

The book cover features a dark purple-to-blue gradient background with a large, stylized palm frond graphic in shades of orange and yellow. The text is centered and reads:

THE
**LAST
WEEK**
MORE THAN
PASSION

This Book Belongs To:

Preface

This study guide can be used for individual Bible Study, small group curriculum, or family studies.

Small Group Leaders Note:

The purpose of this study guide is to draw you and your group into conversation and discussion of God’s Word and its application to our lives. The questions are posed in a specific order and each of the questions has a specific purpose. As you are familiar with the purpose of each question, this will help guide the flow of the discussion.

A high-level view of the five basic questions and their functions:

1. Introduction (lean in). The goal of this first question is to get everyone in the group to “lean in” and get involved. It is normally easy to answer, fun and creates a sense of energy—so much so that you’ll see group members sometimes physically lean in as they engage in the discussion.

2. Observation (look down). This is an observation question. It is designed to help group members “look down” and see the relevant details and facts in the Bible passage being studied. This question establishes a solid foundation for the rest of the study. Regardless how much time someone has spent studying God’s word in their lives, everyone in the group can get involved simply by taking an observant look at what the passage says.

3. Evaluation (look up). What do we learn about God from this passage? This is the ultimate goal of every Bible study—to get a clearer picture of the God we worship, so that we can serve and love Him better.

4. Understanding (look out). This question helps group members “look out” and see the principles of the Bible passage through the lens of the world today. It builds a bridge between the facts of the passage and our understanding of it as it relates to our lives and culture.

5. Application (look in). Here is where group members begin to “look in” and see what God might be nudging them to change in their lives. During this part of the study, group members move from “knowing” to “doing” what God’s word says. It’s the final step of all Bible study: life change—of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Adapted from the Liquid Curriculum Series

5 Transformational Activities

We believe there are five transformational activities that can deepen your time with God—in whatever Bible study setting you find yourself. These are also great practices we are asking all our small groups to incorporate into the life of their groups.

We will be recommending one of these activities each week for you to integrate into your study and devotional time—with your family, or small group, or any place you engage with these study guides. Here is a list of these transformational activities as well as a brief description for each. At the end of the study questions, you will find each week that we have included a suggested activity. We pray that this may this deepen and enrich your time with God and that you may you draw closer to the God you love.

1. Bible Study — We seek to learn more about the triune God with the goal of knowing Him better and applying His will in our lives.

2. Prayer — We seek to learn how to have a deeper and richer prayer life that is consistevnt and meaningful. We will practice this both individually and corporately.

3. Community — We grow more when we are together than in isolation. We want to have a place to love and support each other and encourage one another in the faith. “From Jesus, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16).

4. Worship — We seek to incorporate into our study of God an element of worship. Knowing about God is different than knowing and worshipping God. This may

or may not include music. Worship is a response to all that God is with all that we are. All of life is worship.

5. Outreach — We seek to be healthy in our spiritual growth by avoiding insulation and isolation—which comes from a loss of vision and passion for reaching out and ministering to those around us.

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Introduction

As we approach the season of Easter and look forward to spending time together reflecting on all that it represents, we will spend the five weeks leading up to Easter, and Easter Sunday itself, exploring the events of what is known as “Passion Week”. In modern usage, the term “passion” evokes images of strong and powerful emotion—and perhaps even connotations of love. Yet the way the church has historically used the term “passion” comes from its Latin root, *pati*, meaning to suffer or to endure. Thus the “passion of the Christ” (reflected in the title of the Mel Gibson movie), points us to the suffering that Jesus had to endure, from the time of His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane until His death on the cross. In this short six-week series, we will look at the events of the final week leading up to the crucifixion.

The way the church has historically used the term “passion” comes from its Latin root, *pati*, meaning to suffer or to endure.

I firmly believe we will never fully grasp the depth of the suffering Christ endured on our behalf as He offered Himself up as the substitute for the suffering we all deserve. The unfathomable truth is that the holy, righteous, creator God of the universe deigned to become flesh and tabernacle among us, condescending to bear the weight of the wrath of God that our sin merited.

And He did that for choices you and I make daily. Isaiah chapter 53 paints a bit of the picture of that suffering. As we enter into this season, we might consider reading through this vivid chapter several times. It is important to spend time meditating on, and bringing back into our current awareness, the power and meaning of this climax of human history—to mourn our sin as the cause of this ultimate tragedy—and to praise God for His love, justice, and mercy.

In approaching the events of Passion Week, we will

come across many details and events that can only be rightly understood by examining them in light of the passionate practice of the Judaism of that day. Jesus was Jewish. The Apostles were Jewish. The entire expression of their faith in God was lived out through the faith handed down to them by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was a faith Moses then systematized once Israel became a nation and God gave them rules by which He was to be worshipped and rules by which His people were to live. The events of the New Testament did not occur in a vacuum. They happened within the context of a larger story God began in the Old Testament and was continuing now in the New. This context was Jewish.

As we began to more fully explore in our last series on the book of Acts, one absolutely essential lens through which to read scripture is the lens of the Jewish culture and mindset of the day in which the Bible was both written and received. If we are to rightly understand God's written message to us, there are questions we must ask as we read and study scripture. What did the human authors mean, and what did the recipients hear regarding the message being communicated? What situations were happening all around them, and what presuppositions did they hold about the truths being taught? How did their history and culture shape their worldview and the method by which they approached worshipping the God of Israel? If we are to have any success in the monumental task of transporting ourselves back some 2,000 years and halfway around the world, into a world that is completely foreign to us, we must do our due diligence in seeking out the cultural context of scripture. And for the most part, this means understanding the Jewishness of our Christian faith.

One very apparent truth about the time in which the Passion Week takes place, is that it is approaching the season of and is intimately intertwined with the Jewish feast of Passover. Growing up in a western, 20th century, Bible-believing, Bible-teaching church, all I really knew of Passover was that it was something Jesus and

the disciples observed. I remembered the miraculous deliverance God provided Israel in rescuing them from Egypt—and how Passover was a picture of God “passing over” the homes with blood on their doorposts. I had also heard through the occasional sermon that Passover was one of seven feasts that God called His people to observe. But I never really understood why God considered these feasts so important. For me, they seemed distant and not really applicable to my Christian walk. After all, I didn’t have any plans to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

In most churches I have attended, we really didn’t spend that much time in the Old Testament—outside of some of the more spectacular stories of Abraham, David, Elijah, Moses, and Noah. Whether or not it was intentional, my Christian education growing up in church left me with the impression that Christianity was basically just a New Testament faith. Unfortunately, most everything I was told about the Old Testament and the Mosaic Law was that it was either burdensome or simply didn’t apply anymore.

One thing I definitely didn’t learn growing up was that through these series of feasts God prescribed, not only did He provide a way for His people to honor Him for His faithfulness by giving them a habitual routine—a regular rhythm of remembering and celebrating what He had done—but God used these seven feasts (or seven holy seasons for Israel) to actually reveal an outline of His entire program of redemption, from the death of Messiah to the establishment of His kingdom here on earth. This understanding or realization has come to theologians and teachers of just about every stripe or persuasion. Different teachers sometimes will vary in what they see the fulfillment of these feasts actually point to. The way it will be presented here is from

These seven feasts are actually an outline of God's entire program of redemption, from the death of Messiah to the establishment of His kingdom here on earth.

a Messianic Jewish perspective. Among these learned Christian scholars is a great deal of agreement regarding what the fulfillments look like.

So this is where we will begin exploring background information about the events of the Passion Week. We'll start with an overview of the Feasts of Israel, including their significance both in history and in prophecy, and describe how Passover is the key that unlocks what was really happening in the crucifixion. We will also highlight how unpacking the Jewish mindset regarding these Passion Week events helps us grasp a fuller and more accurate understanding of this monumental event.

The goal is to enable us to see much more clearly that Christianity is not a New Testament religion. It is the next phase of a story God began writing back in the beginning of Genesis. It is the story of salvation that God revealed through His relationship with the Jewish people. That story then continued as He used that chosen people to bring a Messiah to the world. The exciting discovery is that all 66 books of the Bible are a revelation of God Himself. We learn more about who God is and what His plan is by spending time with Him in all parts of His Word.

Week 1:

The Triumphal Entry

As we begin the journey to the cross during this final week of Jesus' earthly ministry, we begin with the Sunday that has come to be known as "Palm Sunday". This important day is known by other names as well. It is also called the "Triumphal Entry". In the Jewish world it was known as "lamb selection day". All of these titles for this important day carry significant meaning. This meaning is intertwined with the feast of Passover, which is the day on which Jesus died. But before we can unpack the significance of each of these titles, it is necessary to present an overview of the feasts—of which Passover is such an important part. What are the Levitical (or Mosaic) feasts? Why did God establish them? What can we learn about God through the meaning He imbued into these feasts?

