

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 15 - One Week in Jerusalem

Key Questions:

- How did Jesus end up being crucified? Why exactly do Christians believe that Jesus had to die?

The Last Week of Jesus' Life

Most of the religious leaders who were planning to have Jesus executed lived in Jerusalem, making it a dangerous place for Him to be. So, you might expect that He would stay away from this city where His enemies were. However, Jesus actually knew that He would die on a cross, and He believed that this was the reason why He had come to earth (John 12:27). So, in the third year of His ministry, even though opposition to His ministry was increasing, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, just as He had in the previous two years. He arrived at Jerusalem on a Sunday, and the following Friday He was executed. We can attempt to date these events based on references in the Gospels:

- The day of the crucifixion was the day before the Sabbath, that is a Friday (Matthew 27:62, John 19:31).
- It was also the Day of preparation for the Passover (John 18:28, 19:14) – this is the Jewish date 14th Nisan.
- The 14th day of Nisan was only a Friday twice in the range AD 28-34: 7th April 30 and 3rd April 33.
- Since the ministry of John the Baptist began during the 15th year of the Emperor Tiberius, i.e. 28-29 AD (Luke 3:1-4 – Tiberius reigned AD 14-37), this makes **3rd April 33 AD** more likely (see *Part 11*).

Sunday – Jesus enters the City of Jerusalem riding on a Donkey [Now known as: *Palm Sunday*]

Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:29-44, John 12:12-19

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem He was surrounded by His followers, who mainly came from Galilee. Jesus asked His disciples to get Him a donkey to ride into the city (fulfilling the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey). Jesus' followers were very happy as they believed that Jesus would become the king in Jerusalem and restore God's Kingdom on earth. They waved palm branches in the air and shouted praises to God.

Monday – Jesus cleanses the Temple

Matthew 21:12-20, Mark 11:12-21, Luke 19:45&46

During His first year of ministry when Jesus came to Jerusalem for the Passover, He had visited the Temple and had driven out the money changers and shop-owners who had stalls there (see John 2:13-25). On this last visit to Jerusalem He did exactly the same thing. Jesus was very angry about these people using the Temple to make money. It was supposed to be a place where people could worship God, but these men were using it for business! His action threatened the Sadducees financially. As High Priests they controlled the business in the Temple and made money from it. Jesus' action was right, but it was also deliberately planned to increase the opposition against Him.

Tuesday and Wednesday – Jesus' teaching & the plans of His enemies

Matthew 21:23-26:5, Mark 11:27-14:2, Luke 20:1-22:6

During these two days Jesus taught in Jerusalem, mainly about the future. He also faced some challenges about His own authority (see Luke 20:1-8) and spoke out against the hypocritical religious leaders (see Luke 20:9-19). His enemies began to plot a way to arrest Jesus, but were finding it difficult to know how to do it without causing a riot among the people, as Jesus still had many followers. Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, made an agreement with the Jewish leaders to hand Jesus over to them, giving them the opportunity they were looking for to arrest Him.

Thursday – The Passover and the Lord's Supper – Jesus betrayed and arrested

Matthew 26:17-56, Mark 14:12-52, Luke 22:7-51, John 12:1-18:13

Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His twelve disciples. Before the meal He did something amazing: He washed their feet, a job that a servant, not the Master, should do (see John 13:1-17). He did this to show His love for them and to teach them that they should also be servants of others. After the meal He did something new (see Luke 22:19&20). He took bread and broke it and said that it represented His body given for them, and told them to do it to remember Him. He also took a cup of wine and said it represented God's **New Covenant** with them which was sealed by the blood He would pour out. It must have seemed strange to the disciples. Jesus was with them, but He was teaching them to remember Him. He was alive, but He was speaking about His death. This was the beginning of the Lord's Supper, which Christians still practice in churches today as a way to remember Jesus (see *Part 20*).

Next, Jesus shared some parting teaching with His disciples, recorded in John 14-16. He explained that He must leave them soon, but that He would prepare a place for them in God's house and that one day He would return to take them to live there with Him. He also told them that He would send the Holy Spirit to live with them as their teacher and comforter after He had left them. Lastly He prayed a wonderful prayer for His disciples (see John chapter 17).

The disciples and Jesus left the city and went across a valley to a garden, where Jesus began to pray. It was now the middle of the night, and, although Jesus asked them to pray with Him, the disciples fell asleep. Jesus was in great pain as He prayed because He knew what lay ahead of Him. While He was in the garden, a group of soldiers from the High Priest's guard came to Him. Judas identified Jesus by kissing Him on the cheek, and the soldiers arrested Him. Simon Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword, but Jesus told him to put it away. The disciples were confused and ran away.

