only miracle worker of his day.

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 105 -6

- **Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa** "resided in the village of Arab just a few kilometers from Jesus's home in Nazareth," and "had the power to pray over the sick and even intercede on their behalf to discern who would live and who would die."
- **Apollonius of Tyana**, [circa 3 B.C. - c. 97 A.D] a "holy man," taught the concept of a 'Supreme God' " and "performed miraculous deeds wherever he went. [According to his biographer] He healed the lame, the blind, the paralytic. He even raised a girl from the dead." He was killed by the Romans reportedly appeared to one his detractors after his death.

For more on Rabbi ben Dosa see

<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7207-hanina-b-dosa>

For more, see the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, a lengthy, novelistic biography written by the sophist Philostratus at the request of empress Julia Domna. Wiki "Apollonius of Tyana"



Jesus was not the only exorcist of his day.

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 105)

- Many exorcists are mentioned in the gospels (Matthew 12:27; Luke 11;19; Mark 9:38-40; see also Acts 19:11-17)
- **Eleazar** "used amulets and incantations to draw demons out of the afflicted through their noses."
- **Rabbi be Yohai** "could cast out demons by uttering the demon's name. Like Jesus, Yohai would first command the demon to identify itself, which gave him authority over it."

- Paul is accredited with performing exorcisms in Jesus' name (Acts 16:16-18; 19:12).
- "Exorcism instructions have even been found within the Dead Sea Scrolls"

Miracles and Messiahs

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 105)

- Two failed messiahs, **Theudas** and **the Epyptian**, used "miraculous deeds to gain followers and make messianic claims."
- They were called "**men of deeds**," "the same term that was applied to Jesus.

... the **literary form of the miracle stories** found in the Jewish and pagan writings of the first and second centuries **is almost identical to that of the gospels**; the same basic vocabulary is used to describe both the miracle and the miracle worker."

Magic and Miracles

Deut 18¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft,¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 107-8)

- Though magicians were "ubiquitous in the Greco-Roman world" ... "magic was considered a form of charlatany"
- The Romans had several laws against its practice, and those practicing "dark magic" could be imprisoned or killed.
- The Law of Moses makes it "punishable by death," (Deuteronomy 18:10-11), but "magicians were fairly prevalent" in Judaism.
- The definition depended largely upon who did the defining: Moses performed miracles, but the Egyptians did magic (Exodus 7:1-3; 9:8-12)

Jesus' miracles in Mark

- In the earliest gospel, Mark, ... "Jesus uses magician's techniques - incantations, rehearsed formulae, spitting, repeated supplications"

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 107-8)

Mark 7: 31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!").³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

Jesus' miracles in Mark

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 107-8

Mark 5:24-34

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." ²⁹ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

– "Mark's narrative suggests that Jesus was a ... conduit through which healing power pulsed like electrical current."

³⁰ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

³¹ "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Jesus didn't charge for help

"Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts – ¹⁰ no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹ Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave.

- Jesus sets the pattern for the disciples.
- Find someone to feed and house you, but take no money for helping people.
- Peter continues this practice in Acts 8:9-24 when he rebukes "Simon the Magician" for trying to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 10

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ..

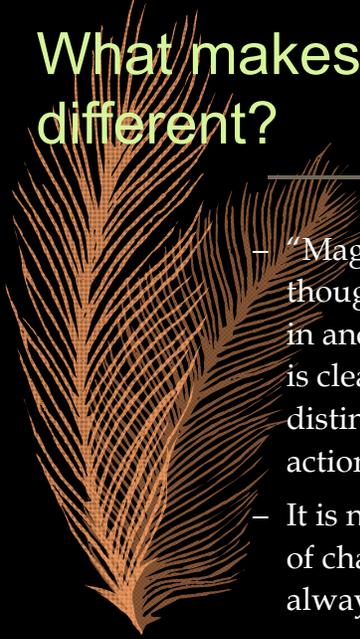
Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'

⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^[a] drive out demons.

Freely you have received; freely give. (see Luke 9:20-22)

(Reza Aslan . Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth 111

What makes Jesus miracles different?



- "Magic and miracle are perhaps best thought of as two sides of the same coin in ancient Palestine ... [However], there is clearly something unique and distinctive about Jesus' miraculous actions in the gospels.
- It is not simply that Jesus' work is free of charge, or that his healings do not always employ a magician's methods.