These feasts all revolved around the harvest seasons in Israel—which were the sources of life for them—and were thus the tangible representations of God's faithfulness to them.

To memorialize the rhythms of life that God wanted His people to establish, and to facilitate their use in honoring Him for His faithfulness, God instituted as a part of the Mosaic Law a yearly cycle of seven feasts for Israel to remember and celebrate His goodness. We see the importance of these feasts expressed all throughout scripture. They were the thread that connected the people of Israel to each other and to God through their long and difficult journey in the Old Testament. They were celebrations and remembrances of the most significant milestones in Israel's history. Yet we also see a new perspective revealed about these feasts as we transition to the New Testament—which we will

cover shortly.

This Old Testament significance is described in Leviticus chapter 23 where the Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed festivals ... which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.’” Moses then spends the entire chapter laying out the details of what these feasts should look like.

Throughout the year, the seven annual feasts were divided into two groups of three, with one in between. These feasts all revolved around the harvest seasons in Israel, which were sources of life for them—and were thus, the tangible representations of God’s faithfulness to them. When the harvests were good, life was good. They would harvest barley and wheat in the spring and summer, and in response, celebrate the three spring feasts (and also Pentecost in the summer) to thank God for His provision through those crops. Then they would harvest olives and grapes in the fall and celebrate three additional feasts to honor God for His watch-care over them.

The three feasts that occur in the spring are:

- The Feast of **Passover** (Pesach)—celebrating God as deliverer
- The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Hag Hamatzot)—celebrating God as redeemer
- The Feast of First Fruits (Yom Habikkurim)—celebrating God as trustworthy

Then 50 days after First Fruits came:

- The Feast of **Weeks** (Pentecost, Harvest, or Shavuot)—celebrating God’s abundant provision

The fall feasts are:

- The Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)—celebrating God’s faithfulness
- The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)—celebrating God’s righteousness
- The Feast of **Tabernacles** (Booths or Sukkot)—celebrating God’s blessings

During these celebrations, the Israelites took time to remember what God had done for His people and to celebrate His goodness. The entire faith community gathered together in Jerusalem without the burden of work to simply worship and celebrate. They ate, danced, sang, played instruments, prayed, and offered sacrifices to God.

In His Law, God required all of His people to come to Jerusalem three times a year—for Passover, Weeks (Pentecost), and Tabernacles (all noted in bold above). So, while they were there in Jerusalem for Passover, they would typically stay (about two weeks) for all three spring feasts. Also, since they were coming to Jerusalem for Tabernacles in the fall, they would arrive early and spend about two weeks celebrating all three fall feasts before returning home.

This was the yearly calendar God designed into the life of His people. This calendar kept them connected to God and to His temple. God provided for His people through the harvests. And in these obligatory feasts, God was helping to teach His children to be thankful—and to recognize Himself as the source of life and blessing. Yet, we also see a whole new perspective on these feasts as we look back on them from the vantage point of the New Testament.

In addition to being historical celebrations of

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

On the Day of Pentecost, the crowds were desperate for Messiah to come and deliver them from the bondage to Rome. They surely felt that God had abandoned them since He had not sent them a prophet in over 400 years. And for many, the kind of Messiah that Jesus was, did not match up with their hopes and expectations. Describe a time when you felt God wasn't answering your prayers. Or that He did answer, but the answer was not exactly what you had expected. What did you learn about God and about yourself through this experience?

significant events in the history of Israel, these feasts are also prophetic, pointing to the mission of the Messiah. The first four feasts focus on the first coming of Messiah and have already been fulfilled. The Feast of Passover pointed toward and was fulfilled by the substitutionary sacrificial death of the Messiah. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled by the shedding of His sinless blood. The Feast of First Fruits was fulfilled by His resurrection. The Feast of Pentecost (or Harvest), fifty days later, was fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit and a great *harvest* of three thousand souls on the Day of Pentecost. This feast focuses on the church age and is fulfilled by the birth of the church. Then came an interval of four months each year between the first cycle of feasts, and the second cycle. This interval is reflected in the church age we are in currently—which is the time period between the first and second comings of Christ.

If you think about it, this was an absolutely amazing way for God to build into the life of His people an understanding of, and anticipation for, all of what the coming of Messiah meant. Each and every year, when taught properly, these feasts would reinforce the power and significance of God’s provision through the message of a coming Messiah.

While the first three feasts describe the work of Christ in His first coming, and the feast of Pentecost pictures the age between His comings, the three fall feasts point toward and describe the events of the second coming of Messiah. The Feast of Trumpets will announce Christ’s return for His church and will be fulfilled by the rapture. The Day of Atonement will be fulfilled by the Great Tribulation and the coming of the *Day of the Lord* (the cataclysmic raining down of judgments that occur during the tribulation, immediately preceding the Second Coming). The Feast of Tabernacles looks

During these celebrations, the Israelites took time to remember what God had done for His people and to celebrate His goodness.

toward our God and savior Jesus Christ setting up His 1,000-year millennial Kingdom and ruling the world from Jerusalem. These seven feasts were given to Israel by God as an outline of His entire program of redemption—including both His first and second comings. They were (and will be) fulfilled on the exact day in the liturgical year in which the feasts occur.

This series of feasts reminds us of the amazing truth that God never fails to prepare us for what is to come. He prepared His people for His arrival as Messiah in giving them previews of what His coming represented. These previews were the yearly feasts that comprised the backbone of their calendar year. And we can understand the program of His return more clearly by understanding the second set of feasts God established in scripture.

Discussion Questions

1. If you grew up in church, what memories of Palm Sunday do you have? If you did not, what do you think Palm Sunday is all about?

2. The Triumphal Entry is recorded in all four Gospels. Read the Luke version of the event in Luke 19:28-44. What is unusual or stands out to you in this story? Why do you think Jesus' reaction upon entering the city on this specific day was to weep (vv. 41-44)?

3. What do we learn about the heart of God from this passage? What is on display about God from the provision of the colt, and how Jesus arranged for it? What do we learn from the Old Testament quotation in v. 38? Why is it significant that the crowd chooses that passage to call out? What do we learn about God from the unbelievable statement by Jesus in v. 40? What is highlighted through the tears, lament, and curse of Jesus at the end of this section?

4. The crowds clearly misunderstood what was happening with Jesus riding into Jerusalem on this day. Where, in the world around you, do you see people misunderstanding what God is doing today? Where does this confusion become apparent regarding: 1) the suffering God allows to happen, 2) the purpose of the church in the world, 3) what God expects of the Christian regarding how we engage with culture, and 4) what God expects of us personally?

5. In Luke 19:39, the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His disciples for their proclamations of His messiahship. By this, we see clearly that the Pharisees were in denial when it came to who Jesus was. They knew that Jesus had performed miracles which only Messiah could do, yet they refused to give up their power. Where might you be in denial as to what God is asking of you? Where do you hold on to control, rather than yielding it up to God? Where do you stubbornly cling to things of this world, or elements of “self” that you know God wants you to give over to Him?

Going Deeper

1. If you would, read ahead through the introduction to the next chapter. What new insights do you notice there about the Triumphal Entry? What misconceptions have we perhaps held about what is really happening in the Triumphal Entry?

2. What soon-coming historical event is Jesus pointing Israel to in Luke 19:41-44? For what reason God is allowing the destruction of Jerusalem to happen in 70 AD? Why is it important to understand that Jesus is highlighting this specific event (the destruction of Jerusalem) and not some vague future end-times event? How does this detail help us understand the significance of the Triumphal Entry more clearly?

Transformational Activity

Worship

The crowds were reciting the Hallel Psalms (Psalm 113-118) and praising God as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. This was a group of Psalms, the purpose of which was to welcome the Messiah when He arrived. This week read through this section of scripture and praise God for who He is and for what He has done—both in providing salvation and for what He has done in your life. When you come back together as a family or group, discuss what God highlighted for you through this time of worship.



Week 2:

Jesus Clears the Temple

Having seen last week the bigger picture of what these seven feasts signify both in the life of Israel and in the overarching plan of God, we can now more clearly understand how Passover (and each of the events leading up to the cross) fits within that overall structure. Then we can also unpack the significance of these important events of “holy week”. We began last time by noting that Palm Sunday is also known as “The Triumphal Entry,” as well as “lamb selection day”. Each of these appellations carry important meaning—which will be important to explore as we go.

So, what is Palm Sunday really all about? It seems there has always been a bit of confusion about this day. On the one hand, the people are waving palm branches and calling out “Hosanna,” supposedly welcoming Jesus

Jesus spent the first half of His ministry performing the miracles that only Messiah could perform.

into Jerusalem as their long-awaited Messiah (Matt 21:8-9). Yet when Jesus arrives in the city, He immediately weeps because He says that the people did not recognize the time of their visitation (Luke 19:41-44). What is really going on with this significant day?

