

# **BIBLE STUDY**

## **The Life of Jesus Christ**

### **The Raising of Lazarus and the Final Passover**

#### **Study Section 10**



# **Jesus Christ: Part 22**

## **“Lazarus, Come Forth”**

In this study we return to the record of Jesus' ministry not long before the time that He was to be put to death. He had attended the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) in Jerusalem. This feast occurred in the autumn following harvest period. It was the day following the end of that feast that He had healed the man born blind.

John records that subsequently Jesus again returned to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, which was held in late December, around the time of the winter solstice. A further confrontation with the Jews in the Temple at that time, once again led to a decision to stone Him, and then finally to seize Him. However, once again they failed because the right time had not yet come, thus the record simply states that “He eluded their grasp.”

With this further attempt having been made upon His life, Jesus left Jerusalem and crossed the Jordan to the place where John the Baptist had first baptized and He stayed there. The Gospel writer John is the only one to record this particular occasion in chapter 10, verses 22 to 42. But it is then Luke who then records Jesus remaining and preaching in that area over the next few months. (Luke 13:22 to 17:10)

Over three years had passed since Jesus had been baptized and His public work had begun. Once again, we see a Bible echo. When God made a further covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:8, 9, 18) a sacrifice was required to mark the confirmation of the covenant. Abraham slew a heifer, a she-goat and a ram, (each three year's old). Christ had completed three years of service. Very soon now, He would willingly offer Himself as God's appointed sacrifice for sin. (Isaiah 53:10)

In His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus made “Abraham” to say “if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” (Luke 16:19-31) Not much time passed before Jesus proved His point, for He did raise a Lazarus from the dead, and sure enough, the Scribes, the Priests and the Pharisees did not believe.

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It is John who records this seventh sign from Jesus, so we now turn to His record beginning at chapter 11.

### **He Whom You Love Is Sick - John 11:1-5**

In this place so full of reminders of His own approaching death, (beyond Jordan) a message arrived from Bethany for Jesus. Among the closest friends of Jesus were Lazarus and His family in Bethany, just over the hill from Jerusalem. (about 2 miles) Now Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was desperately ill, and the sisters made a frantic appeal for help. This appeal reached Him somewhere in the Jordan valley.

There was a close bond between Jesus and this family at Bethany, and it possibly appears strange, at first, that He did not respond immediately. The words of His initial reaction were taken to mean that the ill health of Lazarus was not serious:

*“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” John 11:4*

### **Jesus Delays - John 11:6-15**

As the details surrounding this event begin to emerge from John’s careful recording, they bring with them the many significant aspects of this sign. The sisters probably thought that Jesus would come quickly to their brother’s side. Surely, the healing hand which had stretched out so often for strangers would not be restrained for a friend. But, inexplicably at first, the Lord delayed His journey to Bethany until He knew that the illness had run its grim course. It is then on the third day that Jesus set out to raise Lazarus from the dead. Friendship with the Master did not mean being immediately relieved of present distress. It means involvement in His work through which those who are closely associated with Him will be sustained and ultimately comforted.

For two days, Jesus delayed His journey to Bethany. He then advised His Disciples of His intention to return into that area of Judea. Knowing His recent escape from death there, they were amazed. The delay might have seemed intolerable to the grieving Mary and Martha, but it was not enough to overcome the anxious concern of the Disciples:

*“...The Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” John 11:8*

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Although the initial part of His response might have been difficult for the Disciples to understand, we have the advantage of being able to look back on these events in the knowledge of subsequent developments:

*“Are there not 12 hours in the day?” John 11:9*

We can see the significance in this question as complimentary to those times when Jesus said “Mine hour is not yet come.” He knew that His time was running out. People had begun to turn from Him. The last Passover had marked the first mass rejection of Jesus by the people. (John 6:60, 61, 66) From that time, Jesus knew for certain that only 12 months more remained to Him before His death. The twelve months had not yet passed. The final hour of His time had not fully run its course. He knew that He would not be taken. There was time yet remaining before the day in which His enemies would succeed in their efforts to take and kill Him. In this sense, there were some remaining “hours in the day.” Jesus then went on to reassure them. As the “Light of the World,” His words shed light on their path. There was safety in following His commands. (John 11:9, 10)