It is that Jesus' miracles are not intended as an end in themselves. Rather his actions serve a pedagogical purpose. They are a means of conveying a specific message to the Jews."

The miracles signal the entry of the kingdom of God



Matthew 12:28 ²⁸ But **if** it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, **then the kingdom of God has come upon you.** (See Luke 11:20)

Matthew 11

- ²When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"
- ⁴Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[b] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Isaiah 35: 5-6

- "Be strong, do not fear; **your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."**
- ⁵Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 112

Jesus represents God's kingdom on Earth

Matthew 12:28 ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (See Luke 11:20)

"Except God already had representatives on earth. They were the ones clothed in fine robes milling about the Temple, hovering over the mountains of incense and the ceaseless sacrifices ...

The sick, the lame, the leper, the 'demon-possessed,' menstruating women, those with bodily discharges, those who had recently given birth –none of these were permitted to enter the Temple and take part in the rituals unless first purified according the the priestly code.

With every leper cleansed, every paralytic healed, every demon cast out, **Jesus was not only challenging the priestly code, he was invalidating the very purpose of the priesthood."**

Mark 1 Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

Quotes from the Bible from Bible Gateway NIV <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

The sacrifices are a "testimony" –a witness.

- ⁴⁰ A man with leprosy^[a] came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."
- ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant.^[b] He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.
- ⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, **as a testimony to them.**" ⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Mark 1:40 The Greek word traditionally translated leprosy was used for various diseases affecting the skin.
Mark 1:41 Many manuscripts Jesus was filled with compassion

Treatment for Leprosy: Leviticus 14

(Reza Aslan . Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth 113)

- "the only way a leper could be cleansed is to complete the most laborious and costly ritual, one that could be conducted solely by a priest "
- 1. Bring two clean birds, along with some cedarwood, crimson yarn, and hyssop.
- 2. One of the birds must be sacrificed immediately and the living bird, cedarwood, and hyssop dipped in its blood.
- 3. The blood must then be sprinkled upon the leper and the living bird released.
- 4. Seven days later, the leper must shave off all his [or her] hair and bathe him[her]s with water.
- 5. On the eighth day, the leper must take two male lambs, free of blemish, and one ephah of flour, as well as a grain offering of choice flour mixed with oil, back to the priest, a burnt offering to the Lord.
- 6. The priest must smear the blood from the offering on the leper's right earlobe, on the right thumb, and on the big toe of his right foot.
- 7. He must then sprinkle the leper with oil seven times.
- Only after all of this is complete shall the leper be considered free of the sin and guilt of his affliction in the first place; only then shall he [or she] be allowed to rejoin the community of God.

Jesus isn't telling the leper to perform the ceremony, he is telling him to present himself as "already cleansed"

The writing is on the wall...

(Reza Aslan . Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth 113)

- The healing of the leper **"is a direct challenge not only to the priest's authority, but to the Temple itself."**
- Jesus did not only heal the leper, he purified him, making him eligible to appear at the Temple as a true Israelite. And he did so for free, **as a gift from God** - without tithe, without sacrifice - thus seizing for himself the powers granted solely to the priesthood to deem a man worth of entering the presence of God.

Mark 2

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

- 2 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 3 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 4 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 5 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 6 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."
- 7 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 8 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
- 9 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 10 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?"

The Son of Man

- 10 But I want you to know that **the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.** So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"



<http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-bethesda/>

The miracles actually form a third strand of Jesus' hidden message:

The Son of Man

The Kingdom of God

The Miracles as signs of both

Jesus' actions are messages to the priests and scribes

His rhetoric forces them to choose between protecting themselves and learning the truth -- to choose kingdoms...

- Mark 11 ²⁷ They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸ "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?" ²⁹ Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰ John's baptism – was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!"
- ³¹ They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'Of human origin' ..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) ³³ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."
- Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Mark 9:38-41 ³⁸ "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

³⁹ "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us.

⁴¹ Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

The Miracles are *semeion of dunamis*, not just "wonders"

- According to Father Ronald D. Witherup, "For Mark, the meaning is clear. Jesus' ability to exorcise demons is a main element of His teaching. It is **not a question of "magic"** or provoking **wonderment** at some unexplainable trick. In Mark's day the Greco-Roman world was filled with charlatans and magicians.
- Even Jesus in Mark acknowledges other miracle-workers, and He is not incensed that someone else would seemingly be in competition with Him (12:38-41).
- In fact, some Gospel miracles about Jesus have counterparts in contemporary figures, like Apollonius of Tyana or Honi the Circle Drawer, who could do wondrous deeds. But the similarities stop there. Jesus' ability to perform "miracles" is to show forth **God's power** and Jesus' own authority to heal ...