Often the Triumphal Entry, recorded in Matthew chapter 21 (and elsewhere), is understood to be the time when Jesus is offering Himself to the nation as their Messiah and extending the offer of the kingdom to Israel. But we have already seen (during our Acts study) that in Matthew chapter 12, this offer of the kingdom was clearly (and officially) rejected—by the leaders of Israel, and thus by Israel herself.

Jesus spent the first half of His ministry doing the deeds that Messiah was expected to do when He arrived,

and performing the miracles that only Messiah could perform (Matt 11:2-6). He was proclaiming Himself widely to be the Messiah Israel had been waiting for. This clear and public demonstration of His Messiahship forced the leaders of Israel to officially make a decision regarding His messianic claims. It was their responsibility to evaluate and render judgment on any supposed Messiahs. And they had a very clear procedure by which they evaluated such claims.

That decision came halfway into the ministry of Jesus (in Matthew chapter 12), when those leaders declared that Jesus performed His miracles by the power of Satan, rather than by the power of God. This official pronouncement of their decision (by the leaders of Israel) that Jesus was not the Messiah sealed the fate of that generation. Jesus would, from then on, begin to teach that “this generation” would suffer the irrevocable consequences for that rejection (Luke 19:41-44; Matt 21:43). Jerusalem would be destroyed and a partial blindness would happen to Israel until the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25-26). The offer of the kingdom was now revoked and would be offered to a future generation of Israel who will accept it—the generation of Israel alive at the end of the tribulation (Zech 12:10; Hosea 5:15).

Thus, when we come to Matthew chapter 21 and hear the cries of “Hosannah,” what was really happening? According to the Jewish calendar, the date of Palm Sunday would have been the 10th of Nisan. In Exodus 12:3-6, in preparation for that first Passover, God tells Moses to have each household set aside a lamb on that specific day. Between the 10th and the 14th day of that month, the lamb was then to be inspected and tested to make sure it was without spot or blemish. Then on the 14th of Nisan, the Passover occurred and the lamb was to be slaughtered.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey on that Palm Sunday, it was the 10th of Nisan—lamb selection

day. Thus, the Triumphal Entry was not actually the time Jesus was offering Himself as King—that offer had already been rejected (a year and a half earlier). Rather, this was the day the lamb was to be chosen for the sacrifice. And that selection (of Jesus as the ultimate Passover sacrificial lamb) began the process by which, over next few days, Jesus was examined and demonstrated to be without spot or blemish (1 Pet 1:19). In the next few stories following this event, Jesus was attacked and “tested” four times (by the priests and elders, the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees again). Each time He passed the test with flying colors. They could find no fault with Him. Jesus was indeed our spotless sacrificial lamb.

As a side note, through this process, the lamb that had been selected from the flock would become somewhat of a pet in the family. It would need to be under close supervision and thus live with them inside the house. Thus, when it came time for that animal to be sacrificed, imagine how much more impactful that lesson would be on the children, to see their beloved pet lamb being killed, to bear the penalty of what they themselves owed. “Lamb selection day” is a title that pictures for us in a powerful way what this day represented.

The next title for this day is Palm Sunday. The explanation for this title is often given in Palm Sunday sermons, that when Messiah eventually arrived, the Jews knew to cut off palm branches and lay them at his feet. They were also supposed to call out “Hosanna” and say, “Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.” These words come from the “Hallel Psalms” (Ps 113-118). The purpose of these Psalms was to herald the coming of Messiah. The rabbis taught that when Messiah arrived, He must be greeted with these words. But without an understanding of what the Jews were thinking and what their expectations were, we miss out on the significance of what they were actually doing.

Normally all these actions (palm branches and crying

out Hosanna) were not performed during Passover—which is what we see the people doing here. They were supposed to be performed during the feast of Tabernacles (booths). By laying out palm branches and calling out Hosanna, these Jews, at the Triumphal entry, were communicating that they expected what accompanied the feast of Tabernacles to be fulfilled at that moment. However, now having in mind the scope of the prophetic meaning of each of the seven feasts, and reading the scriptures through a Jewish lens, we see that the fulfillment of the feast of Tabernacles does not come until the Messianic kingdom is established (Zech 14:16-21).

The people did not realize that Jesus had **not** come at that time to fulfill the feast of Tabernacles. He had come to fulfill Passover—where the sacrifice for sin was always made. **The multitudes misunderstood the reason Jesus was riding into Jerusalem.** This was not the offer of the kingdom we often see it as. The offer of the kingdom had already been rejected (Matt 12), and the Messiah coming in glory would have to wait for a future generation. This is why understanding the purpose of each of the seven feasts is so important. Jesus confirmed this was not the joyous occasion the people hoped it was by His tears that followed (Luke 19:41-44).

The people did not realize that Jesus had not come at that time to fulfill the feast of Tabernacles, He had come to fulfill Passover.

The final title for this day is the “Triumphal Entry”. Yet this day was not so triumphant after all. Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem? He said it was because they did not recognize the time of their visitation (Luke 19:44). This was the very day Daniel had told Israel the Messiah would present Himself. In Daniel 9:24-27, God gives Daniel a timeline for the nation of Israel—a timeline that charted Israel’s destiny from Daniel’s time until the Second Coming. Within that timeline, God details for Daniel the

exact day that the nation should look for Messiah. Daniel is told that following the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, 69 weeks of years would pass (a week of years is 7 years, thus 483 years of 360 days each, thus 173,880 days). The prophecy then states that following this interval of time the Messiah would come—and He did...on that very day! Daniel prepared the Magi to eventually welcome Messiah when He did arrive. And they did their job. But the people as a whole missed it. Thus, Jesus wept over Jerusalem saying “they did not recognize the time of their visitation” (Luke 19:44).

This singular day in history carried with it monumental significance. It was not the arrival of Messiah in glory to set up His promised kingdom. It was lamb selection day, where the ultimate sin sacrifice would be set apart—leading to a sacrifice that would put an end to the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law, and that would pay the penalty for your sin and mine.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

What are some things we do in the church today that might hinder, rather than help, people coming to faith in Jesus? What “extra-biblical traditions” do we perpetuate that may actually be roadblocks to those who are not familiar with our unique church culture? How might we start the conversation to re-examine these traditions or roadblocks—especially with those who are emotionally tied to them?

Discussion Questions

1. When Jesus clears the temple, we see a perfect illustration of righteous anger. Describe a time you got angry for a good reason.

2. Read Mark 11:27-28. How did the religious leaders react to what Jesus did? What was their specific question for Him? What does “authority” have to do with the situation at hand? Whose authority was Jesus challenging when He overturned the tables? Why was this significant in the life of religious Israel at that time? What did this event say about Jesus’ own authority?

3. What were the money changers and merchants doing in the temple that caused Jesus to do what He did—twice in His ministry (both at the beginning and at the end of His ministry, John 2:13-22; Matt 21:12-13)? What was the temple supposed to be, and how would this activity affect that purpose? What does this incident tell us about the heart of God? What can we learn about God’s anger and our own?

4. If Jesus came to overturn the tables in the church today, what would this look like? Where would He begin? How do you think church leaders would react?

5. Clearly no church is perfect. What have you done to help the church do better? If you could change one thing about modern Christianity, what would it be? How is God prompting you to get involved in the life of the church, perhaps in ways you have not before?

Going Deeper

1. Who (or what) are the authorities in our life today? What are the things that most influence us today (things that influence public opinion, our worldviews, our priorities, how we raise our children, etc.)? How much do these other sources of influence compete with the Word of God as our authority? How might we filter out these competing sources for influence in our lives (or our children's lives)?

2. After reading through the introduction for this week, what do you see as the importance of the Triumphal Entry? Why was it so significant in the life and history of Israel? How did the events of that day perfectly set up what would take place throughout the rest of the week? How did Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers play into the drama of that final week? How might it have been the “last straw” cementing the proposed plans of the religious leaders (Mark 11:18)?

Transformational Activity

Prayer

Most everyone struggles with some sort of anger issues. Whether it is mild or severe, it is something we cannot ignore. This week, take some time to pray about anger. What kinds of things do you get angry about? Are these the kinds of things Jesus would get angry about? What constitutes righteous anger? What do you think God is telling you today regarding how you react to challenges and frustrations? Come back together next time to discuss what you learned.



