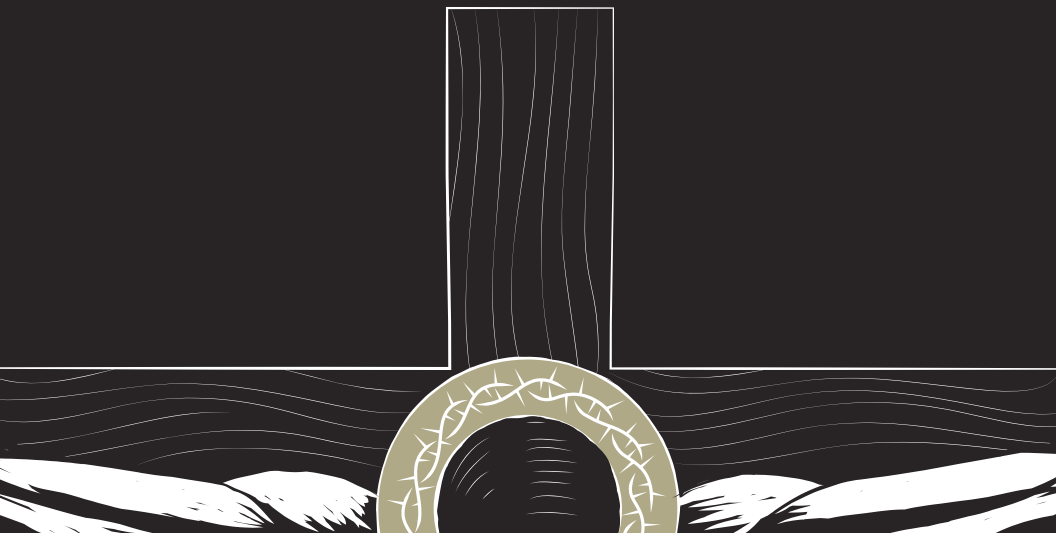


THE MOST IMPORTANT WEEK OF THE
MOST IMPORTANT PERSON WHO EVER LIVED

THE FINAL DAYS OF JESUS

ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER
& JUSTIN TAYLOR
WITH ALEXANDER STEWART



“This is a book about the most important person who ever lived during the most crucial week of his life. If you want to get to know the person and teachings of Jesus in the context of an engaging story with practical commentary, this book is for you. It is biblical, personal, and transformational.”

Darrin Patrick, Lead Pastor, The Journey, St. Louis, Missouri

“An enlightening and edifying look at the most important week in history. Both those who want to know more about the history and those who long to behold the wonder will find much to love about this great work. One gets the sense that we should proceed through these pages on our knees.”

J. D. Greear, Lead Pastor, The Summit Church, Durham, North Carolina; author, *Gospel* and *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*

“You may be wondering what can be done to make Christ’s last week come alive in ways it hasn’t before. It would help to understand the historical background and cultural script a little better, but you don’t want a big book. It would help, too, if your authors were trustworthy, knowledgeable evangelical scholars who could write clearly for lay-people. Look no further—this is the book for you!”

Craig L. Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary

“Whether you’re a Christian seeking to defend your faith, an inquirer wanting to know what really happened with Jesus, or a disciple who wants to know the Lord more fully, *The Final Days of Jesus* will instruct and encourage you. It lays out the truth with coherence and conviction. I will point people to this book because it so clearly and faithfully explains what happened in the final days of Jesus. Here is the truth, based on the Gospel accounts. Here is the center of the Christian story, filled with insight and inspiration.”

Mark D. Roberts, Executive Director of Digital Media and the Theological and Cultural Steward, Foundations for Laity Renewal; author, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*

“This is an immensely helpful guide to the last week of Jesus’s life—historically, theologically, and devotionally. Historically, it provides a likely chronology of Passion Week, chock full of historical, cultural, and geographical insights. Theologically, the authors provide the text of the four Gospels with helpful commentary, noting the theological contributions of each evangelist. Devotionally, the reader has the privilege of walking with Jesus through the most important week of human history—the climax of God’s redemptive plan. A feast of insights for both mind and heart.”

Mark L. Strauss, Professor of New Testament, Bethel Seminary
San Diego

“Jesus’s last week shook but also saved the world. From Palm Sunday to Easter morning, each day and encounter were critical. This book leads the reader step-by-step along Jesus’s route from triumphal entry to the cross and finally to glory. Numerous maps and diagrams shed fresh light on each Gospel’s claims. We are reminded not only of what Christ did but also where his way points us now. An excellent beginning-to-intermediate guide!”

Robert W. Yarbrough, Professor of New Testament, Covenant
Theological Seminary

“Holy Week is arguably the most sacred time of year for Christians. Andreas Köstenberger and Justin Taylor provide a simple yet eloquent survey of the final week of Jesus’s life. They take readers on a pilgrimage through the Gospels and invite us to follow Jesus in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, on to the dark and tragic moments of Golgotha, and through to the glorious and unspeakable joy at the feet of the risen Jesus. In short, this is a wonderful resource for individuals, families, and fellowships to learn more about the Easter story, the greatest story ever told.”

Michael F. Bird, Lecturer in Theology, Ridley Melbourne College
of Mission and Ministry

“A clearly presented overview of the most important week in world history. Brief, helpful comments illuminate the biblical story and bring home its enduring and life-changing message.”