He then indicated to them that He was going to awaken their friend Lazarus out of sleep. (John 11:11) The Disciples appeared to tie this into Jesus’ earlier statement, that the “sickness was not unto death.” So they thought He meant normal, healthy sleep. Jesus, therefore, said to them plainly: “...*Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe...*” *John 11:14, 15*

The Apostle Thomas’ reaction must have been heartening to the Lord. To these men very little could be more hazardous, at the moment, than a return to the area of Jerusalem. But Thomas was strong in loyalty, if not in faith. (John 20:25, 16) The least they could do was to stand by Jesus in His peril, even if they died. (John 11:16)

### **Jesus and Martha - John 11:16-27**

By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, the burial was over. The dead Lazarus had been sealed within the tomb for 4 days. Mourners still remained to console the two sisters. Then hearing of Jesus’ approach, Martha hurried out to meet Him. The conversation between the two of them, that John so carefully records, provides great insight into the state of those who die in faith and in union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Martha’s opening greeting and following statements leave no doubt regarding her faith and awareness in the hope of Jesus Christ. All of the elements related to this wonderful sign bear no resemblance to the beliefs of the Pharisees regarding life after death.

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Martha met Jesus and said: “...*Lord, If you had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.*” *John 11:21, 22* Her faith and her hope were focused in Jesus, but she recognised the supreme position of God, His Father. Gently, for all to hear, the Master drew out of her a further statement regarding her trust in God by saying: “...**Your brother shall rise again.**” (Verse 23) This was nothing new to the faithful Martha. She immediately revealed her insight into Jesus’ teachings: “*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*” (verse 24)

The prevalent belief of the Pharisees regarding life after death, and that of the Sadducees who felt that there was no life possible other than that of the current mortal state, presented a confusing picture to the average Jew. Blind Religious leaders were leading their followers astray. There is evidence of much uncertainty and ambiguity in contemporary Jewish thought about the after-life. Martha’s emphatic declaration of faith had surely been learned from Jesus, Himself. Her confidence rested in what He had taught her. Thus Jesus now centred this reassuring doctrine specifically on Himself. He, and the resurrection were inseparable: “...*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*” *verses 25, 26* Martha’s hopes were not to be disappointed. Jesus provides her with the comforting assurance that they will be fulfilled in and through Him.

The balance of phrases in Jesus’ statement here is worth noting. Apart from Jesus, there was no life after death. But in Him, just as He had declared to His disciples, the dead were only sleeping. For those who die before His coming in Glory, there is life in His resurrection. For those believers who live to witness His return, He is life. Paul, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, very clearly elaborates on this statement from Christ:

*“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thess. 4:13, 15-18,*

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In response to Jesus' statement and His question regarding her belief, Martha once again reveals her insight and her faith: "...*Yes, Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.*" Verse 27

The essence of Christ's statement to Martha could be summed up as:

- **"Resurrection" and "life" are bound up in Him.**
- **Dead believers will be raised to life by Him.**
- **Living believers will be given immortality by Him**

Martha's reply in testifying to her belief in the identity of Christ provided an echo regarding God's promise to David regarding the Kingdom. In this one simple statement she revealed her knowledge of Old Testament Scriptures and affirmed her belief and understanding of the points inherent to Jesus' statement regarding resurrection.

The familiar phrases she uses regarding Jesus: **"the Christ"; "the Son of God"; "the Coming One,"** all point back to the great promise made to David recorded in 2 Samuel, chapter 7. "Christ" is the anointed, meaning the "Promised King," and it is in the Scriptural foundation of that promise that this future King is designated as the Son of God. We look at the words of God spoken through Nathan the Prophet to David as rendered in the King James Version:

*"And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build an house for my name and I will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever. I will be His Father, and He shall be My Son..." 2 Samuel 7:12-14*

In the words of this promise we find references to Psalms 2 and 89, which serve as commentaries on it in relating to the fulfilment of this amazing promise made to David.

In the words of this prophecy, presented by Nathan, we also find anticipation of the resurrection of the dead. Although it begins with the statement that this Promised King will come after David's death, when he is sleeping with his fathers, it is given its

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completion in verse 16: “...*Thy Kingdom shall be established forever before Thee...*” 2 *Samuel 7:16*

The fulfillment of that promise implies resurrection. Psalm 89 carries the same thought. Martha’s convictions were very definite and clear.