Week 3:

Jesus at the Mount of Olives

We are making our way through Passion Week, carefully exploring significant events that happened along the way. Our next stop in this journey will be to explore what it means for Jesus to be the Passover lamb. As we have seen, the Triumphal Entry was not really triumphant after all. After Jesus entered the city, He wept over Jerusalem and pronounced a curse upon Israel (Luke 19:41-44). The people misunderstood what was happening and as a result, they performed deeds that were supposed to be performed during the Feast of Tabernacles, not during Passover. They were expecting the Messianic Kingdom to be established, yet this was not the time. Had Israel not rejected Jesus as the Messiah, it actually

Palm Sunday was not the presentation and inauguration of the King, it was “lamb selection day”—in preparation for the sacrificial death of that Lamb.

would have been the time. Hence, following the rejection of the offer of the kingdom (back in Matt 12), Jesus was not in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to fulfill the Feast of Tabernacles, He was there to fulfill Passover. Which means that Palm Sunday was not the presentation and inauguration of the King, it was “lamb selection day”—in preparation for the sacrificial death of that lamb.

On the 10th of Nisan, each family in Israel selected a lamb to be their “paschal lamb.” It was the lamb they would slaughter and eat at their Passover feast on the 14th of Nisan. According to the Law it had to be spotless and without blemish. Thus, for the next four days, each lamb was closely observed to make absolutely certain it was indeed pure. As our Passover lamb, this is what happened to Jesus over the next few days of Passion

Week. We will see Him tested four different times and be found blameless.

It is important to remember that the coming of Messiah is pictured in scripture in two distinct ways. He is called the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev 5:5), as well as the Lamb of God. This illustrates the two distinct purposes of His two comings. The first coming of Jesus was as a lamb being led to the slaughter. Sadly, our Messiah needed to die to pay the price for our sin. But when He returns, it will be as a conquering king. So, in this first coming, the mission of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb is in focus.

Four different passages in the New Testament identify Jesus as that lamb. When Jesus was introduced as Messiah to the Jewish people at His baptism, John referred to Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 26). In this way, John connected Jesus with the Passover lamb of Exodus 12, and with the suffering sacrificial lamb presented in Isaiah chapter 53. Also, 1 Peter 1:19 says that we were redeemed with the “precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” 1 Cor 5:7 highlights this as well: “...our Passover has been sacrificed, even Christ.” Then in Rev 5:12, Jesus is described as: “the lamb that has been slain.”

After the Triumphal Entry, Jesus returned to Bethany, where He spent every night of this last week. Over the next two days, several things happened. Jesus cleansed the temple, He cursed the fig tree, and He was “examined” through attacks by four different groups.

In Mark 11:15, we see Jesus driving out the money changers from the temple. If that sounds familiar, it’s because this is the second time Jesus had done this. Back during the first Passover of Jesus’ ministry (John 2:13-22), Jesus did the exact same thing. This early act by Jesus in John chapter 2 set the stage for a conflict with the religious leaders that would be a running theme all throughout His ministry.

The reason the clearing of the temple roused so much attention was that the High Priest Annas had set up a very lucrative business for himself. Under his direction, the priests ran a “sacred marketplace” which would exchange the foreign coinage people had for the Jewish temple currency they needed to pay the temple tax. They would also inspect the animals being brought for sacrifice, and declare them blemished so the people would be forced to purchase, at exorbitant prices, the “approved” animals from the priestly flocks. The proceeds of this extortion went directly into the pockets of Annas.



Normally, during the off-season, this marketplace was located in the huge colonnaded structure called the “Royal Stoa” located above the southern wall of the temple mount. But during the high holidays, to accommodate the millions of pilgrims who were in Jerusalem for the mandatory feasts, these stalls for money changing and the selling of animals would spill over into the temple proper, profaning the sacred area of the court of the Gentiles.

At the beginning of the gospels, Jesus went public in His ministry by driving out these money changers. Here in this final week, Jesus closes His public ministry by doing the same thing. In doing this, Jesus was exercising His messianic authority over the temple, showing His

authority to cleanse the temple, His authority to possess the temple and not allow anyone to enter, and His authority to speak for God.

This leads us to the examination of the lamb God had prescribed—to ensure it was without stain or blemish. We see Jesus tested by each of the factions of religious leaders: the priests and elders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians. This examination came in the form of attacks and challenges to His authority. We see the first attack from the priests and the elders in Matt 21:23. Here they attacked and challenged Jesus on the subject of authority. They were the self-appointed authorities for all things religious, and Jesus had been systematically undermining that authority all throughout His ministry.

They asked Jesus, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you that authority?” According to the Pharisaic methodology, authoritative teaching required previous rabbinic authorization. Thus, when rabbis would teach, they would always begin their arguments by saying things like, “According to Rabbi Hillel...”, or “according to Shammai...” They would always cite their authority before making any kind of claim, thus teaching or ruling via the citation of recognized authorities.

But how did Jesus teach? He would say, “You have heard it said...but I say unto you.” This simple statement—a statement that might not catch our attention—would be a shocking thing for a first century Jew to hear, and something that would be more than a little offensive for the religious elite. Jesus was claiming *intrinsic* authority for His teaching—another insight we glean from exploring the Jewish cultural context of our Bible.

We notice that Jesus does not answer their question here, but rather, answers their question with a question—a common Jewish teaching method. He asks if the baptism of John was a God-ordained ministry. Here Jesus catches these rulers in a trap. They could not say that John was

not from God, in that they feared the reaction of the multitude who considered John to be a prophet. But if they said his ministry was from God, then Jesus could claim that He received His authority from John—from whom Jesus had received His baptism, and from whom Jesus had received testimony that He was the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” This initial attack against Jesus failed.

The next attack came from the Pharisees and the Herodians—strange bedfellows indeed. They were from extreme opposite ends of the political spectrum, and would normally have nothing to do with one another. The Herodians supported Roman rule through the house of Herod. And the Pharisees actively opposed Roman rule. But their common opposition to Jesus’ messianic claims brought them together.

They asked Jesus whether or not it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar. They thought they had Jesus trapped, in that He would either anger the people for siding with Rome, or open Himself up to a charge of sedition for refusing to pay taxes. Jesus called them out for their hypocrisy and pointed out in His answer that all authority comes from God. Caesar only rules because God allows it. Thus, paying taxes to Caesar did not

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

One important principle by which we must approach scripture is the truth that “scripture interprets scripture”. Many people avoid studying the end-times because of the imagery and symbolism employed in that genre. But in the 404 verses that comprise the book of Revelation, there are over 800 allusions to the Old Testament. We don’t understand the book of Revelation because we need to spend more time in the Old Testament. Rather than “punting to mystery” when it comes to symbols and images in Revelation, perhaps we might take up the challenge to do some digging to see where those images might be used elsewhere in scripture.

nullify God's rule. This second attack failed.

The third attack came from the Sadducees, who did not believe in the concept of resurrection. They used a Levitical law called "the law of Levirate marriage" to try to trap Jesus with a question they knew the Pharisees were unable to answer. But Jesus gave a multi-faceted answer that so overwhelmed them, scripture says that after this, they dared not ask Jesus any more questions (Luke 20:40). Jesus' answer brilliantly exposed the shortcomings of the Sadducees, blasting them for not knowing the scriptures nor understanding the power of God.

In His answer Jesus deftly avoided using the most common proof-texts for the resurrection in the Old Testament (Dan 12:2, Job 19:25-26, and Isa 26:19). He understood that while the Pharisees believed you could derive doctrine from any place in scripture (the Old Testament), the Sadducees taught that every doctrine must originate in the Law of Moses. For them, you could *illustrate* doctrines by using the Prophets and the Writings, but the doctrine must have originated in the Torah. Thus, using Daniel, Job, and Isaiah would not carry any weight with the Sadducees.

Knowing this, in His answer to the Sadducees, Jesus points to a completely unexpected source to argue for the resurrection.

Using very Jewish logic, Jesus argued that God is the God of the living and not the dead. The thinking behind this is if God made a promise to someone, and that person dies before that promise is fulfilled, then God must raise that person from the dead, because God always keeps His promises. God had promised Abraham

Jesus passed the examination of the Passover lamb with flying colors, and was now qualified to be the ultimate sin sacrifice the Mosaic sacrificial system had so long anticipated.

many things—including the land of Israel. Yet during his life, Abraham never owned more than a burial plot and a well in the land. The complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant has not yet happened, and so God must needs resurrect Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so that He can keep His promises to them. The writer of Hebrews used that same logic to argue that Abraham trusted that God would raise Isaac from the dead, if Abraham had indeed gone through with that sacrifice (Heb 11:17-19). Thus, Jesus used their venerated Torah to disarm the question of the Sadducees. Jesus silenced them with this answer and passed the third test.

The fourth attack was from the Pharisees again, who, this time, asked Jesus a theological question. They asked what the greatest commandment in the Law was. He replied that we must love the Lord our God with all our being, and that we must love our neighbor as ourselves. This turned out to be the exact answer the Pharisees themselves would have given. And thus, they too were silenced. Jesus then puts the nail in the coffin of these questions by asking them a question of His own. The point of His question was that the Messiah had to be both man and God at the same time, otherwise David could not have called Him Lord. This was something these leaders could not publicly acknowledge, for it would substantiate the messianic claims of Jesus.