Douglas J. Moo, Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies, Wheaton
College

“The Final Days of Jesus helps believers take note of the historical events leading up to Jesus’s death on the cross. Readers are challenged to see the provocation that Jesus’s message and life represented, leading to his arrest and execution. The book demonstrates that historical facts and Christian worship can and should go hand in hand.”

Eckhard J. Schnabel, Mary F. Rockefeller Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“The center point of history is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus *The Final Days of Jesus* is an incredibly important work, for it enables us to see the full impact of the social and religious tension that lay behind Jesus’s death as well as the theological implications for us. This book is both well researched and well written and is must-reading for students of the Word and indeed for all who wish to understand more fully the God-led events that resulted in the cross.”

Grant Osborne, Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“Ninety-eight percent of the students entering a particular Christian college last year claimed to be Christians. Yet twenty-five percent did not know that Christianity affirms that Jesus literally rose from the dead! What better way to rediscover this truth than to walk alongside the Savior during his final days and moments? Köstenberger and Taylor guide us on our pilgrimage, and they are outstanding guides. More than anything else, they remind us that Jesus final days are not really the end.”

Charles L. Quarles, Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

The Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived

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INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The four Gospels contain eyewitness accounts (and first-hand reports) of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus was born of a young virgin in the town of Bethlehem, perhaps in October of 6 or 5 BC.¹ After his mother, Mary, and his adoptive father, Joseph, fled to Egypt on account of the murderous designs of Herod the Great, the family relocated to the town of Nazareth in lower Galilee, where Joseph served as a carpenter. Apart from a brief account of Jesus's interaction with the rulers of Jerusalem when he was twelve years old (probably in AD 7 or 8), we hear no further details about the life of Jesus until the beginning of his public ministry, which likely began in late AD 29 and continued until his death on Friday, April 3, AD 33.²

Jesus's relatively brief public ministry began with his baptism and wilderness temptations, continued with his authoritative teaching and miracle-working power, and culminated in his atoning death at the hands of the Romans and Jews, followed by his resurrection and ascension.

This book covers Jesus's final days. In these pages you will read the eyewitness accounts of what the most important person who ever lived said and did during the most important week of his life. Sunday through Sunday—from what we now call “Palm Sunday” to “Easter Sunday”—we will put the accounts together in roughly

¹Scholars usually suggest a date of 7–5 BC for Jesus's birth.

²Though note that many (if not most) date Jesus's death to AD 30. For more on this, see chapter 1, note 1.

chronological order, letting you read all four records of these events as we seek to explain to the best of our ability what is happening.

Before we proceed, it may be helpful to review some of the basics in order to set the stage and to remember the context of the four Gospels.

Who Wrote the Gospels?

Though the information has been doubted, there is good reason to believe that the Gospels were written by four men who were in the best possible position to recount what Jesus said and did.

Matthew and John, the authors of the first and fourth biblical Gospels, respectively, were members of the Twelve; John was even part of Jesus's inner circle (together with Peter and James).

Mark, the church fathers tell us, wrote his Gospel in close association with the apostle Peter, also one of the Twelve and a member of Jesus's inner circle as well as the preeminent spokesman of the Twelve.

Luke, finally, while not himself an eyewitness, sought to conduct a careful investigation of these events and acknowledges his dependence on "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2). (The word he uses for "eyewitnesses" is *autoptēs*, a composite of two Greek words meaning "to see for oneself.")

As John writes in his first epistle,

That which was from the beginning,
which we have heard,
which we have seen with our eyes,
which we looked upon
and have touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life . . .
that which we have seen and heard
we proclaim also to you,

so that you too may have fellowship with us. . . .

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1–4)

The result is that those of us today—reading the accounts two thousand years later—share an experience expressed by Peter:

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:8–9)

Why Were the Gospels Written?

As eyewitness accounts of the events surrounding Jesus’s first coming, the four canonical Gospels demand our utmost attention. Why were they written? John says it most clearly:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God—he is the promised, long-awaited Servant of the Lord who came to save us from our sin so that by believing we may have “life in his name.”

Underneath this united, overarching purpose, we can recognize that the four Gospel authors wrote four complementary accounts designed for four distinct audiences. They used theological and literary selection in order to highlight certain aspects of Jesus’s ministry, each painting a true and faithful portrait of the one Messiah.³

The tax-collector-turned-disciple *Matthew* (Levi), writing to a Jewish audience in the 50s or 60s, emphasizes Jesus as the Jewish Messiah predicted in the Old Testament, the son of David who comes to establish the kingdom of heaven.⁴

Peter’s “interpreter” John *Mark*, writing to Gentiles in Rome in the mid- to late 50s, shows Jesus as the authoritative, suffering son of God who gives his life as a ransom for many.

³The following dates are approximations, and other scholars may date Matthew, Mark, and Luke later than is proposed here. Very few would date John earlier.

⁴The date for Matthew depends in part on whether one takes the position that Matthew wrote his Gospel first (Matthean priority) or that Mark was the first Gospel to be written (Markan priority).

Luke, a Gentile physician and travel companion to Paul, was writing a two-volume work around 58–60 to give an account of the truth of the faith to a man named Theophilus (who may also have paid for the publication of Luke–Acts), showing that Jesus is the savior of the world who seeks and saves the lost in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel.⁵

John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, was probably an old man when he composed his account in the mid- or late 80s or early 90s, written to the church in Ephesus to demonstrate that Jesus is the messiah who demands belief and the lamb of God who dies for the sins of the world and gives those who believe eternal life.

