

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Triumphal Entry and Tragic Ending

Matthew 21:1-22

Lesson 39

Step #51 and #52 of *Wilmington's Guide to The Bible* include all the events of the Passion Week, from the Triumphal entry through the completion of the last Passover Supper. It is the moment at which the chief cornerstone of God's plan becomes the stumbling stone of the leadership builders of Israel. The vineyard keepers will plot to kill the heir apparent to the owner of the vineyard. The Kingdom has been offered and yet the Messiah will be rejected. The multitude proclaimed Jesus the Son of David and the Messiah weeps at Israel's missed opportunity.

Chapter 21 deals with the Triumphal entry, the cleansing of the Temple, the cursing of the fig tree, the authority of Jesus questioned, and two parables of the sons and the evil vineyard tenants. This study will be limited to the first two days. Matthew 21:1 "when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives." There seems to be either two different locations with similar names in close proximity as seen side by side in Mark 11:1 "And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany" and recorded again in Luke 19:29 "when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany." 21:1 Βηθφαγή Bethphagē In Hebrew the first part of that name is from beit = beth and is the word for house as seen in Ruth 2:4. A.T Robertson points out that the second word in the name Bethphage φαγή - phagē is Aramaic for Figs. (21:17) Βηθανία Bēth/ thania In Hebrew tania is the word for figs thus Beit tania or Bethany = house of figs. בֵּית לֶחֶם -Hebrew bêyth lechem = Bethlehem meaning *house of bread*.

Whether this is the name in two different languages for the same place or two distinct locations known for processing the same fruit they were in very close proximity. Bethany is used 11 times in four gospels while Bethphage is only used in three gospels for this one instance. Another possibility for the two-location theory is that there was a lower and an upper Bethany as is often the case in modern Israeli towns and villages. Although there is no first-century Greek linguistic qualifier in the text to prove that theory, the geographic context does provide a hint of that possibility. In modern Hebrew the upper portion is indicated so by the qualifying word translated in English as "elite". It seems according to Luke that when Jesus first arrived, He was "at" the Mount called Olives which could indicate He arrived at the foot of the mountain. When He sent the two disciples for the donkey from that point, he told them to go to a village "over against you." Bethany was parallel and slightly higher up on the eastern-facing slope on the Mount of Olives. These descriptive locative phrases "at" and "over against" could hint at lower and upper portions of the same town. Jericho, only 12 miles away had both a lower older and an upper newer section. A misunderstanding of this fact is often the cause of the accusation of a contradiction in the Gospels. Matthew 20:29-34 says Jesus healed two blind men as He left Jericho. Luke 18:35-43 indicates He healed a blind man as he entered Jericho. Both passages, including Mark 10:46-53, indicate it was the same event. So did He heal them upon entering Jericho or leaving Jericho? "In Jesus' time, there were two Jerichos; the remaining mound of the ancient destroyed city and the later city of Jericho inhabited by Jesus' day.ⁱ Jesus could have healed the two men as He was leaving the area of the ancient city and entering the newer city of Jericho, thus accounting for the seeming contradiction."

The steep eastern slope of the Mount of Olives from which the Dead Sea is visible is extremely arid and would be ideal for fruit drying and storage facilities. The western slope facing Jerusalem benefits from moisture-laden clouds from the Mediterranean. Jesus stayed in Bethany "house of figs" and later in the passage as we will expound, He curses the fig tree on His way into Jerusalem.

Why would the Messiah make a grand entrance on a donkey?

A white horse would have played right into the narrative of the zealots and the throne-seeking disciples and brought down the Romans' wrath on Him. His time had not yet come and He avoided anything that would trigger the Romans. The decision needed to be put right at the feet of the religious leadership of Israel. He told Pilate after their rejection that His kingdom was not of this world else his disciples would rise up and fight.

He was coming in the manner that would fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;

shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." The use of a donkey in this situation has elicited much mockery by rabbis and agnostics, due to ignorance of livestock characteristics. A foal or colt of a donkey who had yet born a burden on its back would bolt at the attempt of an adult to mount. Shofars blasting, tambourines clanging, garments being thrown in the pathway of this young animal, along with the waving of palm branches and people shouting "Hosana!", would have sent an untried donkey into an absolute panicked revolt. Its voluntary submission was no less than one more miraculous sign to the common folk about the special nature of the rider to which this beast yielded.