Jesus passed the examination of the Passover lamb with flying colors, and was now qualified to be the ultimate sin sacrifice the Mosaic sacrificial system had so long anticipated. Jesus being the “Lamb of God” carries so much more significance than might appear at first. It is our job to do the digging to uncover these rich, vibrant layers of meaning and understanding as we spend time with God in His Word.

Discussion Questions

1. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus gives His most extensive teaching on the end times in scripture. If you could ask Jesus one question right now regarding the end times, what would it be?

2. (For more in-depth background on the Olivet Discourse, it would be helpful to read through the intro to next week's notes. There we will see that in order to get a full understanding of all that is happening in this discourse, we need to examine all three gospel versions of it.) What three questions do the disciples ask of Jesus in Matt 24:3? What is the difference between these three questions? What is the first question and what is it specifically asking? How does Jesus answer this question in Luke 21:20-24? How is this near-term event (70 AD) similar to and different from how Jesus describes what happens in the middle of the future tribulation period in Matt 24:15-22?

3. Why do you think Jesus used His disciples' question regarding the temple buildings as the prompting for giving His most thorough teaching regarding the end times? What did the temple represent to the Jews? Why was it so important to them? What would its destruction mean in their minds? What do we learn about the heart of God by Him giving His people Israel: first, a tabernacle, then a temple, and then taking that temple away?

4. What is the typical reaction of those outside the faith when Christians begin talking about the end times? Why do you think so many Christians avoid the study of the end times? What challenges does this kind of study lay before us?

5. How does the biblical teaching on the end times produce in us a sense of hope? Describe how understanding the scope of the end times as discussed in scripture can help us see more clearly the broad strokes of the overarching plan of God, as well as how far-reaching the sovereignty of God really extends. How does discussing the end times make you feel? Perhaps anxious or fearful, or maybe even excited? How does understanding the end times motivate you to action?

Going Deeper

1. In the parallel account of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25, Jesus ends the message with parables about being prepared (the parable of ten virgins), and about how we are to steward the resources God has entrusted to us (the parable of the talents). How do each of these two parables challenge us regarding how we ought to apply end times teaching to our lives? Read through these parables in Matthew chapter 25 and discuss what being prepared looks like for us today. Then discuss how the idea of stewardship might guide both our daily priorities as well as our mindset for how we apply the power of end times teaching in our Christian walk.

2. Jesus responds to the question from the disciples about the temple buildings by detailing the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Why specifically will Jerusalem be destroyed in 70 AD (Luke 19:41-44)? Read Luke 11:49-51. To which generation does Jesus assign this coming judgment? What additional information do we get about the message of Jesus to that particular generation in Matt 23:34-39? Why is it important to distinguish between the three questions the disciples ask in order to properly understand the message Jesus gives in the Olivet Discourse?

Transformational Activity

Bible Study

Take some time this week to think and pray about how God might be prompting you to dive deeper into this important area of God's Word. God included discussions of the end times in scripture for a reason, and unfortunately, many Christians deem it too confusing and thus ignore it. Our first question this week had us think about one question we might ask Jesus about the end times. If we were to ask Him if He thought we should spend time studying this doctrine, what do you think His answer would be? Read through the three parallel accounts of the Olivet Discourse this week (Matt 24-25; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36) and write down any questions you have. Note where you see Jesus referring to Israel, and which sections apply to the church. Come back next time to discuss what you learned.



Week 4:

Resting in Bethany

The last week in the life of Jesus leading up to the crucifixion was full of significant events. One of the most important events of that final week is known as the “Olivet Discourse.” This is a message we see recorded in Matthew 24-25 (also detailed in Mark and Luke) that Jesus gave to His disciples, answering a question that was burning in each of their minds: “What about the kingdom?”

By this point in the ministry of Jesus, the disciples had seen enough to be convinced that He was the Messiah. But the final piece of the messianic puzzle was surely plaguing them. They had been taught all their lives that when Messiah came, the Messianic kingdom would be established. The Old Testament was abundantly clear that it was in this kingdom that Israel would see the restoration and renewal of all things. Wrongs would be made right. And the Messiah would reign on David’s literal, political throne here on earth. It was in the coming of the kingdom that Israel would receive the fulfillment of the many promises God had made to them all throughout their history. (See weeks 29 and 40 in the Acts book 3 study guide for a fuller discussion of the Jewish “kingdom expectation”.)

We have already seen that the purpose of Matthew in writing his gospel was to answer the very specific question: if Jesus was indeed the Messianic king, why had the kingdom not yet been established? Here, in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus proceeds to tie a bow on that question by answering the disciples’ follow-up question: if you’re not bringing in the kingdom now, when will it happen?

The order of events that bracket the Olivet Discourse is very telling. Immediately preceding and following this important teaching by Jesus are two other teachings

that set the Olivet Discourse in its context. In the prior chapter (Matthew 23), Jesus closed His public ministry in a powerful way. We see Jesus spend an entire chapter forcefully denouncing the leadership of Israel directly to their face—for their role (and guilt) in leading Israel to reject the Messiahship of Jesus and His offer of the kingdom. Jesus lets them have it with both barrels in calling out their hypocrisy and condemning them for usurping the authority of the Law of Moses with their own self-appointed authority.

He punctuates this stinging rebuke by revealing that, as a result of this rejection, He will not return until Israel actually requests His return (Matt 23:37-39; Hos 5:15-6:2). From this point on in His ministry, Jesus would deal only with His disciples and not the nation at large. This passion-filled outburst by Jesus set the stage for and actually propelled Jesus into the message regarding the end of the age we see in the Olivet Discourse. This was not some calm, serene, chat with Jesus and His disciples sitting under the shade of the olive trees. This was a passionate, fiery message fueled by the climactic, fire-and-brimstone, blistering confrontation Jesus just had with the Pharisees.

What closes the bracket on the other side of the Olivet Discourse is the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper. Here we see Jesus give the Upper Room Discourse, where He transitions in His role from Prophet to Priest. Many of us have understood that Jesus holds all three sacred offices: Prophet, Priest, and King. But what is often misunderstood is that He does not hold these offices simultaneously, but rather, chronologically. During His first coming and His 3-year ministry, Jesus functioned in the office of a Prophet. In the Upper Room Discourse, He makes the transition to the office of Priest—where He now sits at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. And it is only when He comes in glory to sit on the throne of David that He will function in His role as King. Clearly, this teaching in Matthew chapters 24-25 comes at an absolute climax in

the ministry of Jesus.

With that context in place, what were the questions Jesus was answering in Matthew chapters 24-25? In other words, what was the purpose of the Olivet Discourse? As Jesus and the disciples left the temple compound, with the Pharisees no doubt seething from being taken to the woodshed, the disciples point out to Jesus the amazing structure of Herod's temple. Jesus then "tees up" the next question from the disciples by noting that none of the stones they were marveling at would be left standing upon each other in the coming destruction. These stones, still visible under the western wall of the temple compound today, measure some 26 feet long and weigh over 100 tons. The disciples naturally took the bait and asked Jesus when this destruction would take place, and how and when the Messianic kingdom would be established. They were beginning to understand that, in light of Israel's rejection of the offer of the kingdom by Israel (as seen in Matthew chapter 12), it was impossible to set up the kingdom at that time. As they left the temple mount and reached the other side of the ravine and sat down on the Mount of Olives, Jesus began His answer.

**World wars,
Jesus says,
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of the age has
begun.**

While Matthew gives us a helpful structure and timeline for how these events transpired, we need to look to all three gospel accounts to fill out the picture of what was being asked and how Jesus answered each question separately. All in all, three questions were asked, and three signs were requested. The first question is recorded in the Matthew account: "Tell us, when shall these things be?" (Matt 24:3) This points back to the destruction of the temple Jesus had just made reference to. Luke adds a bit of detail to this first question by adding the note, "And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" (Luke 21:7) In other words, the disciples are asking when the temple will be destroyed and what the

will be that it is about to happen.

The second question asked was, “What will be the sign of your coming?” (Matt 24:3) Included in this question is the request for a sign. This question is not asking about the rapture of the church, in that it is clear from other passages that the rapture is imminent (after 70 AD), and there is no sign that precedes it. However, we learn from this teaching by Jesus that the Second Coming has a very clear sign that announces its arrival.

The third question was, “What will be the sign of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3) In Jewish thinking of that day, there were to be two “ages”—“this age,” and “the age to come.” They were asking what the sign would be that “this age” was ending—and the Messianic Age was beginning.