One of the more interesting differences between the Gospels is the strategy used to begin their biographies of Jesus's life and work. The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) begin *in history*, first recounting either the announcement of the birth of Jesus or the announcement of his prophetic forerunner John the Baptist. John, on the other hand, begins *before* history, *in heaven*, emphasizing the eternal relationship between God the Father and God the Son before the Son took on human nature. This is one of the reasons that the Synoptics are marked by greater similarity and overlap, whereas John often highlights other aspects of Jesus's ministry as part of his overall strategy.

But the question still remains: Would it not have been easier simply to provide one authoritative account of Jesus's life rather than four versions that at times don't harmonize very easily?

The answer is, first of all, that the early church did not consider our four Gospels as four *separate* Gospels but as *one* Gospel according to four different witnesses—the Gospel (singular) according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The early church had it right: there is only *one* gospel message (not four!), but for reasons of his

⁵The New Testament writers refer to the Old Testament in a variety of ways. Most widely known is the pattern of fulfillment-prediction, which highlights the fulfillment of messianic prophecy in Christ (e.g., Matt. 1:22–23 citing Isa. 7:14). But there are other ways the New Testament refers to the Old Testament as well, most notably typology. Typology involves an escalating salvation-historical pattern culminating in Christ (e.g., the serpent in the wilderness: John 3:14 citing Num. 21:9). In addition, the New Testament authors refer to the Old Testament by way of analogy, illustration, and commentary (*midrash* or *peshet*).

own God chose to provide us with four (rather than just one) eyewitness accounts of this one gospel.

Second, remember what we said earlier about the nature of the Gospels as eyewitness testimony. Like witnesses in the courtroom each recounting what they saw, using their own words and recalling events and statements from their unique perspective, the Gospel writers each tell us how *they* witnessed the unfolding story of Jesus (or in Mark's and Luke's case, how their firsthand sources did). This should in fact *enhance* our appreciation for the four biblical Gospels, not *diminish* it! Demonstrably, the four evangelists did not sanitize their accounts or somehow streamline them so as to make them artificially cohere; they were unafraid to tell the story of Jesus each in his own way, without fear of contradiction—because they were all witnessing to the *one* story of Jesus, the *one* gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember also that when the Gospels were written and published, there were still plenty of eyewitnesses around who could easily have disputed the veracity of the Gospel accounts—but we are not aware of any such challenges. For this reason we have every confidence that the one Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is reliable.

Did It Really Happen?

Our primary response to the Gospels is not to criticize or to find fault but to believe. As we celebrate Easter, we can do so with a grateful heart and with the assurance that the Easter story is true—historically *and* theologically. Even though the primary design of the Gospels is for us to believe in this Messiah and to become his disciples, this does not mean it is illegitimate to explore the Gospel accounts intelligently. As Augustine and others after him have rightly asserted, faith of necessity seeks greater understanding. Our faith and our intellect should never be separated, as if (as some detractors allege) we were called to throw away our minds at conversion and blindly believe contrary to the evidence.

Critical scholars, with limited success, have sought to establish criteria for assessing the historicity of various teachings and events

in the Gospels. One such criterion is the *criterion of multiple attestation*, according to which Gospel material is likely authentic if it is found in two or more Gospels or other ancient sources that are not dependent on each other. While it is widely held that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are in some way interrelated, John's account may classify as an independent witness to many of the same events as those recorded in the so-called Synoptic Gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke). This would underscore the likely historicity of these events using the criterion of multiple attestation.

Another criterion is *the criterion of dissimilarity*, according to which Gospel material is likely authentic if Jesus's teachings or actions differed from first-century Judaism or the practice of the early church. The early church, so the argument goes, would hardly have fabricated material that embarrassed the first Christians or weakened their stance in interaction with Christianity's detractors. Instead, embarrassing facts would likely have been omitted from the Gospel accounts. The fact, however, is that the Gospels include many such data that did not present Christianity in a favorable light—the apostles' rivalry and jockeying for position in Jesus's kingdom, their desertion of Jesus at his arrest, Peter's denials, and particularly the crucifixion itself, all at first glance seem to constitute embarrassing information that the church would likely have suppressed—unless these data are historical and the evangelists were honest enough to preserve them *despite* the fact that they were less than complimentary and do not present their own actions or people's response to Jesus in a positive light.

However, while these and other criteria are of some value in establishing positively the historicity of certain events recounted in the Gospels, they fall short in many ways, especially when critical scholars are trying to use these criteria negatively in order to disprove the authenticity of these accounts.

Two Ways to Read the Gospels

This, of course, does not remove the need for careful harmonization, that is, reading the four Gospels in tandem and trying to

explain any apparent differences in detail of their presentation of individual statements or events. There are two—complementary and equally legitimate—ways of reading the Gospels.

The first is to read the Gospels *vertically*, that is, to read each account from beginning to end as a self-contained story in its own right. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each told their *own* story, and we must respect the literary and theological integrity of their work. This has been increasingly realized in recent years and underscores the importance of using (initially) Matthew to explain Matthew, Mark to explain Mark, and so forth.

