

Jesus of Nazareth

co-written and directed by Franco Zeffirelli

Study Guide for Hour Five

Episode Five records Jesus' final week in Jerusalem. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus goes to Jerusalem but once, and he goes there to die. Episode Five is challenging to annotate, because Zeffirelli moves a great deal of material from Jesus' earlier ministry to his last week in Jerusalem, probably to abbreviate the length his pre-Jerusalem ministry.

Hour 3, minute :59 through hour 4, minute :11 depicts the commercialization of the Passover in the Temple, to which Jesus will soon object with its cleansing. There is noisy haggling, and people waiting in long lines to sacrifice their lambs. The prophets and Jesus see sacrifice as jejune. It was originally borrowed from paganism and infused with new meaning by the people of Israel. Sacrifice was a means of approach to God, and evinced various responses to him - contrition, gratitude, etc. Jesus and the prophets believed it became a perfunctory ritual and could be replaced simply by a right inward disposition toward God.

There are two interspersions in the Temple scene: The first is the introduction of the San Hedrin. The San Hedrin was a large (seventy plus members) Council of religious leaders. It served as a channel through which the Romans ruled the Jews, but the Romans allowed the Jews a measure of self-governance through it. The second is Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, which was David's means of transportation. He is hailed as a political king, come to Jerusalem to deliver the Jews from the Romans.

These types of interspersions are common in the gospels. Scholars have even given them a name - intercalations.

The scene then cuts back to Jesus' cleansing of the temple. (Read Mark 11:15-19) Jesus quotes Jeremiah's famed Temple Speech (Read Jeremiah 7) in which Jeremiah foretells the destruction of the temple. Jesus then is foretelling the destruction of the temple by the Romans. Zeffirelli also nods to John's gospel (Read John 2:13-22) in his ongoing harmonization of the four gospels.

The character Zerah is not biblical, but he serves as the voice of the religious authorities.

Hour 4, minute :11 depicts Mary heading to Jerusalem. She was present at the foot of Jesus' cross.

Hour 4, minutes :12 -:15 depicts Jesus teaching at the temple. He addressed the so called Am Ha'aretz, the people of the earth, by whom he is beloved. His teaching includes his famed Eschatological Discourse in which Jesus discloses the means by which he will render judgment in the Final Judgement. (Read Matthew 25:31-46.)

Hour 4, minutes :15-:20 record Jesus' interaction with Barabbas. Barabbas was a Zealot who by the time of Jesus' trial by Pilate was imprisoned. The Zealots figure only in a minor way in the gospels. Zeffirelli puts them in a spotlight, and nearly overlooks the Pharisees, who are Jesus' true enemies in the gospels.

Hour 4, minute :20 depicts Jesus' great love for children, about whom he delivers several teachings. His teaching to children is directed against the religious authorities (Read Matthew 21:28-32).

Hour 4, minutes :23-:26 are teachings from the Sermon on the Mount. (Reread Matthew 5-7)

Hour 4, minutes :26-:29 records Jesus with the adulterous. This is an example of Zeffirelli's importation of material from earlier in Jesus' ministry. (Read John 8:1-11).

Hour 4, minutes :29-:31 depict Jesus' encounter by a Roman Centurion. A Centurion had charge of a hundred soldiers. The Centurion's faith in Jesus is foreshadowing of the gospels early spread to the Gentiles. These foreshadowings are peppered throughout Matthew and Mark and are the central theme of Luke.

Hour 4, minutes :32-:40 are another example of the importation of material from earlier in Jesus' ministry. (Read John 9) It depicts Jesus' healing of a man born blind, and his antagonistic relationship with the religious authorities. The nature of their deliberations against Jesus are true to the spirit of the gospels. Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, his favorite means of identifying himself. The Son of Man was an apocalyptic being who would inbreak history and inaugurate the Kingdom of God. (Read Daniel 7:12-14.)

Hour 4, minutes :40-:44 depict Jesus' growing hostility towards the religious authorities. It conflates three of Jesus' attacks upon them. (Read Matthew 23, Matthew 24, and John 12:22-42). It also depicts a Zealot attack upon a Roman, which was the Zealots modus operandi. They favored daggers.

Hour 4, minutes :44-:47 introduces Nicodemus, who is present only in John's gospel and appears most prominently in John 3.

Hour 4, minute :51 records the San Hedrin's deliberation about Jesus before his trial. This meeting did not take place in the gospels but encapsulates their attitude toward Jesus throughout the gospels. The bottom line for them is that Jesus is claiming to be the Son of God. They conclude that this makes him a false prophet. Jesus' claim to be the Son of God is the "blasphemy" by which the San Hedrin will convict him. The Romans, in Jesus' second trial, will convict him for claiming to be a king in opposition to Roman rule. Caiaphus, the head of the San Hedrin, will preside over Jesus' trial by the Jews.