Friday – Trial and Death [Now known as: *Good Friday*]

Matthew 26:57-27:66, Mark 14:53-15:47, Luke 22:54-23:53, John 18:13-42

Jesus was taken for trial to the High Priest. He was beaten by soldiers, and the High Priest brought false witnesses to make accusations against Him. The High Priest accused Him of blasphemy, and wanted to kill Him. However, the Jewish authorities needed permission for the execution from Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate did not want to

kill Jesus, as he did not find Him guilty of any crime, and tried to pass the case to Herod, King of Galilee. Herod, however, returned Jesus to Pilate, who had Him beaten in the hope that this would be enough to please the priests. However, the priests had their supporters call out for Jesus to be executed, and Pilate, afraid that the Jews might riot if he didn't give them what they wanted, agreed to execute Jesus. Jesus was led out of the city to a hill and executed there on a cross.

The disciples were very confused at this time. Simon Peter even denied that he knew Jesus. They couldn't understand why their Lord, who they believed to be the Messiah, had been killed in this way. They thought their hope was lost. Nicodemus and another wealthy Jew called Joseph took Jesus' body off the cross and buried it in Joseph's new tomb.

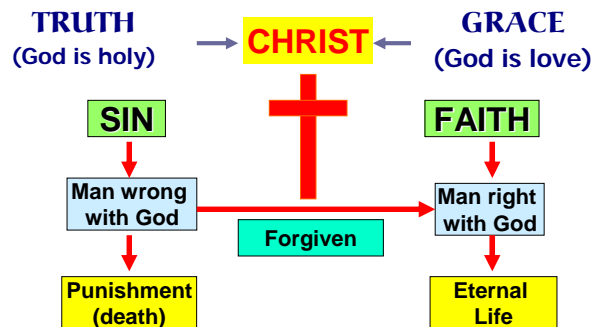
Why did Jesus have to die?

Death was the result of sin. Before sin came into the world there was no death, but after Adam (the first man) sinned, death came into the world. **Jesus was the only person who never sinned, and so He did not deserve to die.** It seems even more strange that He should die when you consider that He was God! How can God die? Jesus Himself said that no one could take His life away from Him, but He could lay it down (see John 10:17&18). No one else could say this – only Jesus had control over when He would die. He said that he had to die to bring us eternal life (see John 3:14&15), and to defeat the Devil (the "prince of this world" in John 12:31). So, **Jesus believed that He had to die, but that His death would not be a defeat but a victory.** How can this be? The answer lies in the Old Testament prophecies. In Isaiah chapter 53 we read about the "Suffering Servant", and in vv 11&12 it tells us why the Messiah had to suffer:

When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of what he has experienced, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.

So, Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 53:10). He took our sins on Himself and died in our place. He took the punishment that we deserved for our sins, and so made it possible for us to be "counted righteous". This means literally, that Jesus died so that we can have eternal life. He was punished so that we can be declared "not guilty" by God. He took our sin so that when God looks at us He doesn't see any sin, but accepts us as right with Him (righteous).

This truth is also taught throughout the New Testament (see Romans 3:21-26, Hebrews 10:1-18, 1 Peter 3:18). Although the disciples were confused when Jesus died, later they realised what His death had meant. The Old Testament sacrifices were only pictures of the one sacrifice that Jesus would make for the sins of all people. The Old Testament sacrifices of animals could never really pay the price for our sins – to do that we would need perfect (sinless) human being to die for us. In Jesus we have this perfect sacrifice that can really pay for our sins, so that if we trust in Him we can be completely forgiven. This is the amazing message of the Christian "gospel" (good news). This is the only way God can forgive us for our sins but still remain holy.



We can now summarise the message of the Bible so far in five simple points:

1. God created us to know Him and obey Him as our King

The world God created was perfect – human beings had perfect relationships with God, one another and the earth.

2. We have rebelled against God's rule, and so we are in the wrong with God.

God's creation was spoiled when the man and woman disobeyed Him, rejecting His rule. God is holy (perfect and just) and so He must punish sin. We deserve to be punished for our own sin because each of us has failed to reach God's perfect standard and has rebelled against His rule over our lives.

3. God still loves us, and wants us to know Him, so He sent Jesus to die for us

As a result, He kept speaking to mankind throughout the centuries, especially through the people of Israel. God even gave the Jewish people a pattern of sacrifices to represent their sins being forgiven. Finally He came into the world Himself in Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life which fully displayed God's character (full of grace and truth, love and holiness), and finally died on a cross for our sins. In the cross the justice and love of God meet – He punishes sin, but forgives the sinner. The cost was the death of Jesus.

4. We must respond to God in repentance and faith (submitting to His rule over us)

Those who trust in Jesus can be forgiven and can receive a completely new life from God (born again). We can be made right with God through the cross. Instead of having the punishment we deserve for our sin, which is death and separation from God forever, we can receive eternal life as a gift from Him. To receive this gift we must repent (turn from sin to ask God for forgiveness) and trust in God to save us and lead us.

5. God will give us new life by His Holy Spirit and new power to live for Him

When a person surrenders control of his life to God, he is born again and the Holy Spirit comes to live with him. God begins to change him from the inside out, giving new power to live the way He wants him to.

Key Lesson: Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice for sins

Although the enemies of Jesus thought they were executing Him and would get rid of a problem by doing this, it was actually God's plan that Jesus would die as the only perfect sacrifice for sins – including our sins.