The other way to read the Gospels is *horizontally*, that is, how each relates to the others, as complementary accounts and witnesses to the *same* historical reality and set of statements and events. Refusing to supplement our vertical reading of the individual Gospels with a horizontal reading is tantamount to the ostrich policy of refusing to acknowledge that while the Gospels *tell the same story*, they don't do so *in exactly the same way*.

Are There Contradictions?

As you work your way through this book, you will find many instances where we acknowledge differences among the Gospel accounts of individual details and make an honest attempt to suggest plausible ways in which those accounts may in fact cohere. As John writes at the conclusion of his Gospel, “Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). This speaks to the inevitable *selectivity* at work in the Gospels. For this reason we must not assume that just because an evangelist does not *mention* a given detail, he was necessarily unaware of it or would have disputed its accuracy. Furthermore, we must be careful not to read these accounts anachronistically, imposing artificial limitations or requiring unreasonable precision upon eyewitness testimony and the genre of ancient theological biography. A simple example can be illustrated in what was written on the epitaph of the cross

above Jesus's crucified head. Each Gospel writer gives us a slightly different version:

Jesus's Crucifixion Epitaph: Differences in Wording

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews | John 19:19 |
| This is Jesus, the King of the Jews | Matt. 27:37 |
| the King of the Jews | Mark 15:26 |
| This is the King of the Jews | Luke 23:38 |

A charitable rather than critical reading clearly demonstrates that the evangelists are each accurately referring to the same thing rather than contradicting one another. This is consistent with the way that true (rather than artificial or deceptive) eyewitness testimony takes place: different observers remember and choose to highlight different aspects of the one event.

So we ought to read the Gospels sympathetically, giving them the benefit of the doubt, rather than reading between the lines critically, looking for problems. The burden of proof lies on those who would convict the Gospels of incoherence, not on the Gospels to prove their integrity!

Using This Book

How, then, do we recommend that you use this book? Essentially, we provide you with an account of Jesus's final week from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday, with brief presentations of preceding and subsequent events in a prologue and epilogue.

Beginning with Wednesday of the final week, we have included the complete text of Scripture for this time period, with the intention that you will first read and meditate upon God's authoritative Word and only then read our attempts to comment on what you have read.

We envision that churches, families, small groups, and individuals will benefit from reading through the biblical material and accompanying commentary in sequence on each day of Holy Week,

though certainly this subject is worthy of meditation throughout the year. Naturally, some days contain less material than others; Good Friday is particularly lengthy, so it would be good for you to plan on setting aside additional time to work through the material. The study could culminate in a special sermon, lesson, or study on Easter Sunday, including reflection on the significance of Easter and Jesus's resurrection.

While the primary purpose of this book is not academic—instead, our desire is to provide an aid to informed worship—and we have thus refrained from providing extensive references to the scholarly literature, the discussion is informed by responsible evangelical scholarship. There is a rich tapestry of historical detail, literary artistry, and theological insight to be gleaned from the Gospel accounts of Jesus's final week, and we have done our best to include all the relevant material and to do so in a way that is informative, intelligible, and interesting to read.

For those who are interested in doing further study of the Gospel presentation of Jesus's final week, we have provided a list of suggested resources. We have also included a glossary that provides brief sketches of the most important characters in the Gospel story as well as geographical and topographical information and other important data. Before you delve into your study, it will also be helpful to familiarize yourself with the sequence of events as presented in the immediately following Scripture Guide to the Events of Holy Week.

It is our prayer that God will see fit to use this volume to bring glory to himself and to the Lord Jesus Christ. “For I [Paul] delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve” (1 Cor. 15:3–5). *Soli Deo gloria*—to God alone be the glory!

SCRIPTURE GUIDE TO THE EVENTS OF HOLY WEEK

Sunday

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Jesus enters Jerusalem | Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19 |
| Jesus predicts his death | John 12:20-36 |
| Jesus visits the temple | Matt. 21:14-17; Mark 11:11 |

Monday

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Jesus curses a fig tree | Matt. 21:18-19; Mark 11:12-14 |
| Jesus cleanses the temple | Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48 |

Tuesday

| | |
|--|--|
| The lesson from the fig tree | Matt. 21:20-22; Mark 11:20-26 |
| Jesus teaches and engages in controversies in the temple | Matt. 21:23-23:39; Mark 11:27-12:44; Luke 20:1-21:4 |
| Jesus predicts the future | Matt. 24-25; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36 |

Wednesday¹

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Jesus continues his daily teaching in the temple complex | Luke 21:37-38 |
|--|---------------|

¹We don't really know for sure that either of these events occurred on Wednesday. This is just one possible option.

24 *Scripture Guide to the Events of Holy Week*

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| The Sanhedrin plots to kill Jesus | Matt. 26:3-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2 |
|-----------------------------------|--|

Thursday

| | |
|--|--|
| Jesus instructs his disciples Peter and John to secure a large upper room in a house in Jerusalem and to prepare for the Passover meal | Matt. 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13 |
| In the evening Jesus eats the Passover meal with the Twelve, tells them of the coming betrayal, and institutes the Lord's Supper | Matt. 26:20-29; Mark 14:17-23; Luke 22:14-30 |
| During supper Jesus washes the disciples' feet, interacts with them, and delivers the Upper Room Discourse (Farewell Discourse) | John 13:1-17:26 |
| Jesus and the disciples sing a hymn together, then depart to the Mount of Olives | Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39 |
| Jesus predicts Peter's denials | Matt. 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34 |
| Jesus issues final practical commands about supplies and provisions | Luke 22:35-38 |
| Jesus and the disciples go to Gethsemane, where he struggles in prayer and they struggle to stay awake late into the night | Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46 |