### **Mary Comes to Jesus - John 11:28-36**

Martha then went to give Mary the news regarding the arrival of Jesus. She did so in a whisper, for among the many influential people joining in the formality of sharing their mourning, would certainly be critics and enemies of Jesus. Mary lost no time in going out to meet Jesus who had made no move to come into the village and approach the house. Falling at His feet, she, too, confessed her grief, her need, her faith and her hope:

*“...Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*  
*John 11:32*

The mourners had followed her from the house assuming that she was going to the tomb to weep. In John’s record of this we can see the Lord’s purpose in waiting for Mary rather than going to the house. Those who followed her out would now witness the wonderful events that would now take place.

Jesus was overcome by the sight of His sorrowing friends, and the anguish that they must have felt whilst watching Lazarus die, as they awaited Jesus’ arrival. He knew the futility of human existence without what He was to accomplish. Only through Him would salvation be found. Even though good would come out of their grief, for the moment there was only sorrow for all involved in this scene. Scripture simply records that “Jesus wept.”

Once again, John is very precise in the detail that he records. We see, in verse 36, that some of the witnesses to this scene were impressed with Jesus’ love of Lazarus. Some of them revealed their criticism as noted in verse 37. With all of the witnesses gathered, Jesus now moved quickly, asking:

*“...Where have you laid him?...” John 11:34*

### **Jesus Raises Lazarus - John 11:37-44**

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The whole group, some of them friendly, some hostile, moved to the site of the grave. Cold and silent, a stone across its mouth, it closely resembled the grave in which Christ, Himself, would soon lie dead. Martha was horrified at the Master's request to roll away the stone: *"...Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead 4 days."* John 11:39

Everyone knew that Lazarus was really dead. There could be no doubt in the minds of any of these witnesses. But, Jesus reminded her of the message that He had sent days earlier, (John 11:4), telling her to "believe and see the glory of God." This was to be no obscure miracle. With "many" of the Jews looking on, and hearing the Master's words, He lifted His eyes and thanked His Father for hearing His earlier, unrecorded prayer:

*"...Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst sent me."*  
John 11:41, 42

His voice of authority then spanned the space between Himself and the grave: *"...Lazarus, Come Forth."*In a clear demonstration of Jesus' own words, as recorded earlier, Lazarus walked out of the tomb:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; And He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man."* John 5: 25-27

By the raising Lazarus, Jesus provided an unmistakable sign foreshadowing the great day of the resurrection, when Jesus will return to this earth in judgment:

*"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds, to a resurrection of judgment."* John 5:28,29

**One Man Must Die - John 11:45-57**

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Jesus had raised His friend Lazarus from the dead, and He had done it before a great crowd of witnesses. Many of these were influential Jews from Jerusalem. It was a deliberate challenge to the Leaders of the Nation to face the unshakable truth that He was “the Messiah, the Son of God, the Coming One.” (John 11:27)

This miracle had profound repercussions. Historically, it led directly to the death of Jesus. Many of the Jews who saw it, believed in Jesus right away. Others told the Pharisees what they had seen. This provoked an immediate crisis. The Chief Priests and Pharisees assembled the Sanhedrin. The Sadducee Chief Priests were seriously concerned by the activities of Jesus, now, and for very good reason. The raising of Lazarus had shattered one of their chief dogmas, that there is no resurrection. The Pharisees and their enemies, the Sadducees, were now, for the first time, driven into an evil alliance regarding Jesus. The combined force of these two very powerful and influential groups in Jerusalem led to a bold decision in this crisis. The death of Jesus now became official policy (verse 53).

Jesus, knowing of their plans, went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim. There He stayed with His Disciples until the time of the approaching Passover. As the Passover approached, the Jews awaited with great anticipation, many of them believing in Jesus because of the raising of Lazarus. So the Chief Priests, Religious leaders in the land, decided to kill Lazarus as well. He was living evidence that the doctrine they taught was false and contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Once again, we see a foreshadowing in a policy that has persisted throughout the ages as false teachers have endeavoured to protect the doctrine of men and suppress the true teachings of Christ. In making the decision to kill Jesus, these false leaders unwittingly provided a resounding echo from the Law of God.