Jesus was asked three total questions and He answers all three, but not in the order they were asked. Also, the disciples asked Jesus for specific signs, yet He begins by detailing some “non-signs.” He first sets the stage by describing some general characteristics of the church age: the rise of false messiahs, and the coming of local wars (Matt 24:4-6). He emphasizes that these were non-signs by pointing out that these things must come to pass, but He says that this is not yet the end.

Having set the stage, Jesus begins answering these questions by addressing the third question first. In Matt 24:7-8 He says that the end of the age will be signaled by “...nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”. This phrase is a Jewish idiom for the idea of a *world-wide* war. This is in contrast to the non-signs He mentioned earlier of *local* wars. These world wars will be accompanied by famines and earthquakes. World wars, Jesus says, signal the fact that the end of the age has begun. And He characterized this as the beginning of the birth-pangs. What do we know about birth pangs? We know that once they begin, the birth is inevitable and will be accomplished soon. One of the most remarkable and even miraculous consequences of the two world wars

was the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948—something which further sets the stage for the coming of the end.

One of the most remarkable and even miraculous consequences of the two world wars was the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948.

Before proceeding to answer the other two questions, Jesus describes what awaits the apostles in their own time (Mark 13:9-13 and Luke 21:12-19). He describes the persecution they will endure both in synagogues and in prison, but comforts them that He will be with them through it all. We see this unfold before us in the book of Acts.

Jesus then answers the first of the remaining two questions. In Luke 21:20-24, Jesus describes the coming destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem. What is most remarkable about His answer is that while Jesus granted their request for a sign (a sign that would mark the arrival of the destruction of Jerusalem), He also instructed them that when they saw this sign, they were to flee to the mountains.

Jesus says that the city of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies was that very sign. The question then follows: if the city is surrounded, how then would they be able to flee? History gives us the remarkable answer. In 66 A.D., the Jewish revolt against Rome began. The Roman general stationed in Israel brought his army from Caesarea up to Jerusalem and surrounded it—not expecting much resistance. To his surprise, the city was well prepared for a lengthy siege and valiantly fought back—holding off the mighty Roman army. Thus Gallus, the Roman general, lifted the siege and returned to Caesarea to await reinforcements. This lifting of the siege afforded the Christians time to actually flee the city as Jesus had instructed. When the Roman army returned, although over 1.1 million Jews died at the hands of the Romans in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., it is believed that none of them were Messianic believers.

These followers of Yeshua (Jesus) heeded His call to flee the city after Jerusalem was surrounded.

As we move into Jesus' answer to the disciples' second question (the final of the three questions He answers), it is important to notice that there are similarities between Jesus' answer to the first question (regarding the details describing the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.), and the details of the answer to the second (and final) question regarding the sign of His coming at the end of the tribulation period. These similarities reveal that God often gives us a preview of things to come in the events of history. For example, God gave us (through Daniel) a preview of the antichrist and his activities in the person of the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes (167 B.C.)—who desecrated the Holy of Holies. This historical event paints a picture for us of what the Antichrist will do when he eventually comes. God always prepares us for what is to come. One of the ways He does that is through these prophetic previews.

Here, in the Olivet Discourse, God gives us a preview of the coming destruction that will happen in the tribulation period by mirroring some of the events back in 70 A.D. In both situations, the Jews are told to flee. In 70 A.D., they fled to Pella, across the Jordan river, outside the territory that that particular Roman procurator had control over—in order to escape

DID YOU KNOW?

According to Exodus 21:32, the Mosaic Law valued the life of a slave at 30 pieces of silver. That was how much you were required to recompense your neighbor if your animal accidentally caused the death of his slave. Over time, this became a symbolic number of contempt. If you wanted to insult a person, you would give them 30 pieces of silver—indicating they were worth as much as a dead slave. This being the amount that Judas was paid was no accident. The chief priests were demonstrating that they thought the life of Jesus was worth no more than a dead slave.

that destruction. During the coming tribulation, the Jews will flee to Bozrah (in Petra) to escape the persecution of the antichrist (Isa 34:1-7, 63:1-6).

So, the second question the disciples asked (and the final question Jesus answers) is regarding the sign of His coming at the end of the age. Here (Matt 24:15) Jesus points His disciples to the book of Daniel, which describes the “Abomination of Desolations” in chapters 9, 11, & 12. This is the mid-point of the tribulation and will start a countdown of 1260 days until His return. This will be the signal for the Jews to flee. But this tribulation period will culminate in the return of Messiah in glory. The specific sign Jesus points to, following the countdown, is the sign that will appear in the sky in Matt 24:29-30.

After answering the three questions and describing the signs of those events, Jesus then goes on to provide more information regarding the last days. He describes a world-wide regathering of His people Israel from the four corners of the earth. He then gives a series of parables that illustrate His exhortation to believers to look up—for our redemption “draweth nigh”. He also gives an exhortation to unbelievers to believe on the Messiah, for that is the only way to escape the horrors of the time of the tribulation, where we will see the outpouring of the wrath of God on the usurpers of this realm. Jesus also gives an exhortation to the those who will be present during the tribulation. To the Jews who will be present then, He says to be ready to flee. And to the Gentiles, He says to watch, be ready, and to labor. This is the most comprehensive treatment of end times events Jesus gives us. And when we examine it through the lens of the Jewish context of the times, and of His audience, it comes much more clearly into focus.

Discussion Questions

1. In this story we see a beautiful, selfless act done for Jesus. What is the most selfless act you have seen someone do for another?

2. Read Mark 14:3-9 and the parallel passages in Matt 26:6-13 and John 12:1-8. What details stand out to you about this story? Why do you think the disciples are indignant? What is Jesus' reaction to what Mary did? Why do you think Mary understood that Jesus was about to die, when the disciples apparently did not? What does this loving act teach us about earthly priorities and having an eternal perspective?

3. What did Jesus mean in Mark 14:7? Does this statement have more to do with the poor, or with Jesus? What did Jesus mean in Mark 14:9? Why do you think this act holds this kind of significance? What does this act (and Jesus' response) say about how we typically view and treat Jesus? Do you feel like we give Jesus the honor He is due in our daily lives? Why or why not?

4. One thing that stands out about this act by Mary is its selfless character. No matter the cost, no matter the scorn, she was going to worship Jesus. In what ways is the worship happening today in the church more self-centered than God-centered? What are some examples of selfless, God-centered worship you see today? How might we move toward a more God-centered approach in our worship?

5. What do we learn about worship from this simple act by this woman in Mark 14:3? What does worship look like in your life? What would you like to change about how you worship? What is one step you will take this week to make that happen?

Going Deeper

1. Read Mark 14:10-11 and the parallel passages in Matt 26:14-16 and Luke 22:3-6. What details stand out to you about this event? What is different about what happened to Judas from what normally happens to someone who is described as demon-possessed in scripture? Why is this significant? How do you see the strategies of Satan at play here in His long war against God?

2. Jesus told His disciples many times that He was destined to die, but somehow it never really sank in. Read Matt 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19, and 26:1-2. What is different about this latest proclamation of Jesus in Matthew chapter 26? Why do you think it was so difficult for the disciples to comprehend that Jesus was going to die? Read John 11:47-57. What is remarkable about this passage? What is the surface reason that the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead? What underlying reasons are also motivating their plot?

Transformational Activity

Prayer

The alabaster vial of costly perfume that Mary broke for Jesus did not indicate that her family was wealthy. It was more likely a family heirloom, perhaps even something reserved for the bride's wedding night. Mary selflessly gave her most prized possession to worship Jesus. What might Jesus be asking you to give up for Him? Spend some time this week praying about something that might be holding you back from being a fully devoted follower of Christ. Is there a secret place in your heart you have yet to yield to God's control? When you come back together as a group or family, share what the Spirit revealed to you this week.



Week 5: Passover

As we have seen, this final week before the crucifixion is all about Passover. In fact, the ministry of Jesus and the meaning of the cross is intricately intertwined with how God designed Passover. We've explored how Passover fits into the structure of the seven Mosaic feasts that God wove into the life of His people—so that they would remember and celebrate His goodness. We've also seen how each of the feasts was (and will be) fulfilled on the exact day it was observed in the Jewish liturgical year. This is quite easy to notice when comes to Passover. Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb, and His sacrifice came on the exact day of Passover. For these final two weeks in our Passion week series, we will zero in a little closer on the details of the Passover meal Jesus celebrated with His disciples, as well as the Passover sacrifice itself, which lies at the heart of our salvation.

The Exodus out of Egypt and the Passover event are among the most memorable passages in all of biblical history. Not only because of Cecil B. DeMille's colorful depiction of this story—with Charlton Heston's flowing

**God would give
His firstborn
Son for us;
thus, He has a
claim on every
firstborn in a
special way.**

brown locks turning glowing white after his encounter with God—but even more so because it is the most important and most referred to of all the Mosaic feasts in scripture. It is referenced over 50 times in the Old Testament, and some 27 times in the New Testament.

