

# A Fickled Worship

## Various Scriptures

Today, is what is known traditionally as Palm Sunday or the Day of the Triumphant Entry, marking the day, the Sunday morning when Jesus came into Jerusalem with the intended purpose of... **not to set up an earthly Kingdom, but to offer Himself as that sacrifice.** This day was the beginning of the last week of Jesus' earthly life, leading directly to His arrest, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection.

This was also **just a few days before the beginning of the Jewish Feast or Festival of Passover**, the biggest day of celebration in the Jewish calendar.

For you and I to understand the power, and excitement of the Festival of Passover for the Jew of the First Century, it would be like we wrap a major family **reunion/birthday** celebration into our national celebration of **Independence Day**, and box it all into an extravagant celebration of **Christmas**.

Now understand, none of **those celebrations** have anything to do with Passover, but it the fullness of joy and excitement, the family connections and **even the national pride** of all of those together that help us to understand the impact of the Festival of Passover for the First Century Jew living in or close to Judea before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in A.D.70.

Part of the celebration was the meal called the **Passover Seder**. This was the highlight of Passover, but only a part of the eight-day festival known as the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** – the entire meal commemorated the harshness of the enslavement and the freedom of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt by the power of God.

We are going to look closer at the modern day Passover meal – the Seder – this Wednesday evening, but Passover was so much more for the Jew than a meal – there is rich symbolism to each part of the meal.

In thinking about the First Century, right now today you can get a wide variety of estimates as to the normal population of Jerusalem during the First Century. But most

reliable, unprejudiced estimates run from about 80,000 to 120,000 Jews as being residents of Jerusalem at the time of Christ.

Many historians allude to the fact that during the times of celebration of any of the three major feast days, the population of Jerusalem and the surrounding smaller villages would swell at times to almost 10 times that amount (or about a million plus people), at least for a few days during, before and after the feast.

It's with this understanding in mind that I want to take you today to the road leading from Jericho, near the Jordan River, up to Jerusalem. This would have been the pathway of the pilgrims who were **headed into Jerusalem from the west**, including most of the travelers from Galilee to the north and those located along the whole Jordan River Valley area. These Pilgrims would have proceeded along the route, heading into Jerusalem from Jericho for the time of celebration of the Passover or the Days of Unleavened Bread. Among those pilgrims traveling this route was the young Rabi, Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee and His followers.

For quiet some time before this day Jesus had been sharing with His disciples –

Matthew 20

*<sup>18</sup> Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,*

*<sup>19</sup> And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again...*

He had shared this with them multiple times and on several occasions, yet they still didn't get it.

Jesus **knew** He was going into Jerusalem to become the **sacrifice for the sin** of the world. This **wasn't a surprise** to Him. Be certain you understand, the **enemy wasn't out-flanking the God of all creation**. This was God's plan revealed through the Prophets of old.

- Jesus was purposefully moving towards the fulfillment of those prophecies...
- The fulfillment of a 1,000 plus years of what had been portrayed by the sacrifices given at the Tabernacle and the Temple...

- The fulfillment of the words of Abraham in Genesis 22:8 as he told his son Isaac, *"My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering."*
- On that particular day Jesus entered into Jerusalem ..., on that day..., and at that very hour to become ***the completion of the promise of the Father...***

According to Bible scholars, this was the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month Nissan. This was also the day according to Exodus 12 that during their time of the enslavement in Egypt, the Passover lamb was to be brought into the homes of each Jewish family for a thorough inspection, prior to offering it up as a sacrifice on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Look with me at Exodus 12 —

Exodus 12

<sup>1</sup> *Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, <sup>2</sup> "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. <sup>3</sup> Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.*

<sup>5</sup> *"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. <sup>6</sup> Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. <sup>7</sup> And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.*

<sup>12</sup> *"For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup> Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. <sup>14</sup> 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance."*

This event in Egypt was the **beginning of the Passover celebration**. God had **passed over** His people Israel as He brought judgment on Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. His judgment **passed over** Israel only if He **saw the blood of the sacrificed lamb**

*upon the doorway -- the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you.*

It is on this day, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, the beginning of the four day time of inspection of the Passover Lamb that we find Jesus preparing to come into the city of Jerusalem and present Himself before the priests, there at the Temple... And, according to the Gospel accounts each day over the course of the next week until His crucifixion..., every day Jesus would come back into Jerusalem and present Himself at the Temple, while the chief priests looked for opportunity to bring charges against Him.

Look with me at the Gospel accounts of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Each one tells of the event and each one gives a special nugget or specifics.

