

# 02-24 Archaeological Site Visit: Sepphoris and Jesus' Theatrical Imagery in Parables

*Lecture: Jesus' Use of Greco-Roman Theater, Royal Parables, and Historical Context Duration: 5m 32s | Date: February 24, 2026*

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## SITE OVERVIEW

- **Location:** Sepphoris (ancient city near Nazareth) [implied but not explicitly named]
- **Date of Visit:** February 24, 2026
- **Biblical References:** Matthew 6:16; Luke 19:11-15; Matthew 22 (wedding banquet parable); Matthew 18 (parable of settling accounts); Luke 7 (John the Baptist); Luke 14 (counting the cost of war)

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Site functioned as a major Herodian city during Jesus' lifetime
- Location where Herod Antipas maintained a royal palace and hosted wedding banquets
- Theater complex existed contemporaneously with Jesus' ministry in nearby Nazareth
- Site of political tensions culminating in conflict between Herod Philip and the king of Nabatea following Philip's divorce of the Nabatean king's daughter
- The political marriage dissolution led to war, ultimately resulting in Herod's defeat
- John the Baptist's execution connected to this political context (Herod Antipas's marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife)

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

- Theater structure with evidence of dramatic performances during first century
- Palace remains confirming royal presence and luxury accommodations
- Physical setting provides context for Jesus' theatrical vocabulary and royal imagery in parables
- Archaeological evidence supports the practice of announcing lead actors with trumpet fanfare
- Face-painting customs of actors documented through theatrical context

- No scholarly debates mentioned; Dr. Schilling presents as established consensus

## DR. SCHILLING'S KEY POINTS

- **Primary Argument:** Jesus deliberately employed theatrical terminology from Sepphoris to critique the Pharisees, calling them “hypocrites” (ὕποκριτής = Greek word for “actor”)
- **Contextual Insight:** Jesus grew up in Nazareth working in proximity to this Herodian city, giving him direct exposure to theatrical culture, royal customs, and political events
- **Linguistic Connection:** The Greek term for hypocrite literally means “actor” or one playing a role
- **Theatrical Vocabulary in Scripture:**
  - “Announcing with trumpets” (Matthew 6) = theatrical practice of heralding lead actors
  - “Disfiguring faces” (Matthew 6:16) = actors painting faces to represent character emotions
- **Parables Rooted in Local Experience:**
  - Luke 19:11-15 parable of nobleman seeking kingship reflects actual Herodian practice
  - Wedding banquet imagery (Matthew 22) drawn from royal celebrations Jesus would have known about
  - King’s palace luxury references (Luke 7) based on observable local reality
  - War preparation teaching (Luke 14) directly applicable to contemporaneous Herod-Nabatea conflict
- **Pedagogical Method:** Jesus appropriated familiar stories and cultural references his audience understood to teach spiritual truths
- **Correction of Misconception:** Jesus was not isolated in rural Nazareth but engaged with urban Herodian culture, though likely not as a participant in theater or palace events

## GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

- Site located in close proximity to Nazareth (Jesus’ hometown)
- Described as accessible to someone living and working in Nazareth
- Contrast drawn between “isolated city in the hills” (Nazareth) and this urban center
- Strategic importance implied through royal residence and political significance
- Regional context includes Nabatea (kingdom to the east) as geopolitical neighbor

## QUOTABLE MOMENTS

- “Jesus looks at the Pharisees and says, you say one thing, you do another. You’re just filling a role.” [Speaker 2: “We call them politicians.”]
- “So Jesus takes a story everybody understands and teaches a new lesson from it. He’s got everybody’s attention.”
- “Did he participate [in theater]? Probably not. He’s a big Jewish boy. Did he come to this theater? Probably not. Did he use the name of the play actors to attack the Pharisees?”

- “Remember, this is an honor-shame culture. He’s just brought shame on the family. To honor his daughter, he has to protect her.”
- “Does a king going to war not first sit down and count the cost? Everyone who heard him is going to [understand the reference].”

## PERSONAL NOTES

- Question for follow-up: What specific archaeological evidence dates the theater to the first century? Need primary sources on theatrical customs (trumpet announcements, face painting).
- Research needed: Scholarly literature on Jesus’ relationship to Sepphoris; debate over whether he worked there as a τέκτων (craftsman/builder).
- Historical detail to verify: Exact identity of Herod Philip’s wife (daughter of Nabatean king Aretas IV?) and timeline of subsequent war.
- Linguistic study: Comprehensive analysis of ὑποκριτής usage in Septuagint vs. theatrical contexts vs. Gospel usage.
- Note: Dr. Schilling presents as probable rather than certain that Jesus did not attend theater or participate in palace life, while being confident Jesus was aware of these institutions.
- Theological implication: Jesus’ parables gain additional rhetorical force when understood as culturally embedded, not abstract teaching.