As the fateful night of their departure out of Egypt approached, God gave Moses detailed instructions to pass along to Israel for how He wanted them to celebrate the first Passover. We see this spelled out in Exodus chapter 12. Each family was to take an unblemished lamb and kill it, and apply the blood to the lintel and doorposts of their home. Thus, when God Himself (not a supposed “angel of death”) passed through the land and came to a

house “covered” by the blood, He would “pass over” that house. At the other houses that did not have the blood, He would “pass through” and slay the firstborn. This idea of God requiring the firstborn is seen in many places in scripture.

For example, immediately after giving Moses these instructions in Exodus 12, in the very next chapter God clearly explains to Moses that every firstborn now belongs to Him. In fact, not just every firstborn human, but the firstborn of every womb (human and animal alike) is His. God would give His firstborn Son for us; thus, He has a claim on every firstborn in a special way. Rather than *taking the life* of the firstborn sons of Israel, God chose to take, as a substitute, the entire tribe of Levi—which would be set apart in special service to Him (Num 3:44-45 and Luke 2:22-24).

The two essential elements in the celebration of the Passover that God commanded His people to observe included first, the killing of the lamb, and second, the eating of the lamb. As it comes to the killing of the lamb, several things are noteworthy.

First of all, the lamb was to be without spot or blemish. We have already seen how Jesus passed this test of the religious leaders who closely examined Him—who had hopes of finding some sort of flaw. Next, not a bone of the lamb was to be broken (Ex 12:46). John 19:36 confirms that Jesus was qualified regarding this requirement as well.

We must also remember that in the Jewish reckoning of a day, the night always came before the day (a day begins at sundown). Therefore, the night of Passover preceded the day of Passover. On the evening of Passover each family would take the set-apart lamb and kill it and eat it. The following morning, a special sacrificial lamb was offered for the entire nation on the altar by the priesthood. Thus, the first element of the Passover remembrance was the killing of the lamb. The next element was the eating of the lamb.

The Passover (Pachal) meal included the eating of the

lamb along with two other items: unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Many more elements have crept into the Passover Seder celebration over the years, but these three elements were all the Mosaic Law required. Along with the food, wine was the other important element. We will see Jesus explain the significance of these elements as He breathes new life into the last Passover (which was the first Lord's Supper).

In the upper room, Jesus unpacked for His disciples the meaning of what these elements and symbols were ultimately pointing to. He Himself embodied the fulfillment of this observance Israel had been keeping ever since the time of Moses.

The fact that the bread had to be unleavened was very significant. As the people of Israel left the land in a hurry, not knowing if Pharaoh would change his mind, they had no time to bake bread, and let it rise. So, they ate unleavened bread that night. Yet when we put on our Jewish lenses to read scripture, and understand all that this means, we see there is much more in focus. Leaven is a "type" or picture of sin all throughout scripture (1 Cor 6:6-8). It is said that pride (the source of all sin) "corrupts, by puffing up"—just as leaven rises and puffs up the bread.

Throughout the many years of Jewish history, the rabbis added many elements to how Passover was observed. Yet even in these added elements, we see

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

What was your impression of Passover growing up? Was it just one of those things in the Old Testament that had no relevance to your life? After having explored it a bit more this week—focusing on the powerful Messianic messages present within this ceremony—what is your impression of Passover now? What new facets or insights regarding this God-ordained feast are most meaningful to you? What is the main message of Passover? Have you applied the blood of the lamb to the doorposts of your heart?

the picture of our suffering Messiah come through. The bread was to be not only unleavened, but striped and pierced as well. Since the bread had to be baked quickly, it would end up being striped, because of the high heat and the hurry with which it was cooked. This cooking process would make it more brittle. The bread was also to be pierced, which would further impede the fermenting or leavening process. If the bread was held up to the light, the light would penetrate through it.

When Jesus was celebrating this ceremony with His disciples, He held up the bread and said, “This is my body, broken for you.” The body of Jesus could be seen as “unleavened” in that it was sinless, and thus qualified to be the Passover sacrifice (2 Cor 5:21). The body of Jesus was striped by the Roman whips (John 19:1). Isaiah 53:5 paints the picture of Jesus on the cross by saying, “...by His stripes we are healed.” And the body of Jesus was pierced on the cross on two occasions—first, by the nails in His hands and feet, and then by the spear in His side (John 19:34). In Psalm 22, David narrates the crucifixion in advance by stating, “They pierced my hands and my feet...” Zechariah 12:10 reveals how Israel will remember this one truth in their national repentance by “...looking upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him, and one mourns for an only son.” Isaiah echoes the same thought by saying, “He was pierced through for our transgressions...” (Isa 53:5). The body of Jesus was the bread given for us. It was unleavened, striped, and pierced.

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In the modern celebration of the Passover Seder, three pieces of unleavened bread (the Matzo) are placed within a white linen cloth and placed in an afikomen bag. In the Messianic, fuller understanding of the meaning of Passover, we see that the three pieces wrapped in one bag represent our one God, who exists in three persons. The middle (or second) piece is taken out and broken, and half of it is “buried” or hidden somewhere in the room. The children then search for the “buried treasure” of

unleavened bread which is striped and pierced, wrapped in cloth, buried, earnestly sought, and when discovered, found to be of great value. The second person of the Trinity was wrapped in white linen and buried on our behalf. In the Passover Seder ceremony, pieces of this bread are broken off and given to each member of the family, reflecting John 6:51, which says that we must all partake of this bread, His body.

In addition to the food, there were also four cups of wine served as a part of the Passover celebration. Each of these cups had a name which communicated a specific meaning. The first cup was called “the cup of thanksgiving” (or blessing). We see this in Luke 22:17-18. The second cup was called “the cup of plagues,” symbolizing and remembering the ten plagues which fell upon them in Egypt. The third cup was called “the cup of redemption” because it symbolized the physical redemption of Israel by the blood of the paschal lamb. Jesus transformed this cup into a picture of spiritual redemption from the bondage of sin, which He accomplished on the cross (Luke 22:20). Jesus tied this act of redemption to the coming of the promised New Covenant from Jeremiah 31:31-33. This third cup, the cup of redemption, now becomes the cup of communion we all participate in today. The fourth cup was called the cup of praise, referring to the Psalms of praise which are sung at the conclusion of the ceremony (Ps 115-118). This is the cup that Jesus indicated He would not drink of until He was able to drink it with His disciples in the coming Kingdom.

Yeshua (Jesus) is our Passover (1 Cor 5:6-7). But just as in the Passover experience in the exodus, the blood itself accomplishes nothing unless it is applied. The blood had to be applied to the doorposts of the house in Egypt for it to accomplish its purpose. So too, the blood of Jesus must be applied to the doorposts of our hearts. This is our means of deliverance from divine judgement. Passover carries with it such significant meaning—both in the life of Israel and in our own lives today.

Discussion Questions

1. What special meals do you celebrate with your family? What are some of the traditions you like to keep together?

2. As you read through this account of the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper in Mark 14:12-26, what details stand out to you? Of the events mentioned in the text, what would have been surprising or even shocking for the disciples to witness? What do you think would have been going through the minds of the disciples as Jesus departed from centuries of tradition to imbue new meaning into these very strict Jewish Seder observances? What new meaning does Jesus highlight?

3. Why do you think Jesus said that He “earnestly desired” to celebrate this Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:15)? What do you think was going through the mind of Jesus as He partook in this final Passover with His friends? What was the reaction of the disciples when Jesus dropped the bombshell comment about one of them betraying Him (Mark 14:19)? Why do you think they all reacted in the same way?

4. In the Last Supper, Jesus proclaimed that His body and blood would be given to cleanse us of all sin. In light of that transformative truth, why do you think so many Christians still struggle with feelings of guilt? Why is it then important that we continue to celebrate the Lord’s Supper together regularly? What do we need to be reminded of, to keep the present awareness of our sanctified status before God fresh in our minds?

5. What does participating in communion mean to you? What is the danger of allowing something we celebrate so often to become too familiar? How might you strive to keep the importance and solemnity of communion alive in your heart?

Going Deeper

1. Read Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:26-28. What is the New Covenant? With whom was it made? What are the provisions of the New Covenant? How does it relate to the Old (Mosaic) Covenant? What is the relationship between the Last Supper celebration and the institution of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20)?

2. Read the account of the Last Supper in John 13:1-20. What is highlighted here regarding Peter and washing? What does Jesus mean about washing their feet? What does it mean to be completely clean but still need to have our feet washed (1 John 1:9)? Why is this interchange between Peter and Jesus especially powerful (Luke 26:31-35)? How might we apply John 13:15?

