

This book is for you if

- you have ever wondered what Jesus was really like. i.e. 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild'? Not much!
- you enjoy historical novels;
- you would like to experience Jesus without 1900 years of church tradition;
- you are interested in walking with Jesus day by day during Holy Week;
- you are curious about the Jewish worship and prayer that Jesus took part in in his last days on earth;
- you want to get new insights into the actual historical events of the last eight days of Jesus' life, i.e. on Palm Sunday why did he arrive at the Temple late?

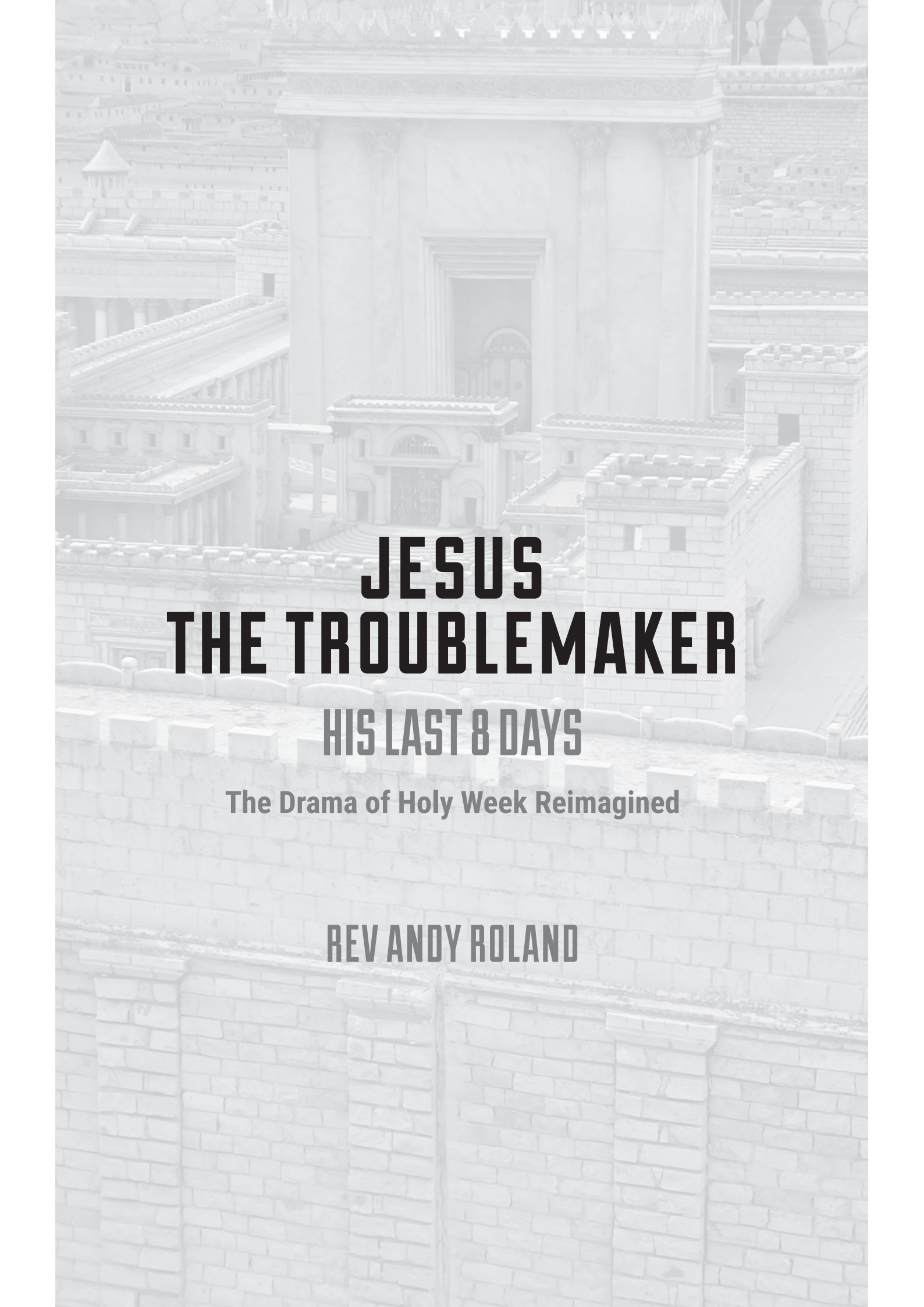
What others say

Well! Holy Week has come alive in a new way and will never be the same again. The book has finally removed set images and confusions stuck in my mind from so many years and something much more vibrant and alive has replaced them. I especially appreciated the trial scenes and the final hours of Jesus life. Just a couple of things I found distracting. Sometimes scholarship drew me away from the pace of the narrative, and I did not like the name of 'trainees' for the twelve disciples. I also found using the Aramaic names a nuisance!