Let's begin in the book of Matthew, chapter 21

*<sup>1</sup> Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. <sup>3</sup> And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."*

When we look at this same event in John's Gospel record we find that Jesus had just been in the village or town of Bethany, at the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Bethpage was a small village just next to Bethany and both of them were located on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. From the Mount of Olives, you could look west and see the city of Jerusalem just across the Kidron Valley.

It was in the village of Bethphage where the Holy Spirit had been working on a man in a special way. Jesus hadn't sent any of the disciples ahead as an advance team to Bethphage to prepare things, the Holy Spirit was His advance team. There was a man there willing to surrender his possessions to the Lord if He had need of them –

There is a great spiritual lesson just in this man and in the one that makes his Upper Room available... but that another lesson for another day.

Coming back to Matthew, he shares with us that Jesus rode a colt, young foal of a donkey into the city of Jerusalem specifically **as a fulfilment of prophecy**.

Matthew 21

<sup>4</sup> *All this was done that it **might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet**, saying: <sup>5</sup> "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'" <sup>6</sup> So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them.*

Mark and Luke tell us that there were those who questioned what they were doing –

Mark 11

<sup>5</sup> *But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?" <sup>6</sup> And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go.*

Luke adds –

Luke 19

<sup>35</sup> *Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him. <sup>36</sup> And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road.*

Matthew and Mark tell us that as Jesus began riding the colt towards the city of Jerusalem (some ½ - ¾ mile away), the crowds began cutting branches from trees and laying them on the road way. John specifically tells us –

John 12

<sup>12</sup> *...a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup> took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him*

That's where we get Palm Sunday, in case you were wondering.

It was an exciting and powerful time. The crowds were excited. Many if not most of them had heard of this miracle working *prophet from Nazareth of Galilee*. Everyone seemed to be caught up in the excitement of the moment. They began to sing from a particular portion of the Psalms. It's interesting how similar, yet how different each of the Gospel writer's words are as they relay the words of the multitudes –

Matthew 21

<sup>9</sup> *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!”*

Mark 11

<sup>9</sup> *“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! <sup>10</sup> Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

Luke 19

<sup>38</sup> *“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

John 12

<sup>13</sup> *“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!”*

As Jesus rode towards Jerusalem the crowds purposefully connected Him with the promises of God for the nation of Israel – He was coming *in the name of the YHWH!* – The God of Israel..., the God of all creation..., the great God Almighty...

By the very word, *Hosanna!* They were **purposefully connecting Jesus with their salvation.** The word *Hosanna* simply means, “Save now” or “Please save”. But the problem was, these people were looking for a **military savior from the oppression of Rome**, not a spiritual Savior from the oppression of sin. **But yet, they still were calling on Jesus to save them!**

It’s interesting that Luke would remember and write down the words *Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*” Do you remember the song of the angelic hosts as they sang to the Shepherds the night Jesus was born? “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*” It’s no wonder that Luke caught those words!

But one of the biggest declarations made were the ones having to do with the connection of Jesus with King David – “*Hosanna to the Son of David!*” and, “*Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!*”

This was undoubtedly and undeniably a **Messianic declaration**. The scriptures had declared and the people knew that Messiah would come from the house and throne of David, **reestablishing the kingdom**.

The excitement of these people cannot be over-estimated.

- God, Himself had heard their prayers. He was coming *in the name of the LORD!*
- God was answering their prayers for an overthrow of the Roman government, *Hosanna!* "Save us, save us now!"
- God was fulfilling His promise to reestablish the *kingdom of our father David* and the power of the Kingdom of Israel. Jesus would become the new *King of Israel!*
- And He would bring *Peace*. *Peace* like they had not seen for generations. They looked for an earthly *peace* and they believed Jesus would be the one to bring it.

But John tells us the disciples were still clueless –

John 12

<sup>16</sup> *His disciples did not understand these things at first;*

But the Pharisees weren't clueless. **They saw something happening that concerned them greatly**. John tells us that as they saw the people praising and giving honor to Jesus, they were greatly troubled...

John 12

<sup>19</sup> *The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"*

But more than the words of the people, it was the connection of **EVERYTHING** that was happening on that day... and **even that week**.

Tradition and Rabbinic writings tell us that weeks before the month of Nissan during *the Spring of the year, it was the time for the sheep to give birth to that years lambs*. It was during that time that the Jewish priests would go out to the Shepherd's Fields outside of

Bethlehem and choose several new born lambs from the flock to be candidates to become the Paschal Lamb – the sacrificial Lamb for Passover.