Friday

| | |
|---|--|
| Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested by the authorities (perhaps after midnight, early Friday morning) | Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12 |
|---|--|

| | |
|--|---|
| Jesus has an informal hearing before Annas (former high priest and Caiaphas's father-in-law) | Matt. 26:57, 59-68; Mark 14:53, 55-65; Luke 22:63-71 |
| As predicted, Peter denies Jesus and the rooster crows | Matt. 26:58, 69-75; Mark 14:54, 66-72; Luke 22:54b-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27 |
| After sunrise on Friday the final consultation of the full Sanhedrin condemns Jesus to death and sends him to Pontius Pilate | Matt. 27:1-2; Mark 15:1 |
| Judas changes his mind, returns the silver, and hangs himself | Matt. 27:3-10 |
| Pilate questions Jesus and sends him to Herod Antipas | Matt. 27:11-14; Mark 15:2-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38 |
| Herod questions Jesus and sends him back to Pilate | Luke 23:8-12 |
| Jesus appears before Pilate a second time and is condemned to die | Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:38b-19:16 |
| Jesus is mocked and marched to Golgotha | Matt. 27:27-34; Mark 15:16-23; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:17 |
| Jesus is crucified between two thieves | Matt. 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:18-27 |
| Jesus breathes his last | Matt. 27:45-56; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-37 |
| Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus in a new tomb | Matt. 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42 |

Saturday

| | |
|---|----------------|
| The chief priests and Pharisees place guards at the tomb with Pilate's permission | Matt. 27:62-66 |
|---|----------------|

Sunday

| | |
|--|---|
| Some women discover the empty tomb and are instructed by angels | Matt. 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1 |
| The women, fearful and joyful, leave the garden and tell the disciples | Matt. 28:8-10; Luke 24:8-11; John 20:2 |
| Peter and John rush to the tomb based upon Mary Magdalene's report and discover it empty | Luke 24:12; John 20:3-10 |
| Mary returns to the tomb and encounters Jesus | John 20:11-18 |
| Jesus appears to Cleopas and a friend on the road to Emmaus | Luke 24:13-35 |
| That evening Jesus appears to the Eleven (minus Thomas) in a house in Jerusalem | Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23 |

Later Appearances of Jesus and the Ascension

| | |
|--|--|
| Jesus appears to the Eleven (including Thomas) | John 20:24-31 |
| Jesus appears to some at the Sea of Galilee | John 21 |
| The Great Commission | Matt. 28:16-20 (see also Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8) |
| The ascension | Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11 |

EARLY IN THE WEEK

THE KING COMES FOR HIS KINGDOM

SUNDAY–TUESDAY

The year was AD 33.¹ The excitement in the cool spring air of Jerusalem was palpable. Thousands of Jewish pilgrims had gathered from around the world for the upcoming Passover feast, and word had spread that Jesus—a thirty-something itinerant rabbi, prophet, and healer from Galilee—had raised Lazarus from the dead, had withdrawn from Bethany—a village just a couple miles east of Jerusalem—to a town called Ephraim in the wilderness (John 11:54), and was staying at Bethany during the weekend prior to Passover (John 11:55–12:1, 9–11).² Many had gone to Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus, with the result that they believed in Jesus and returned to the capital city with reports of his miracle-working power to raise the dead (John 12:9–11, 17–18). The Passover crowds in Jerusalem were like a powder keg ready for a spark—filled to the brim with both messianic fervor and hatred of Roman rule.

Winds of revolution whipped through the air of Palestine throughout the first century, and Jesus, with his teaching author-

¹Most scholars believe that Jesus was crucified in AD 30. We are persuaded that the evidence strongly points to a date of AD 33. For an introductory discussion of the issues, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Date of Jesus’ Crucifixion,” *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1809–10. See also Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, “The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse and the Date of Christ’s Crucifixion,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2 (1992): 331–51.

²Many Jews came to Jerusalem a week early to ceremonially cleanse themselves and prepare for the Passover.

ity and ability to capture the imagination of the masses, not least on account of his ability to heal and raise the dead, looked very much the part of the long-awaited Messiah. In order to gain and maintain power, the Romans could kill—which they did quite effectively—but how could they defeat a leader who could raise the dead at will?

After observing the Sabbath (Friday evening through Saturday evening) at Bethany, Jesus arose Sunday morning to enter the city of Jerusalem. It was March 29, AD 33—the first day of the last week of his earthly life.



SUNDAY

MARCH 29, AD 33

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

(Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19)

The Passover crowds and inhabitants of Jerusalem were filled with messianic expectation, and Jesus does not disappoint. On Sunday morning, Jesus and his disciples are on the Mount of Olives as they approach Jerusalem. He sends two of his followers to the nearby village (Bethphage or Bethany), instructing them to bring a donkey and colt on which he will sit for his entrance into Jerusalem. By this intentional symbolic action, Jesus will clearly communicate his kingship to the expectant crowds of Passover pilgrims by fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, that Israel's future king would come riding on the foal of a donkey, and by copying Solomon's entrance into Jerusalem when he was declared king.¹

As Jesus makes his westward descent down the Mount of Olives and toward the Holy City, the crowds rightly interpret his actions with expectant joy and respond in kind by spreading robes and leafy palm branches in his pathway to create a royal red carpet (see 2 Kings 9:13) and by acclaiming him their Davidic king:

¹ 1 Kings 1:32-40. Matthew makes mention of two animals, a colt (the animal that would have carried Jesus) and a donkey (presumably the colt's mother; Matt. 21:7). Mark and Luke both mention only the colt and note that no one had ever ridden it before (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30), hence perhaps the need for the colt's mother to steady it as it carried its first rider.