The Chief Priests and Pharisees seemed virtually panic-stricken in their discussions during the Council Meeting of the Sanhedrin. They debated among themselves regarding what they should do. If they let Him go on like this, more and more people would come to believe in Him. The Romans could perceive this as a sign of rebellion. Apart from what Rome might do to the nation, these proud men were concerned that they might lose their high places of authority. (John 11:47, 48)

It was Caiaphas, the High Priest who cut through the presentation of the various arguments in the Council Chamber and summed up the whole matter in clear, cold, logic:

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*“...You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.” John 11:49, 50*

Not only that, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die, not just for:

*“...The nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” John 11:51, 52*

Once again we see the detail John provides to make sure that we do not miss the significance in the signs he records. Twice in these two short verses, he refers to the fact that Caiaphas was High Priest that year. (He makes further reference to this fact in 18:13) In seeking his lessons, we should look for the reasons for such obvious repetition. A Prophet is one who communicates the will of God to the people. The only prophecy that Caiaphas could make as High Priest was the duty that fell on him that year, as it did each year on the office of the High Priest. Under the Law, the High Priest selected the sacrifice as the sin offering for the people on the Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16:8)

In this amazing echo, John takes pains to make us aware that in stating that Christ must die for the nation, he was unknowingly fulfilling God's Law and God's purpose. Not only that, but if we further consider chapter 16 of Leviticus, we find that the Day of Atonement ritual was binding upon all, both the natives of Israel and the strangers, or aliens who sojourned among them. (Lev. 16:29) The Day of Atonement sacrifice gathered together in one both Jews and Gentiles, and the one sacrifice picked out by the High Priest was to cover the sins of all. Caiaphas had proclaimed that Jesus was going to die in order that He might gather together into one all the children of God throughout the world. A student and lover of God's word must stand in wonder and in awe of the miracle of the Scriptures:

*“O, how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” Psalm 119:97*

### **Four Days - John 11:39**

Detail upon detail combines to underline the significant aspects of this sign. They foreshadow the time when Jesus will command all of those who are “asleep in Him” to come forth from the grave into life.

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In order for anyone to overcome the bondage of death brought about by sin, it was necessary for Jesus to die and be raised first. He is to be the “first fruits” of the new creation. Following Jesus’ death by crucifixion, He would be raised on the third day. It was on the third day of creation that, through God’s power, the first fruits of vegetation came out of the earth. (Genesis 1:11)

Now John carefully notes that Lazarus was in the tomb four days, signifying that resurrection into the Kingdom could only take place after Jesus’ resurrection. The number 4 in the Bible represents material completeness. It was on the fourth day of creation that God completed the work necessary to prepare the earth for living creatures. (Genesis 1:14-19)

Jesus Himself was raised after 3 days in the tomb. But Lazarus was raised on the fourth day of entombment. Three plus four equals seven. The number seven is a scripturally significant and perfect number. Six days were allocated for the creation and the seventh day for rest. Six thousand years are allocated for the Kingdoms of men, but the seventh millennial period will commence when Christ returns and establishes His Father’s Kingdom, the world and all creation will enter into the promised Sabbath rest.

### **By This Time He Stinketh - John 11:39**

By the fourth day in the tomb, corruption would have begun to set in. When Lazarus came forth from the tomb there was no sign of such corruption. No matter how long they had been dead, those who are resurrected by Christ will be restored to a non-corrupted state:

*“The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable  
...this perishable must put on the imperishable... death is  
swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:52-54*

### **Unbind Him - John 11:44**

When Lazarus came out of the tomb, he was blinded and bound with the grave wrappings. At Jesus’ command, he was freed of the trappings of death. and so the grave clothes were removed. Thus when Jesus raises His “friends” at the time of resurrection and the Kingdom, they will no longer be hampered by, nor subject to, the penalties of sickness and death because to sin.

### **Lazarus**

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The name Lazarus is used to identify only two individuals in the Bible. There is Lazarus in the Parable, and there is Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. Considering Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees in the Parable, in His statement "one raised from the dead," one might consider that Jesus was anticipating this resurrection when He presented the Parable. Lazarus is the only individual named in any of Jesus' Parables. The name Lazarus suggests a very strong and significant Bible echo. It is a derivative of the Hebrew name "Eleazar." Eleazar was the third son of Aaron, and became the High Priest designate, following the untimely deaths of his two elder brothers. He would, therefore, become the next High Priest following the death of Aaron.