A prophetic Psalm is partially fulfilled in 21:9 "the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." Psalm 118:26 "Blessed *be* he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD." Jesus will refer to this Messianic Psalm again with the analogy of "the stone which the builders rejected."

Jesus' credentials for being Messiah King began the book of Matthew. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1"1). This Royal Messianic connection will come up later during this week.

This acclaim harkens back to God's promise to David of an everlasting dynasty known as the David Covenant.

"And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David. The LORD of hosts *is* the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. O Lord GOD, hast spoken *it*: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever." (2 Samuel 7:16-29)

Mat 21:10.11 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

The attention of the whole city was fixated on this massive demonstration of multitudes announcing Jesus as Messiah king. It was reminiscent of Solomon's day, "All the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them" (1 Kings 1:40).

"This is the Day"

Luke 19:38-40 Saying, Blessed *be* the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

The reaction card of the Pharisees was held close to their chest at this moment probably out of fear of the multitudes, but then the commotion and praises came into the bounds of the Temple as we'll see in verses 12-17.

THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL AS UNDERSTOOD BY SIR ROBERT ANDERSON IN THE COMING PRINCE

Dan. 9:24-25 says that from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of the Messiah there will be 483 years.

$$7 + 62 \text{ "weeks"} = 69 \text{ groups of seven years. } 7 \times 69 = 483 \text{ years}$$

Anderson sees a prophetic year as 360 days. This is based both on ancient history and on **Rev. 11:2; Rev. 13:5; Rev. 11:3; Rev. 12:6** which indicate that 42 months 3 ½ years are equal to 1,260 days. Thus, 483 years x 360 days = 173,880 days. Artaxerxes started his reign in 465 B.C. The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was given on the first day of Nisan, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. In our calendar system (the Julian calendar) that date is March 14, 445 B.C. (**Neh. 2:1**) Jesus started His ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius (see **Luke 3:1**). Tiberius started his reign in 14 A.D., so Jesus' ministry started in 29 A.D. Anderson believes that Jesus celebrated four Passovers during His ministry, one each in 29, 30, 31 and His final Passover in 32. With the help of lunar charts, we can calculate the exact date of ancient Passovers, so it is possible to calculate the exact day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as April 6, 32 A.D.

From 445 B.C. to 32 A.D. there are 476 years on the Julian calendar
(not 477 years, because there is no year zero)

476 years x 365 days = 173,740 days

Adjusting for the difference between March 14 and April 6 adds 24 days

Adjusting for leap years over a period of 476 years adds 116 days

The total number of days from March 14, 445 B.C. to April 6, 32 A.D.

173,740 + 24 + 116 = 173,880 daysⁱⁱ

**Daniel told us there would be 173,880 days between the decree
and the arrival of Messiah the Prince.**

Jesus said of the Jewish leadership of this day as He entered the city:

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, **If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!** but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because **thou knewest not the time of thy visitation**” (Luke 19:41-44).

Jesus cleansed the Temple of the money changers for the second time in His ministry (21:12). The first one was after He performed His first miracle (John 2:11-17). The leaders tipped their hands revealing the authority card of their power. Immediately Jesus trumped it by accusing them of changing His Father’s house from a house of prayer into a den of thieves. He exposed their religious corruption of money and power. I can imagine that one could have seen the anger turning their faces red at His rebuke (vs 12,13). Then at a divinely timed moment; enter stage left, the blind and lame people butted in begging for healing (14), to whom Jesus gave priority. The Jewish leaders were pushed aside in sore displeasure (15).

Although the Magi from Babylon knew of the timeline revealed in the Jewish prophecies from Daniel’s influence the Jewish leadership had to be summoned by Herod to find out where this rising star king of the Jews would be born. The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day knew **“not the time of thy visitation.”** They not only were unaware of the Scriptures, they had refused to acknowledge the significance of all that Jesus had said and done as evidence that they must repent and accept Him as the Anointed One. They missed the only offering of God’s plan for their peace.