Sr Hilda Mary CSC, St Michael's Convent

This is an imaginative portrayal of the last week of Jesus' life, and of subsequent events. It is based on the accounts in the gospels, but incorporates the author's linguistic, historical, geographical and architectural knowledge of Jerusalem and the surrounding area. Jesus is referred to mostly by his Hebrew name Yeshua, except in one chapter when the Greek Iēsous is also used. I liked in particular the description of Jewish customs such as the Hebrew blessings for bread and wine that were used at the Last Supper. His description of the trials of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Herod and Pilate are vivid, and his description of the flogging and the crucifixion are chilling. The account of the first resurrection appearances were a joy to read. The difficulty of identifying the exact location of the trials before Pilate and Herod are sensibly dealt with in endnotes rather than the main body of the text. His portrayal of Caiaphas is handled sympathetically, rather than portraying him as an out-and-out rogue. I loved it.

James Behrens, barrister, author of 'Practical Church Management'



JESUS
THE TROUBLEMAKER
HIS LAST 8 DAYS

The Drama of Holy Week Reimagined

REV ANDY ROLAND



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1. Information for Visitors from Mars

The Roman Empire

Two thousand years ago in Earth time, the whole of southern Europe and North Africa were joined together in a Mediterranean-wide customs union we call the Roman Empire. The small city state of Rome in Italy had conquered all this territory. Fifty years earlier it had become a military autocracy, and was now ruled by a succession of Caesars or emperors in Italy, with soldiers stationed everywhere. Although the Romans spoke Latin, the universal language of the empire was Greek, building on the centuries of trading that the Greek city states had been involved in. The glue that kept the empire together was a tolerant attitude towards the various religions in different lands, whether people sacrificed to Jupiter, or Zeus, or Artemis or Isis or whoever.

Judaea

At the eastern end of the empire was a different kind of country called Judaea. It had been ruled for thirty years by a half-Jewish king, Herod, who had been appointed by Caesar. At the time this book is set, it was split into four parts: Judaea and Samaria were ruled by a Roman governor and the three other parts were ruled by descendants of Herod.

Unlike the rest of the known world, this people, the Jews, had no statues or images in their worship. They believed in one supreme God who was beyond all human categories. The focus of their religion was a magnificent temple in Jerusalem, built by King Herod, where they sacrificed animals as a regular part of worship. Jews lived not only in Judaea but all over the empire. There were probably about a million Jews living in Judaea and Galilee, roughly the same number as lived in Egypt. The highest authority in Israel was the High Priest in Jerusalem and the Council of Elders called the Sanhedrin.

Galilee

Five days' walk north from Jerusalem was the district of Galilee, ruled by Herod Antipas. In the middle was a major city called Sepphoris, built in the best Greek style. Five miles from there was a small village called Nazareth. In it was a carpenter and stone mason called Yeshua, known to the world now as Jesus, the Greek form of his name. About 25 years after Rome had taken control of Judaea and Jerusalem, Jesus started a preaching and healing ministry, wandering around small towns and villages of Galilee. He became very popular and was widely regarded as a prophet. Our story opens about three years later when he and his followers were on their road to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the most important festival of the Jewish year, the Passover.

Today

Those who look to Jesus as their spiritual leader today numbered 2,380,000,000 or 31% of the global population (2015 figures). So what was Jesus actually like? 'The Troublemaker' aims to give a living portrait of the man whose life, death and rising again has so dramatically influenced the world.

2. Questions, questions, questions

What are the sources?

The story of 'The Troublemaker' is based on four ancient accounts in the Bible, detailing the ministry of Jesus. They are the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It is remarkable how detailed the accounts are for the last week of Jesus' life. It makes it possible to write a novel about Jesus' last days which stays close to the recorded events. I set out how and why I have used these sources in 'Examining the Gospels' on page 193.

I have used my imagination to recreate the words and conversations of Jesus, much in the style of a film script. In every section I have indicated the gospel passage which lies behind it, and have explained some the background to the stories.

Writing it has been a fascinating and educational journey. The discipline of writing a novel is more exacting than writing a devotional. Where there are differences between the various gospels, I had to make a choice and give reasons for my choice. I also needed to work out the details of place and time, and fill in those instances about which the gospels are silent, e.g. how did the disciples get the lamb for the Passover supper?