Transformational Activity

Community

We don't often associate the celebration of communion with "community," but this is truly an important aspect of its meaning. As we partake of the body and blood of Christ, we are demonstrating the unity of His body, the church. As members of His body, we are interdependent. We are part of Christ and part of each other. We share together in His death, His resurrection, and in His life. This week, spend some time thinking and praying about how the celebration of the Lord's Supper unites the Body of Christ together. Come back next time ready to share what the Spirit revealed to you.



Week 6: Who is Jesus?

As we have been journeying with Jesus through the final week leading up to the cross, we have seen so many beautiful and instructive pictures highlighting all of what Passover represents. God established the sacrificial system in the Old Testament for His people Israel, to teach them the consequences of sin and to prepare them for the provision of the ultimate sin sacrifice He would send in the person of His own Son. In the Passover commemoration, the power and message of salvation itself is laid bare before us.

To review a bit of what we have already seen: the Jews were commanded to select a lamb without spot or blemish, kill it, and sprinkle its blood on the lintel and doorposts of their home. Because of the blood of the lamb, they would escape the judgment of death. This lamb was to be selected and set aside for examination

In the Passover commemoration, the power and message of salvation itself is laid bare before us.

on the 10th of Nisan, as was Jesus on “Lamb selection day” (what we know as the Triumphant Entry). Not a bone of the lamb was to be broken. This sacrifice was to be made in each home on the evening of Passover, in anticipation of the sacrificial lamb being slaughtered for the nation the following morning. As each member of the family participated in the eating of the lamb, along with the unleavened bread and the wine, they were participating in the body and blood of the sacrifice. In 1 Cor 10:16-17 we see that in our observance of the Lord’s Supper, we are participating in the body and blood of Jesus. We also see that the bread of the Passover Seder must be unleavened, striped, and pierced. This vividly pictures some of the horrors our sinless savior endured on the cross.

The drama that unfolded during the Passion week was not a random set of circumstances that simply “happened” to occur. That singular week consisted of divinely orchestrated appointments planned and carried out by our sovereign God to accomplish very specific ends. The stage for this drama was set back in the garden when mankind rebelled against our creator, separating us from being in relationship with Him. In response, the plan put into effect by God is previewed in Genesis 3:15, where God fires the first warning shot across Satan’s bow, revealing that one day, the offspring of the woman would be his demise.

The next act of the drama revealed that God chose one man through whom He would raise up a family—which would become a nation—through whom He would send a deliverer. While our natural inclination is to see a deliverer merely in terms of physical or earthly oppression, this deliverer would do so much more than that. Before He could deliver us physically, He first needed to deliver us spiritually. This deliverance by Messiah would save us from the ravages of sin and the rebellious hearts we all possess, and reconnect us to the source of life—our creator God.

One of the most important lessons we see God teach in scripture is that sin has consequences. These consequences were vividly and unmistakably displayed in the next act of the drama, revealed in the very life and history of Israel. Sin brings death—and to help them understand what that really looked like, God’s people were given an inescapable, unrelenting object lesson. They had to endure hundreds of years of slaughtering innocent little lambs and pouring their blood on the base of the altar. This wanton slaughter of helpless animals forced people to grapple with the ramifications of their rebellion against God. Day after day, month after month, year after year, these unending bloody sacrifices would have indelibly engraved the message upon the hearts of God’s people. We might naïvely see the temple as a serene place of worship. But for the people of Israel, it

was a slaughterhouse. There were literal rivers of blood flowing out of the temple daily.

But intertwined with that message of the price of sinful rebellion was the promise that one day the sacrifices would end. The blood of bulls and goats only temporarily covered over the sins of the people. God's promise was that Messiah would come, and His sacrifice would completely take away sins once and for all. What the people did not understand was that it would need to be Messiah Himself who would be that final sacrificial lamb. The sacrifice needed to be a man in order for it to apply to mankind. But the sacrifice also needed to be God to be of sufficient worth to cover the sins of the whole world. Thus, the final paschal lamb must be the God-Man. This climax of the drama that began with the rebellion in the Garden is what we encounter in the Passion week. What was accomplished on the cross at this pinnacle Passover, is what John the Baptist foretold in John 1:29. The lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world.

This deliverance by Messiah would save us from the ravages of sin and the rebellious hearts we all possess, and reconnect us to the source of life—our creator God.

With the clarity afforded us through the benefit of hindsight, it is difficult for us to understand, when reading Isaiah chapter 53, how the purpose of the death of Messiah was not apparent to the people of Israel. Yet that is how hindsight works. The vivid description of what Jesus endured for us perfectly captures the full meaning of Passover. We began this study with an encouragement to read through this powerful passage several times, in preparation for our journey. It seems appropriate to close this journey meditating on these same vivid truths.

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like

a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

DID YOU KNOW?

The resurrection of Jesus is not just something we learn about from the New Testament. The Old Testament prophesied about the resurrection as well. Psalm 16:9-10 anticipates the resurrection of Christ. Acts 2:24-30 and 13:32-37 make reference to this passage as having been fulfilled by the resurrection. Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 also point us toward the reality of a resurrected Christ.

But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, my Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

One of the Hebrew names for the feast of Passover is *Aman Cheruteinu*, which means “season of our emancipation,” or “time of our freedom.” The result of the Passover in Egypt was freedom from physical slavery for Israel. The ultimate result of Jesus offering Himself as our Passover lamb is freedom from the spiritual slavery to sin for us all. Let us come away from this journey understanding not only that Passover is much more than merely an interesting Old Testament story, but that it directly impacts our walk with Jesus. Romans 15:4 points out that “...whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Let this exploration of Passover drive us to our knees in worship for what our God has done for us.

Discussion Questions

1. The women in today's passage were told to go tell the disciples that Jesus had risen. Who did God send you to tell you that Jesus had risen? Did you have trouble believing that message? Were you more of a quick believer, or a slow doubter?

2. What two messages are the women given by the angel (Luke 24:5; Mark 16:6-7)? This is the second time Jesus has told the disciples to go down to Galilee (Mark 14:28). Why do you think the angel singled out Peter in his instruction? What might this indicate about God's plans for Peter? What else did Jesus have in mind for Peter in his restoration?

3. What do you think was going through the minds of the Apostles following the death of Jesus? They had spent three years seeing the miraculous as well as confirmation after confirmation that Jesus was indeed their long-awaited Messiah. Then their world came crashing down as they witnessed Jesus actually die. Try to put yourselves in their shoes. What would they be thinking and feeling at this point? What does it say about these women that, although the disciples had scattered, they were the ones who came to care for the body of Jesus? Even though their devotion was strong, what details do we see in Mark 16:1-3 that lead us to believe they, too, did not believe Jesus would rise from the dead?

4. In your experience, how do people typically react when the idea of Jesus rising from the dead comes up? How have you responded to these reactions? What kinds of evidence is there for the resurrection of Jesus (both biblical and extra-biblical)?

5. How do you think you would have responded if you were in that situation, with the women and with the disciples? Would you have stuck around, or fled? What was at stake for these followers of Jesus? What danger were they in? What is your response today to the call of Christ to “go tell others” that Jesus has risen from the dead? How active are you in this calling? What holds you back from doing even more? What can you do this week to take a step toward obedience to the call of Christ to both “be and make disciples”?

Going Deeper

1. In light of the monumental significance of the death of Jesus, it is easy sometimes to underestimate the importance of His resurrection. Read Rom 5:10, 6:1-14, 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14, 15:20-23. What do you see in these passages about the ramifications of the resurrection of Messiah? How has the resurrection of Jesus changed all of human history? How has it changed your life?

2. Why was it necessary for Christ to be raised from the dead? Read John 1:4 and 5:26. What is it about His nature that makes this necessary? Read 1 Chron 17:14 and Psalm 89:29. Why else must Jesus have been resurrected? Read 1 John 5:11-12; Eph 1:19-20; and 1 Cor 15:12-19. What is Jesus the source of, now that He is resurrected?

Transformational Activity

Outreach

Take some time this week and do some more studying on the resurrection of Christ. Read some commentaries and articles if you can. But as you do, focus on this one idea: how is the resurrection of Christ the motivation for our sharing God's love with others? What is it about the resurrection that changes everything? What is it about this event that ought to motivate our passionate pursuit of God and our zealous desire to share that good news with everyone we know. Think and pray about that this week and come back together and share what you have learned.



The title "THE LAST WEEK" is written in a bold, sans-serif font. "THE" is in a light green color, while "LAST WEEK" is in a darker green. The text is partially overlaid by a stylized palm frond graphic in shades of orange and brown. Below the main title, the phrase "MORE THAN PASSION" is written in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font, also in a light green color.

THE LAST WEEK

MORE THAN
PASSION

These resources were very helpful in the creation of this study guide: background material from Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum (much of this study guide information comes directly from this very learned scholar), and “Serendipity Bible for Groups.” For helpful answers to many of your Bible questions, the website GotQuestions.org has often proven to be useful.