32 THE FINAL DAYS OF JESUS

Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!

(Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:10; see also Isa. 9:7)

The crowds are openly acclaiming Jesus instead of Caesar as king!

The whole city is shaken by the events, and the crowd keeps spreading the word to any in Jerusalem who have not yet heard who Jesus is (Matt. 21:10–11). Some Pharisees instruct Jesus to rebuke the crowds for their dangerous messianic exuberance, but he refuses to correct or curtail the excitement of the crowd over his entrance into the city (Matt. 21:15–17; Luke 19:39–40). It would be hard to overestimate the political and religious volatility incited by Jesus's actions—the Pharisees were taken by surprise and had no idea how to respond (John 12:19). Up to this point in Jesus's ministry, he could still have managed to live a long, happy, peaceful life, but his actions on Sunday set in motion a series of events that could result only in either his overthrow of the Romans and the current religious establishment—or his brutal death. He has crossed the point of no return; there would be no turning back. Caesar could allow no rival kings. As Jesus approaches the city, he weeps over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44).

Jesus Predicts His Death (John 12:20–36)

Some Greeks who were among the Passover pilgrims seek an audience with Jesus. John does not record the Greeks' question, but Jesus responds by predicting his death and describing it as the very purpose for which he has come into the world (John 12:27). A voice from heaven, thunderous in sound, affirms God's commitment to glorify his name through the coming death of Jesus (John 12:28–29). Jesus goes on to clarify the kind of fate he will meet: death by crucifixion (being "lifted up from the earth," John 12:32; see Isa. 52:13). Yet by his death, Jesus will deal Satan a crushing blow (John 12:31; see also Luke 10:18; Gen. 3:15).

The Jewish crowd, of course, does not like this kind of talk

and objects that according to the Mosaic law, the Messiah must remain forever. Jesus does not directly answer their objection but instead commands them to “walk while [they] have the light” (i.e., Jesus himself, the “light of the world,” John 8:12; 9:5) and believe in the light in order to become sons of light before it is gone and darkness comes (John 12:35–36).

Jesus Visits the Temple (Matt. 21:14-17; Mark 11:11)

Before returning with the Twelve to Bethany at the end of the day, Jesus visits the temple complex. Jesus continues to upset the religious establishment: healing the blind and lame, and receiving the praise of children.

This initial visit to the temple sets the stage for the unforgettable events that are to occur there the following day.



MONDAY

MARCH 30, AD 33

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree (Matt. 21:18-19; Mark 11:12-14)

As Jesus and his disciples are returning to Jerusalem Monday morning, Jesus, being hungry, spots a fig tree. Israel is often characterized as a fig tree in the Old Testament (Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10, 16; Joel 1:7), and Jesus's cursing of the fig tree symbolizes the judgment of God upon a nation that has the outward appearance of life but fails to bear fruit.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

(Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48)

With the riveting events of the previous day still fresh in everyone's mind, all eyes are on Jesus as he enters the city Monday morning. What will the recently hailed Davidic Messiah do to bring about his kingdom? Jesus wastes no time in answering this question by going straight to the temple.

From his visit the night before, he knows exactly what he will find there—moneychangers and merchants selling sacrificial animals in the Court of Gentiles. These profiteers prey upon the religious devotion of the Passover pilgrims who must pay the temple tax with a Tyrian shekel and present unblemished animals for sacrifice. Consumed by holy zeal and righteous indignation, Jesus overturns the tables and chairs of the moneychangers, throws out merchants and customers alike, and refuses entrance to any who

are carrying goods for sale. He then begins to teach the people that the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations (see Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11), not a den of thieves where the rich and powerful exploited the poor under the guise of facilitating worship of God.

By these actions, Jesus directly challenges the Jewish religious leadership complicit with—and likely benefiting from—this glaring corruption of devotion to Israel's covenant-keeping God. The chief priests, scribes, and leaders of the people desperately begin looking for a way to destroy Jesus. Not only had he directly challenged Jewish authority, but the Romans needed no excuse to exercise force if there was any civil instability. In contrast, the common people love what they are seeing. Jesus is shaking things up and setting things right just as the Messiah was expected to do. At the same time, however, by cleansing the temple Jesus further seals his death sentence. Those in power will not put up with a challenge to their authority on this level. Jesus must die.

When evening comes, Jesus and his followers leave Jerusalem once again (Mark 11:19; Luke 21:37).



TUESDAY

MARCH 31, AD 33

Jesus Teaches His Followers a Lesson about the Fig Tree
(Matt. 21:20-22; Mark 11:20-26)

When passing by the fig tree Jesus had cursed the day before, and at Peter's remark that it had withered, Jesus takes the opportunity to instruct his followers to have faith in God.¹ If they do not doubt but believe, they will be able to move spiritual mountains by way of believing prayer. While praying, they must forgive others who have wronged them, so that their own sins will be forgiven by God as well.