Near the end I describe how I came to write the book, and the challenges of creating some sort of historical novel. This is in 'The Story of the Book' on page 185.

How Jewish was Jesus?

I have tried to place Jesus fully into his Jewish context, using Hebrew or Aramaic versions of the names in the story, as well as all the names for God. Jesus' home language was Aramaic. He knew enough Hebrew to read the Jewish Scriptures, which he called 'the Law and the Prophets'. He also probably spoke some Greek. I go into the language question in more detail in 'Languages and Names', on page 207.

There is a thematic glossary of Hebrew, Aramaic and English words from page 235.

Where can I read about the politics and religion of Judaea?

A more detailed discussion of the religious and political background is provided in 'History and Politics' on page 213, and in 'Religion and Division', on page 223.

Now read on

You don't need to bother with any of the detailed background information to enjoy the story and the dramatic encounters Jesus had with people. The notes and information at the back are there as a resource for the curious. But if you want to learn more about any particular aspect of the story, Wikipedia is a wonderful resource!



Judaea, Samaria and Galilee at the time of Jesus

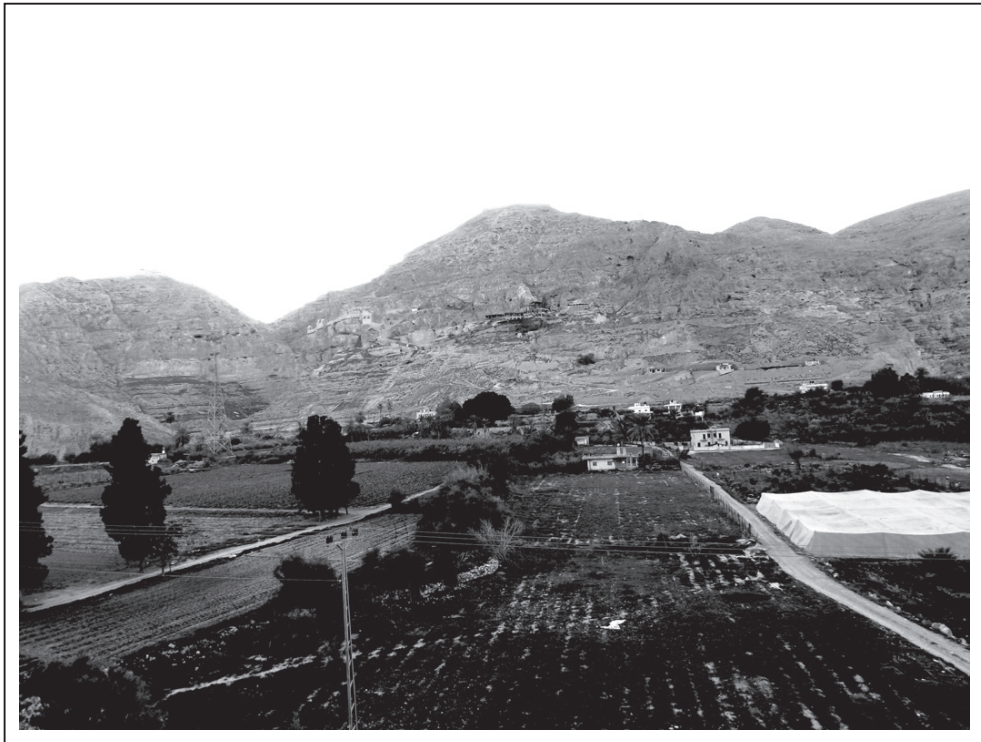
FRIDAY

8th Nisan

Six days before Passover

Jericho - Zacchaeus

Note: Nisan is the first month of the Jewish religious year roughly equating to April.



The fields of Jericho with the Wilderness of Judaea or Mount of Temptation behind

The Pilgrimage Trail^{1, 2}

It was hot in the Jordan valley. It was mid-March, less than a month since there had been snow in Yerushalayim. But the Jordan valley is 850 feet below sea level and has its own micro-climate. The fast-flowing river added humidity to the heat of the sun, with lush patches of jungle interspersed by banana, date and lemon groves.

The broad path along the west bank of the Jordan normally saw just a handful of farmers with donkeys and wagons, and an occasional rich man's chariot. Roman legionnaires were scarce, being based at important cities like Caesarea, Samaria, and Yerushalayim. This morning, however, the flat path was being used by literally thousands of people, all walking in the same direction. They were religious Jews, almost all from the northern, 'Gentile Region' (Galil ha-Goyim)³. This had been conquered and converted to Judaism in the great Maccabean Revolt, less than two hundred years before. Being new converts, Galileans were fervent, emotional and a long way from the Temple priests in Yerushalayim. They avoided walking through the heretical region of Samaria, even though it meant making a detour of over thirty miles, another two days walking in the Jordan heat, another two nights wrapped up in their cloaks in the chilly night air.