In chapter 19 of the Book of Numbers, it is recorded that the Lord instituted the sacrifice of the Red Heifer to Moses and Aaron. They were to take an unblemished red heifer, having no defects, and give it to Eleazar the Priest. It was to be brought outside the camp and be slaughtered. Eleazar was given very specific duties to be performed in this sacrifice. This was the only sacrifice under the Law of Moses which continued effective long after the victim was dead.

The Law stated that death which came by sin brought with it defilement and that this defilement was communicable. When, therefore, a man touched a dead body, the Law placed him under a ceremonial defilement. By this he was separated from the things of God until he was sprinkled on the third day and again on the seventh day. He was to be sprinkled with the water of purification consisting of a solution of the ashes of the red heifer and running (i.e. living) water. The sacrifice of the red heifer was unique in that everything about it took place outside the camp. (Numbers 19:3, 9) Jesus was crucified outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem. The writer to the Hebrews associated Jesus with this sacrifice, first discharged by Eleazar when it was instituted:

*"For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the Holy Place by the High Priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate."  
Hebrews 13:11,12*

Even the name of the man raised from the dead in this sign regarding Lazarus, serves to remind us of Christ's own death and resurrection. The red heifer stood for Christ, who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:25)

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With this thought in mind, the Sanhedrin's action in planning Christ's death acquires an additional meaning. Unconsciously, they were playing their part in the ritual of the red heifer, for the Law stated that the only one in the ritual who was not "clean" to start with was the one who slew it! (Numbers 19:2) The High Priests in Jesus' time echoed the duties of Eleazar by delivering Jesus "outside the camp" to be sacrificed. In so doing, they remained unclean, even after the sacrifice in refusing to accept Him.

### **LESSONS FOR US**

We turn to Christ in our moments of suffering and trial. The fact that we realize our needs before Him turns His attention to us in love. But sometimes He seems to remain away, and we do not understand the message that He sends. The crisis comes and goes. Perhaps, we feel grief-stricken and alone. But, as the writer to the Hebrews states, "...I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Sometimes we do experience hardship, as Christ did, but even then, in faith, we live in the assurance that He is always with us. And one day we know that we will hear the summons, **"the Master has arrived, he is calling for you."** Before the open grave, He will show us that He is the resurrection and the life, and those that believe on Him, although they were dead, shall live. Then we shall see the completed pattern of our lives and we shall know that the sorrow and the suffering that we endured and those that He endured on our behalf, made up the fullness of His love toward us.

*"...May be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."  
Philippians 3:9, 10*

**Test Yourself**

1. Why did Jesus delay going to see Lazarus after learning that he was ill?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said: “*I am the resurrection and the life*”
3. What was significant about Lazarus being in the tomb for 4 days?

# **Jesus Christ: Part 23**

## **Final Passover**

Following the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus left Bethany and went into a city called Ephraim. He returned from there to Bethany in order to prepare for the Passover. When Jesus came back to the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Abib, six days before the Feast of the Passover, He had entered the last week of His mortal life. (John 12:1)

His raising of Lazarus had set off a violent reaction and His life was threatened. (John 11:53, 57) The policy was to kill Lazarus, too, and get rid of the evidence. (John 12:9-11). John records that on the day that Jesus returned to Bethany, a supper was prepared for him. At this point Mary took some very costly ointment, anointed Jesus with it, and wiped His feet with her hair. (John 12:2,3)

When Mary had completed this anointing, Jesus explained that it was in preparation for the “day of His burial.” This became the signal for Judas Iscariot’s betrayal. The stage was being set for Israel’s most dramatic Passover, and for the trial and crucifixion of Jesus (John 12:4-8). The next day, Jesus went into Jerusalem.