Jesus Teaches and Engages in Controversies in the Temple
(Matt. 21:23-23:39; Mark 11:27-12:44; Luke 20:1-21:4)

On Tuesday morning, the crowds come early to the temple to hear Jesus speak (Luke 21:38). Will Jesus do anything today to match the excitement of the previous two days?

The chief priests, scribes, and elders immediately approach Jesus when he enters the temple and confront him concerning his actions on the previous day: "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" (Mark 11:28). *They* are the ones who have authority over the temple and its activities, and Jesus had no right to do what he had done.

¹Note that Matthew simply telescopes the events whereas Mark indicates that the cursing of the fig tree occurred on Monday while Jesus's instruction took place the following day.

Depending on his answer—and there was no answer that would satisfy them—Jesus could be arrested for his actions.

In reply, Jesus turns the tables on them by promising to answer their question if they first answer his: “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” (Mark 11:30). The religious leaders are caught, unable to answer Jesus’s simple question. If they were to say, “From heaven,” the obvious follow-up would be, “Then why don’t the leaders believe in Jesus about whom John testified?” If they were to retort, “From man,” they would incur the wrath of the common people who hold John in high esteem as a prophet sent from God.

After thus humbling the Jewish leaders, Jesus follows up his question—the answer to which was in any case obvious to the crowds—with a series of parables. The parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28–32) explicitly condemns the religious authorities for not believing John’s message, while tax collectors and prostitutes, the most wicked kinds of people imaginable, believe and are entering the kingdom of God ahead of the supposed spiritual leaders. This parable must have infuriated the Jewish authorities, but Jesus adds fuel to the fire with two more parables directed against them.

In the parable of the tenants (Matt. 21:33–44; Mark 12:1–11; Luke 20:9–18), the disobedient, thieving, murdering tenants clearly represent the scribes, chief priests, and Pharisees. There is nothing subtle about Jesus’s telling of the parable: the religious leaders recognize the parable as having been spoken against them (Matt. 21:45; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). The parable is allegorical with the following correspondences:

The Parable of the Tenants

| PARABLE | REPRESENTATION |
|----------------|----------------|
| Vineyard owner | God |
| Vineyard | Israel |
| Slaves | God’s prophets |

| PARABLE | REPRESENTATION |
|----------------------------------|--|
| The son | Jesus |
| Destruction of the evil tenants | God's judgment on Israel's unrighteous leaders |
| Giving of the vineyard to others | Extension of God's kingdom to the Gentiles |

In the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1–14), Jesus makes similar points. The current religious leadership have rejected God's invitation to the messianic wedding banquet and will be judged while the invitation is extended to all.

Jesus is clearly winning the support and approval of the people while exposing the failure and hypocrisy of the ruling Jewish leadership. The authorities, for their part, do not take this lying down and continue trying to figure out a way to arrest him; but they lack the opportunity because of Jesus's widespread popularity among the crowds (Matt. 21:46; 22:15; Mark 12:12–13; Luke 20:19–20). If they seize him, the attempted arrest would cause a riot. The leaders therefore resort to a subtler tactic and try to trick Jesus into incriminating himself by sending Pharisees (a Jewish sect known for its zeal to keep the law) and Herodians (those loyal to Herod's dynasty) to ask him a question to which either answer would provide grounds to accuse him: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Matt. 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26). If Jesus answers yes, he would shatter people's expectations of him as a Messiah who would throw off Roman rule; if no, he could be arrested for fomenting revolt. The temporary alliance of the Herodians and Pharisees (Jesus's political and religious adversaries) clearly demonstrated that Jesus was perceived as a threat to all the existing power structures. His clever answer avoids the trap by allowing for a both/and scenario, evading the either/or dilemma posed by his foes: the denarius has Caesar's image on it; so as long as Caesar is in power, it is appropriate to pay taxes to him (of course, in the messianic kingdom Caesar's image would not be

on the coinage, so there the obligation would no longer apply). At the same time, Jesus urges his listeners to give God the things that are God's; since we are made in God's image, we owe everything to him. The image of Caesar and Roman gods on coins deeply offended Jews in the first century. Yet Jesus cleverly sidesteps their trap, and the Pharisees and Herodians, amazed at his answer, are at a loss as to how to respond.

After Jesus has silenced the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees (a Jewish sect that denied the end-time resurrection of the dead) step forward to test him with a tricky theological conundrum (Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40). Their question is designed to make Jesus's belief in the resurrection look ridiculous. But by quoting God's self-affirmation in Exodus 3:6, 15–16 to the effect that he is a God of the living, not the dead, Jesus once again turns the tables on his opponents.² They marvel at his answer and, as do the others who tried to trick him, fall silent.

Now another questioner, at the instigation of the Pharisees, steps forward in order to test Jesus (Matt. 22:34–35). An expert in the law asks Jesus which of God's commands is the greatest (Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34). Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18, calling for love of God and one's fellow man, and the following conversation leads Jesus to commend (and implicitly invite) the questioner: "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

At this point, Jesus goes on the counteroffensive against those who have been trying to trap him and asks them a question concerning the way in which Psalm 110:1 describes the Messiah as David's Lord: How can he at once be both David's son and his Lord? (Matt. 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44). Being of Davidic ancestry posed no problem for the Messiah's being Lord, but if this ancestry was interpreted as making him *merely human*, then there was a problem. Again, the opposition is utterly confounded:

²Jesus likely cited a passage from the Pentateuch because the Sadducees derived doctrine only from the five books of Moses.