On they came, thousands of families, men, women and children, accompanied by the obligatory sheep. Many were walking

Jesus the Troublemaker

quite purposefully, for they only had a couple of days to reach Yerushalayim. People had been streaming along the valley for the past two days, and there were now plenty who resigned themselves to arriving late.

Among them was a couple of hundred of Galileans, men and women and a few children, who were looking not merely anxious but scared. In stark contrast to the festive and expectant atmosphere of the other pilgrim groups. Slightly ahead of them were a dozen burly bearded men, Rabbi Yeshua's trainees⁵, looking bewildered as if they were not sure what was around the next corner. And ahead of them, a solitary figure, striding fast, his body tense and his face set, Yeshua from Natzeret, the prophet from the Galil.

After walking a couple of hours, Yeshua gave the nod for people to have a rest. The twelve sat down around him, keeping an eye out for any possible hostiles they might need to defend their rabbi from.

*"Listen!" said Yeshua. "we are going up to Yerushalayim, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the leading priests and the Torah-teachers⁴, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Goyim; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."**

The group sat stunned, mouths open, hardly able to move. There was a full two minutes' silence. Then Yeshua stretched his back, got up and said, *"Time to get moving."* The twelve got up too and followed him, still with shocked expressions on their faces.

Two hours later they had another break. Two of the group, clearly brothers, asked in a low, somewhat embarrassed voice, if they could talk to him beyond the group's hearing. They moved a few yards away.

"So, what do my two thunder-lads⁶ want?"

Ya'akov, the elder, spoke. *"Rabbi, we want you to say yes to the favour we're going to ask."*

A light smile came to Yeshua's face. *"That sounds like a serious ask. What is it?"*

"When you come to reign as king, can I be your right-hand man? Can Yehoanan and I be your two chief ministers?"

Yeshua drew a deep breath and looked steadily from one to the other. They shifted uneasily as they tried and failed to meet his direct gaze. He said, *"You haven't a clue what you're asking. Can you pass the test I will be taking? Or can you sign up for the same struggle?"*

"Yes, Rabbi, I'm sure we can!"

"Well, you will undergo the same test as I will, and you will sign up for the same struggle, but as for being my two right-hand men, I'm not in control of that. I can't make any promises."

Mumbling apologetically the two crest-fallen brothers returned to the group. Yeshua sat for some minutes, lost in thought. He was roused by angry voices coming from the twelve.

"I can't believe that you had the brass neck!"

"What chutzpah!"

"We really know who our friends are now, don't we!"

Yeshua quickly rejoined his trainees⁵. *"Settle down, lads, settle down. You've got it all wrong. Listen, you know that anyone who wants to climb the greasy pole in Herod's court or in Pilate's palace, they're self-important, they expect everyone to kow-tow to them and they collect people to look up at them as their patrons. It won't be like that with you. Here anyone who wants to be important must do*

the washing up. In my world, the way of getting to the top is to stay at the bottom. Even I didn't come to have people do things for me. I came to do things for them. Come on lads, let's get going. It isn't too far to Yericho. That's where we'll stay."

Jericho⁷

As the pilgrims approached Yericho⁸, the countryside became a flat rocky desert, and they were relieved to see the green of the palm trees on the near horizon, overlooked by Herod's castle. After a few miles of plantations, Yeshua and his followers reached the village in front of the town of Yericho proper, with its large villas for Yerushalayim temple staff and local aristocracy. The village he approached housed workers on the nearby date palm plantations. A young lad approached them and asked who they were.

"We're followers of Yeshua the prophet," he was told. The boy sped back to the village and soon a crowd of women, men and children had gathered, shouting a welcome. Yeshua smiled broadly and put his hand on the heads of the children who approached:

"Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam⁹, who has created these your children as a blessing and to be a blessing." For the first time for hours, he relaxed.

As they made their way between the square whitewashed houses and their security walls, the street filled with yet more villagers. Then, in the distance, almost where the large two-storey stone villas could be seen, Yeshua stopped and looked curiously at a tree two hundred paces away.

He leant towards an elderly man near him and asked, *"Who's the man up that tree?"*

The man looked up and his mouth dropped open in surprise. With a grimace he said, *"I can't believe it. That's - that's Zakkai!¹⁰ What's he doing in our part of town? And up a tree, in the name of Elaha!¹¹"*

"And just who is Zakkai?"