Father Ronald D. Witherup . "Mark, the Gospel of Miracles ." *Our Sunday Visitor*.

<https://www.osv.com/MyFaith/Article/TabId/586/ArtMID/13752/ArticleID/6176/Mark-the-Gospel-of-Miracles.aspx>

The message of the miracles

(Reza Aslan . *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* 113-14)



- Soon, the authorities in Jerusalem will no longer be able to ignore this itinerant exorcist and miracle worker. The closer he draws to the Holy City, the more urgent the need to silence him will become.
- **For it is not just Jesus's miraculous actions they fear; it is the simple yet incredibly dangerous message conveyed through them. The Kingdom of God is at hand.'**

Mel Gibson Passion Jesus Christ

Connections



apollonius of tyana | Apollonius von Tyana und die Lamie | Frank T. Zumbach

- Magic, miracles, and exorcisms were common in the days of Jesus, and lucrative forms of business.
- Claimants to being king or messiah also commonly were reported as performing miracles and exorcisms.
- Both Jews and Romans had laws against magic, but the lines between magic and miracles were blurred.
- Jesus' miracles were similar to those of others, and some exhibited forms of incantational magic (as do many of the priestly rituals in Leviticus).

Follow the Signs



- So the fundamental issue is framed very precisely by the priests and scribes:
- "by what authority do you do these things?"
- Jesus' miracles *point to* his authority as "the Son of Man" who acts as God's representative on earth (the one who wields the "finger of God").
- In many ways, the Priests and Scribes got the message:

"Your services will no longer be required."

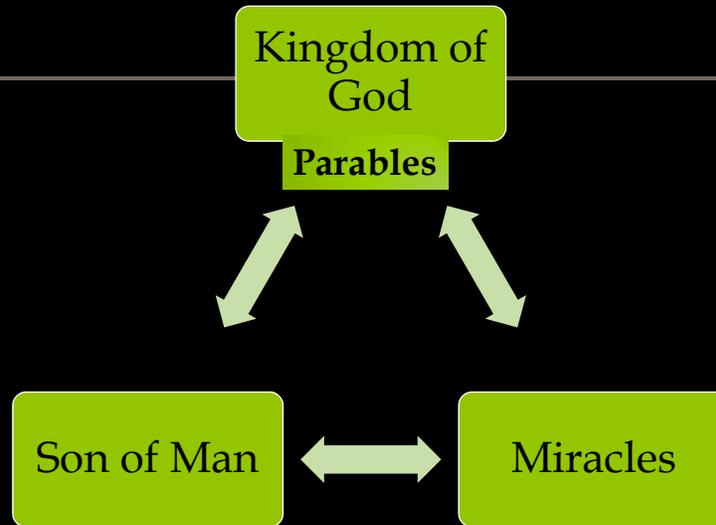
Dead End Sign imgarcade.com

Parable of the tenants: Mark 12

- ⁷ "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.
- ⁹ "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Haven't you read this passage of Scripture:
- "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
- ¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"^{[a]?}"
- ¹² Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him **because they knew he had spoken the parable against them.**

A Rhetoric of Words and Signs

- The miracles and exorcisms function as the third strand of the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus did miracles as signs of power pointing to the Kingdom of God and the Son of Man.
- The parables act also as signs pointing to this alternate way of seeing the world.



Jesus of Nazareth uses miracles and stories as signs pointing to a totally different way of living in the world called "The Kingdom of God," one where the poor and outcast are valued and the rich and powerful must leave both riches and power to enter. It is a kingdom ruled by a person who refuses the title King or Messiah for the humble "The Son of Man."

No wonder Jesus, when asked if he were king and messiah at his trial, could only say, "That's who you say I am." They only understood a world of rulers and power completely alien to the kingdom he lived and spoke within.

And this "Son of Man" shows us how we live in that kingdom - accepting the food and shelter of others, but never seeking money for help and freely giving what we have been given. In this world, rules and laws are to free us, rituals and regulations replaced with faith and mercy.

⁹ Then Jesus said,
"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."
Mark 4:9

You Have the Seeds, Now Sow It | St. Paul Lutheran Church, Ann Arbor. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Ann Arbor