“And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matt. 22:46).

Having established the inability of the Jewish religious leadership to answer Jesus’s questions, Jesus launches a lengthy, scathing critique of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:1–39; Mark 12:38–40; Luke 20:45–47). He warns the crowds against those “hypocrites” and “blind guides” and pronounces seven woes of judgment against them. This full-scale verbal assault against the current religious authorities removes all doubt concerning Jesus’s intentions, agenda, and aims. He has no desire to ally himself with the current leadership; he has come to overthrow their authority and to replace it with his own. There is no way that both sides can survive the escalating conflict. It seems that either Jesus will come to assume power or face death.

Jesus Predicts the Future

(Matthew 24–25; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:5–36)

As Jesus is leaving the temple on Tuesday evening, his disciples are discussing the size and grandeur of the buildings in the temple complex. In response, Jesus prophesies that the day is fast approaching when not one stone will be left upon another. All will be thrown down.

When Jesus and his disciples stop to rest on the Mount of Olives, his followers come to him and privately ask about the timing of his prophecy: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” (Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7). “And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3). The disciples’ question in Mark and Luke relates to the timing of the destruction of the temple, while Matthew’s inclusion of the question concerning the close of the age makes clear that the disciples did not think the temple would be destroyed until the end of time.

Jesus’s lengthy response in Matthew, Mark, and Luke subtly differentiates the two events (though interpreters vary as to which event Jesus refers in the various parts of the discourse). It is not

always clear whether Jesus is giving instructions to his disciples concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (which would take place in AD 70) or concerning his second coming and the end of the age (which was in the more distant future from the vantage point of Jesus's original followers and is still future from our vantage point today). In keeping with prophetic convention, the near event—the destruction of the temple—served as a type (picture or foreshadowing) of the worldwide divine judgment that will come upon the earth at Christ's return. The main themes of Jesus's discourse, reinforced by the parables of the ten virgins and of the talents, are clear. Followers of Jesus will experience increasing persecution and tribulation leading up to the final day of judgment, but they must remain vigilant and persist in faith.

Conclusion

With this overview of the early events of Passion Week in mind, we have a good foundation for our closer look at Jesus's final days. The stage is set for the final act. The characters are in place. Their goals, motives, and intentions are clear. The king has come for his kingdom and has issued a clear and direct challenge to the reigning structures of political, economic, and religious power. The drama can end in only one of two ways. Either Jesus will topple the reigning powers and establish his messianic kingdom—or he will be killed. No one at that time could possibly comprehend that in God's mysterious plan, there was a third option.



WEDNESDAY

APRIL 1, AD 33

THE PLOT AGAINST JESUS

Jesus continues his daily teaching in the temple complex.

LUKE 21:37-38

And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

The Sanhedrin plots to kill Jesus.

MATTHEW 26:3-5

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

MARK 14:1-2

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.”

LUKE 22:1-2

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.

COMMENTARY**Jesus's Daily Teaching**

Wednesday passes quietly—particularly when compared with the earlier city-shaking events of Sunday (the Triumphal Entry), Monday (the cleansing of the temple), and Tuesday (temple controversies). Jesus continues his daily practice of traveling from Bethany to Jerusalem early to teach the people in the temple complex. There do not seem to be any recorded controversies, but Luke notes the rapt attention of the crowds who had come to hear Jesus teach. His authority, actions, and teaching have made him quite a celebrity in the eyes of the people.

Not everyone is friendly, however. Jesus has a contingent of powerful and determined enemies.

The Plotting of the Sanhedrin

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each describe the murderous plotting of the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people “two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread” (Mark 14:1). Matthew informs us that this meeting took place in the “palace” of Caiaphas the high priest (i.e., his private residence; Matt. 26:3).¹ This elite group of Jewish leaders is representative of the Sanhedrin (though the text does not indicate that the entire Sanhedrin met at this time). They gather to brainstorm a way to kill Jesus by stealth in order to avoid a major uproar among the masses. The general consensus is that they must wait until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread (a weeklong festival ending on Nisan 21 [Thursday, April 9]), when the crowds would disperse and return

¹“Palace” may suggest a monarch’s residence but in the present context refers to Caiaphas’s home.

to their homes away from the city. At this point, they would be free to arrest and kill Jesus without fear of inciting a revolt. They are willing to bide their time because they know—or think they know—that they are in positions of power and authority and that if they wait for the right time to dispense with Jesus, they will win in the end.

 Their mind is made up, and their verdict has been rendered.

WALK WITH JESUS DURING HIS LAST WEEK ON EARTH

On March 29, AD 33, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem and boldly predicted that he would soon be put to death—executed on a cross, like a common criminal. So began the most important week of the most important person who ever lived.

Nearly 2,000 years later, the events that took place during Jesus's last days still reverberate through the ages. Designed as a day-by-day guide to Passion Week, *The Final Days of Jesus* leads us to reexamine and meditate on the history-making, earth-shaking significance of Jesus's arrest, trial, crucifixion, and empty tomb.

Combining a chronological arrangement of the Gospel accounts with insightful commentary, charts, and maps, this book will help you better understand what actually happened all those years ago—and why it matters today.

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THEOLOGY / CHRISTOLOGY