"Only the head of the tax farmers in the region.¹² And, by Elaha, doesn't he farm the taxes well. He's a swindler, an extortioner, a miser and a Roman toady. He's got half our town in debt to pay for his rake-off. His name Zakkai - Righteous - what a joke! And now, unbelievably, he's climbing a tree! Doesn't he have any dignity?"

"I can see why he's unpopular," said Yeshua thoughtfully. *"But still,"* he smiled disconcertingly, *"he does climb trees."*

A couple of minutes later they reached the spot where Zakkai in an incongruously ornate cloak was clinging to a branch, trying to look as if he wasn't there. A few of the braver elements of the crowd spat in his direction.

Yeshua stopped and called out, *"Zakkai!"*

The little man almost fell off the branch with shock. *"Zakkai, you'd better shin down. I'm staying at your place this weekend!"*

The adoring crowd quickly changed their tune. *"Unbelievable!" "Is he a real prophet?" "You can't trust Galileans." "What a fake!"* Yeshua just stood there amid the turmoil, waiting while Zakkai tumbled down the tree. He stood in front of Yeshua, twigs and leaf dust in his hair and on his torn robe. Open-mouthed, trying to gather his wits.

"R-rabbi - you're coming to my house? Really?"

"If you'll have me."

"Rabbi - I don't know what to say. I've not lived well." He gathered his wits. *"Listen, tell you what I'll do. I'm going to give half of my possessions to people on the breadline. And if I've cheated anyone -"* the crowd murmured, *"Who haven't you?" - "anyway, I'll pay them back not double but four times over!"*

Jesus the Troublemaker

The crowd stood in stunned silence for a moment, then shouts erupted, "Good ol' Zak!" "Blessings on you, Zakkai!" "Three cheers for Zak!"

Yeshua looked round grinning, then shouted, "Today - today - salvation has come to this man! This son of Abraham. This fellow Jew! This righteous man! Come on, Zakkai, lead the way."

The whole delighted crowd followed Yeshua and Zakkai out of the village to a large ornate villa, none happier than Yeshua's twelve trainees, looking forward to their first comfortable night's sleep for five days.

Notes for 8th Nisan/Friday

¹ The source is Mark 10.32-45

² Passover always fell on the 14th Nisan, at the full moon. The Jewish calendar was lunar, and so had 13 months in the year, with an extra month every five years. The Hebrew word is *Pesach*.

³ Isaiah 9.1, written about 620 BCE, says, '*In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*' Or '*Galilee of the Gentiles*' - *Galil Goyim*.

⁴ I have used the term 'leading priests' instead of 'chief priests' to give the idea of the hereditary and aristocratic status of the priests. They were at the top of the Jerusalem hierarchy.

In 'The Jewish New Testament' David H Stern used the phrase 'Torah-teachers' for 'scribe'. Scribe is the literal translation of the Greek word, but the actual activity of these men was teaching and was central to the religious life of the people.

⁵ Disciples is rather a churchy word. The Hebrew word *talmidim* means more than just being educated. It primarily meant taking on the whole way of life exemplified by one's teacher. I have taken 'trainee' as the nearest in meaning, short for trainee missionaries or trainee church founders.

⁶ Ya'akov and Yochanan were given the nickname 'sons of thunder' by Yeshua because of their hot tempers, an example is in Luke 9.52-55: *'(Jesus' messengers) entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But he turned and rebuked them.'* (NRSV)

⁷ The source is Luke 19.1-9. The final verse has been placed in Jesus' talk in the synagogue on the following day.

⁸ Yericho, or Jericho, was a major city in Jesus' day. King Herod had built three palaces there and brought more water in via an aqueduct. Dates were a major industry. After the Jewish revolt 66-70 it declined to a small Roman garrison town.

⁹ "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe," is the standard opening of innumerable Jewish prayers.

¹⁰ 'Zakkai' is the Hebrew form of the Greek 'Zacchaeus'

¹¹ 'Elaha' is the Aramaic word for God. And Jesus spoke Aramaic. It is used in those parts of the Old Testament, (the Law & the Prophets or the Tenakh), which are in Aramaic, viz. parts of Ezra and Daniel in the Old Testament.

¹² Tax farming was how the Roman empire got its revenues. Periodically, the administration would put up for auction the right to collect taxes in various regions. The one who contracted to get the largest amount won, and he then had to get his own rake-off. It was a system not so much open to corruption as reliant on corruption.