

Matthew Chapter 21-23 – Jesus’ Jerusalem Ministry – Part 1
Matthew 21:1-11 – The Triumphal Entry?
Jesus is Revealed to Jerusalem

Introduction

Matthew 19-23 is an account of Jesus’ final Judean ministry; He is in this region for 6-9 months. During this time, Jesus, with the disciples, is going in and out of Jerusalem, healing the crowds and increasing the faith of the disciples while refuting challenges from the leadership sects in Jerusalem. Matthew 21-23 is Jesus’ final Jerusalem ministry. It begins with an announcement, and over the time of about a week, Jesus comes in and out of the city, and this is when Jesus and the Jewish leadership have many direct confrontations.

The Passion Week

This final week makes up the most detailed portion of the life of Jesus. Combined with the other three Gospels, there is an enormous amount of information. But we are not here for a complete history. We are here to complete the account as recalled by Matthew. Matthew has a point to make to his audience, and we are tasked with making sure we understand this Gospel.

Matthew 21:1-11 – Jesus is Revealed to Jerusalem

The first three verses are the preparation for the entry. Verses 4-11 contain the content of the entry. In this passage, we have many vital points for the Jewish reader.

The passage opens up with Jesus stopping for a moment at Bethpage, specifically at the Mount of Olives. What is the significance of the Mount of Olives?

This is the first time this famous peak is mentioned in Matthew. Jesus visited this area many times, and it is suspected that Jesus and the disciples would camp at the Mount of Olives whenever they would travel to Jerusalem (Luke 21:37; John 8:1). The Mount of Olives is a ridge running north-south and is east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. It is about 2.5 miles long and has three peaks with the highest peak being about 2,700 feet above sea level. This is not a small location, and the area of this ridge is larger than the city of Jerusalem.

When David fled Absalom in one of his greatest difficulties as king, he went to the Mount of Olives (2 Samuel 15:30). It is suspected that the Mount of Olives was considered an area of recess for the kings of Israel.

It is also vital in Eschatology. Zechariah 14:1-4 tells of the victory that God will have and the power of the Messiah when He stands on the Mount of Olives. In Acts, we find that Jesus stages the disciples from this mount and ascends to heaven from this mount as well (Acts 1:4, 9-12).

In Matthew 21:1, Jesus pauses as He approaches Jerusalem from Bethany and stops adjacent to a village called Bethpage at the Mount of Olives.

In verses 2-3, Jesus sends two disciples to retrieve a donkey and a colt in what we assume is Bethpage. As soon as they enter the village, they would find the donkey and the colt. Both were brought to Jesus, but in the other Gospels, only the colt is mentioned. If they were confronted, they were given what to say.

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Matthew does not record anyone stopping them, but in Mark 11:5, there was a question. The disciples gave the prescribed response and permission was granted. Interestingly, this is the first time in Matthew that Jesus refers to Himself as “the Lord.”

The value of this account is presented in verses 4-5. Jesus sets up a direct fulfillment of prophecy. Anyone reading this account with the reference to the prophets would conclude that not only is Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Messiah, but that also He orchestrated the prophecy with its fulfillment. In other fulfillments, it was noticed that there was a fulfillment of prophecy; but here, Jesus initiates the entire situation.

Matthew 21:5 is a conundrum for some. The referent in my NASB says Isaiah 62:11, but in actuality, it is more closely related to Zechariah 9:9. However, neither is an exact match. Matthew takes two similar passages and summarizes them together. This is not a direct quotation, but it is a direct fulfillment.

The point of the passage is the announcement of the Messiah King. Jesus fulfills prophecy and His arrival is announced by the crowds that have been following Him from Jericho through Bethany and coming into Jerusalem.

The significance of Jesus being announced as the Messiah King to Jerusalem riding a donkey is clear. A donkey is a lowly animal that serves by carrying the burdens of others; it is not majestic, and Jesus comes as the colt, a burden carrier (Matthew 11:29-30).

What is the majestic animal He will ride? A horse (Revelation 19:11-13). Jesus will come riding on a majestic white horse with power, but He first comes to serve and save. Jesus came with peace, not war; with grace, not judgment; with salvation, not damnation.

Matthew 21:8 would be recognizable to those of Jewish ancestry. This is how Israelites welcomed their king on inauguration day (2 Kings 9:13; this is also stated in Maccabees).

The crowd here is not to the inhabitants of the city. This is the crowd that was following Jesus and had accepted Him as the Messiah King. They were His announcers as they approached the city and entered the city.

The announcement in Matthew 21:9 was probably truncated. They may have been reciting the entire Hallel (Psalm 113-118) or Psalm 118 may have been recited in its entirety as Jesus was making His ascent to Jerusalem (Psalm 118:22-29).

It is the reference to Jesus being the Son of David and the Messianic reference, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” that got the city’s attention.

Matthew 21:10-11 – Jesus had entered and taught in Jerusalem many times before. But this time, Jesus is being announced as the rightful King. Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified for this claim because the rulers of Jerusalem did not want to lose power. This was the first confrontation with the leadership in Jerusalem. Interestingly, Matthew does not record the confrontation (Luke 19:39-40).

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The point of Matthew is not to draw out all the details, but to reflect on the truth of what must be concluded. Jesus is the Messiah King. The recording of the confrontation is unnecessary in Matthew because it does not add to the validity of what happened or what was said by the crowds.

Conclusion

The significance of the “Triumphal Entry?” in Matthew is to present Jesus to Israel as their Messiah King.

We do read first how Jesus was born; then Jesus was first introduced as Messiah at His baptism; Jesus had been verified as the Messiah King at His temptation. Jesus had demonstrated the wisdom of the Messiah King in His words. Jesus proved that He is the Messiah King with many signs, miracles, and wonders, and Jesus had been revealed in glory as the Messiah King at His transfiguration.

But it was His entry into Jerusalem, as prophesied by Isaiah and Zechariah, where Jesus was openly revealed as the Messiah King to Jerusalem and the Nation of Israel. The prophecy was not a passive fulfillment; Jesus took decisive action to orchestrate the fulfillment.

But in the end, Jerusalem did not recognize Him and they would end up rejecting their salvation.

Luke 19:41-44

When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying,

If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.