Then on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, a procession of Priests would go back out to the field and pick **the One Lamb chosen** among the candidates to be the sacrifice. Then, with great pomp and ceremony they would lead that one lamb back into the city on the roadway lined with the congregation of the people of Israel. The lamb would then be kept at the Temple compound under the watchful eyes of the priests, making certain the *lamb was be without blemish*. Until the **evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>** of Nissan when it would be sacrificed.

As the lamb would move along the road from the Shepherd's Fields into the city, the people of Israel would be singing and then fall in behind the Lamb and the procession of priests. The song they sang was specific for the occasion. They would continually sing the entirety of Psalm 118.

But this year, on that particular day, that very day, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, just as Jesus was arriving from Bethphage on the Mount of Olives to the east, the young Paschal Lamb was coming from the Shepherd's Fields outside of Bethlehem from the south. The last few verses of the Psalm that the people sang to the Passover Lamb should now sound familiar to you –

Turn with me if you would to Psalm 118–

Psalm 118

*<sup>25</sup> Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. <sup>26</sup> Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD. <sup>27</sup> God is the LORD, and He has given us light; Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. <sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You. <sup>29</sup> Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.*

These will be the very same words the crowd will sing out to Jesus later that same day. And these were the **very words that so greatly bothered** the Pharisees, as Luke tells us in chapter 19 –

And the multitude rejoiced and praise God with a loud voice saying, <sup>38</sup> *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!" Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

<sup>39</sup> *And some of the Pharisees called to (Jesus) from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."* <sup>40</sup> *But (Jesus) answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."*<sup>k</sup>

Make no mistake, the Pharisees knew exactly the meaning of those words... they understood completely what was taking place here. The position of the Passover Lamb was being placed upon Jesus – rather the people understood it at this time or not, I don't know. But the Pharisees understood the significance of the words..., the significance of the timing..., and even the significance of the place...

The sad reality was, they people totally **misunderstood the mission** of Jesus at that time. They desired a conquering warrior savior, yet His purpose was to be the Suffering, Servant, Sacrifice, and Savior.

That's why within a week everything could change so quickly—

Within the timeframe of less than a week the loud *"Hosanna! Hosanna!"* changed to cries of *"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"*

From the shouts of *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD,"* to the screams of *"Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas."*

From *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!"* to *"Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!"* *"We have no king but Caesar!"*

How fickle the hearts of people when God doesn't live up to our expectations... when God doesn't **perform** to our standards... when God has a different plan...

Our faith and worship can be so fickle when we praise Him in one moment and then...

- In frustration of the unknown,
- Or dislike for the current situation,
- A severe attack of the enemy,
- Or silence for a season

- Or a disappointment in man or in God.

We then leave our devotion and journey out on our own...,

- Believing that we have a better plan,
- That we can make a better way,
- That we can take care of this, **all on our own**.
- “Not Thy will, but **MY** will be done”

Is it any wonder that our Gentle Shepherd, meek and mild, as He rode that young colt towards the city of Jerusalem in preparation of giving Himself as the sacrifice for the sin of world, in the midst of all the glad “*Hosannas*”, stopped on the hillside...

Luke 19

<sup>41</sup> *Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,* <sup>42</sup> *saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are **hidden from your eyes**.*

<sup>43</sup> *For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,* <sup>44</sup> *and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*

And that is exactly what happened to the city of Jerusalem and to the nation of Israel, because they *did not recognize or receive the day and time of their visitation*. Less than 40 years later, in AD 70 the Roman legions under the command of Titus, utterly and completely destroyed the city and leveled the Temple.

Jesus knew that the message and the hope of salvation needed to be heard... *“I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.”*

And I do believe that at that point the rocks did cry out. They cried out with a deafening roar as the Roman soldiers took those massive stones which made up the Temple and pushed them over the edge of the Temple Mount. And even today they remain there, crying out, still just as loud.

During the time Jesus spent in the Temple that last week, Matthew shares with us that once again Jesus had a time of great lamenting for the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem –

Matthew 23

<sup>37</sup> *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! <sup>38</sup> See! Your house is left to you desolate; <sup>39</sup> for I say to you, **you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”***

**Familiar words?** But here the time He is speaking of is at His Second Coming. Then the words will be completely and clearly understood, as every knee bows and every tongue confesses!

How about you? Is your praise and worship of the Savior **based upon your circumstances** or are they **based upon who He is, was and will be throughout all eternity?**

Do your words of praise come only when things are going your way? Or can you honestly **praise Him in the darkness...** from the very **pit of a prison cell**, with the **shackles of this world and all its issues** binding you?

We need to see Him and honor Him as Lord **at all times** or can we honestly say He truly is our Lord **at any time**.

**He is either Lord of ALL or He is not our Lord at all.**