Jesus curses the Fig tree on His way back to the Temple the next morning.

“Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered... and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw *it*, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away” (21:18-22). “They saw it was “dried up from the roots” (Mark 11:20).

What was going on here? Jesus was hungry. A fig tree had no figs. He had just spent two nights in a town named House of Figs just before fig season started when supplies of dried figs were depleted. An appetite for figs would have been pronounced. Jesus the creator frowned on the fig tree and it quickly withered away. Some have speculated why He would expect a fig tree to have no figs on it since it was not the right season. Passover was always Nissan 14 equating to our March/April. According to modern fruit calendars in Israel, it would be June before ripe figs would appeared.ⁱⁱⁱ The leaves had appeared but the fruit had not yet become visible. He was using it as a parable with a point.

“Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (21:22,22)

This event taught them a powerful connection of praying, believing, and receiving. That is Jesus’ interpretation. But, was there intended symbolism about Jerusalem’s coming judgment?

Misinterpretation

Replacement and Reformed theology believe that the cursing of the fig tree is a sign that God had cursed Israel and they would never again bear spiritual fruit or at least none until the Messianic Kingdom. Israel is absorbed into God's new covenant people. There is no place in their theology for the nation of Israel today nor emphasis on the salvation of Jews today. The Confessional Statement of **The Gospel Coalition** in **Article 11: God's New People** says, "We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; ...The church is ...**the apple of his eye...**"^{iv} Regarding this text and the cursing of the fig tree, they present some good points about fruitlessness, figs, and judgment as an application to Jesus' pronouncement of judgment on Jerusalem, but they draw the wrong conclusion because only Israel is the "apple of His eye." They conclude that Jesus' judgment on Israel was a national curse that is permanent.

Scriptures do indicate that "Throughout the Old Testament, A lack of fruitfulness is a sign of God's curse for their rebellion (Deut. 11:17). This foundational metaphor for Israel's spiritual health vividly blooms in the prophetic era. The time had come for God's people to yield fruit that would bless the world (Isa. 27:6). Several times the prophets describe God as inspecting Israel for "early figs," as a sign of spiritual fruitfulness (Mic. 7:1; Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10-17)—but he finds "no first-ripe fig that my soul desires." So in two exiles (Assyrian and Babylonian), God pours out the curse of barrenness (Hos. 9:16), and Israel becomes a rotten fig (Jer. 29:17). But all is not lost. God promises to one day replant Israel and produce healthy figs from her again (Joel 2:22; Amos 9:14; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 8:12; Ezek. 36:8)."^v

Yes, Jesus did pronounce judgment on that generation, city, and Temple, however, they wrongly conclude that, while Jewish people can be saved today, the nation of Israel is cursed and are no longer the chosen covenant people of God because the church now comprises God's New People." God's old covenant people do not exist in this ecclesiology of the church and they get it wrong in their eschatology of end times. Reformed and Replacement theology has its roots in Covenant Theology in which the New People of God replace Israel and solely benefit from her covenants. Some go so far to say that Israel was never special but only the remnant who became a part of "the people of God." For all practical purposes Israel is cursed and cast aside and of no concern to us. That is arrogant, incorrect, and theologically anti-Semitic. We are to rebuke and disassociate from all forms of it. Will historic Christian doctrine which was written over a 1500-year time period in which no nation of Israel could be seen on a map ever change this prevalent view and adopt Israelology to their Systematic Theology and see God's unique purpose and present position alongside the Church? As one said, There is always hope but not much chance. Sadly those theological systems are spreading like wildfire across the internet and in Seminaries while the mainline denominations that formulated them are drying up like the cursed fig tree. We had better heed Paul's warning.

"Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Romans 11:18-22).

ⁱ [Going to or Coming from Jericho? - livingwithfaith.org](http://livingwithfaith.org)

ⁱⁱ [Son of Man-Sir Robert Anderson.pdf \(grace-life.org\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Israeli Produce Calendar - Fun Joel Israel Tours \(funjoelIsrael.com\)](http://funjoelIsrael.com)

^{iv} [Why Did Jesus Curse the Fig Tree? \(thegospelcoalition.org\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org)

^v *ibid*