### **The Pinned Up Lamb**

According to the Passover ritual, a lamb without spot or blemish was to be selected on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Abib. (the first month of the year) It was to be penned up for inspection until the 14<sup>th</sup> day, when it was to be sacrificed. (Exodus 12:3-6) During that period it was to be examined for any flaws. This sacrificial lamb was a foreshadowing of Jesus who fulfilled the ultimate Passover sacrifice. (1 Cor. 5:7) He was killed on the day that the Passover Lamb was killed. (Compare John 19:14)

In His activities prior to this Passover, Jesus provided an unquestionable echo that would further identify Him with the Passover Lamb. He entered Jerusalem four days before the Passover, when the Lamb was set aside for inspection. During the four days, He was to be under continuous scrutiny by the Priests, who would do their utmost to find some fault in Him.

### **Your King is Coming to You - Matthew 21:1-5**

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Since Bethany was but a Sabbath Day's journey from Jerusalem, (compare John 11:18; Acts 1:12; Luke 24:50), it was determined as legally within the precincts of the city. Thus, when Jesus left Bethany on that fateful 10<sup>th</sup> day of Abib, He knew, that as God's Passover Lamb, He would not leave the area of Jerusalem again until He was raised from the dead. Jesus was well acquainted with what the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets had testified concerning Him. All of His actions from this point forward were carefully guided by the Word of God. Coming to Bethphage, He directed His Disciples to where they would find a donkey tethered, along with her colt. They were to untie them and bring them to Him. (Matt. 21:1-3)

The ass was a symbol of Israel. (Genesis 49:10,11; Hosea 8:8,9; Jeremiah 2:23,24) It was also a symbol of Kingly honour. (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 16:1,2; 1 Kings 1:33, 38) The Law stated that, whereas the first born of all other unclean animals had to be slain, that of an ass could be redeemed with a lamb. (Exodus 13:13) Now Israel was God's first born:

*"...Thus says the Lord, Israel is My son, My firstborn." Exodus 4:22*

In another sense, however, it was an "unbroken colt," i.e. untamed. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in this manner presented very vividly, the picture of Him as the Lamb whose sacrifice could save the first born of God. The colt represented the fact that these Jews were "untamed," or rebellious. The Jews were seeing a living reminder of Israel's promised redemption through the blood of the Lamb. But although the Jews were rebellious, God was announcing the fulfilment of His promise through the actions of His Son. From this point onward His promise would be extended to include not only those of Israel, but also all those from the other nations of the world who would accept and have faith in His Son.

Matthew also reminds us that those who witnessed this entry into Jerusalem were seeing a marvellous fulfilment of the prophecy by Zechariah regarding the arrival of the King:

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Zechariah 9:9*

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The King who would one day rule Israel and the world would first be a Lamb, whose death would uphold God's justice, so as to clear the way for their salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

### **The First Day in Jerusalem - Matthew 21:6-11**

By now a large multitude of people in a great state of excitement, saw Jesus riding towards Jerusalem. Some threw down their garments in the roadway before Him. Others laid down palm leaves. In this same manner, today, as we lay down the red carpet for important visitors, they laid these down as spontaneous expressions of goodwill. They were acknowledging that a King was entering His domain. It was Passover, and Psalm 118 was on everyone's lips. This Psalm was one of jubilant thanksgiving and was sung by worshippers in procession to the Temple. The crowd expressed these sentiments as they cried out:

*"...Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" Matthew 21:9*

They were acknowledging that Jesus was the Son of David and asking Him to save them now (Hosanna), claiming that He was indeed, the One who comes in the name of the Lord as described in Psalm 118. However, the Jewish authorities were horrified; to them it appeared as if the whole world had gone after Jesus. (John 12:19) There were some Pharisees in the crowd, and in an effort to restore order they asked Jesus to rebuke His Disciples. He answered that if these people were to become quiet, the very stones would immediately cry out acknowledging His arrival. (Luke 19:39,40) There is a significant meaning in Jesus' statement. If Israel refused to acknowledge and praise Him, Gentiles (whom Jews considered lifeless as stones), would acclaim Him in praise and honour.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see Paul and Barnabas echoing this same sentiment when the people of Israel began to contradict their preaching. (Acts 13:44-47) As they attempted to silence Paul and Barnabas at that time, the Gentiles who were listening broke into praise:

*"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Acts 13:48*

As this procession accompanying Jesus turned the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, a large part of the Holy City came suddenly into view. The Lord paused, and with eyes

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filled with emotion, surveyed the place which had no use for Him. Then Jesus wept, openly lamenting the sad fate which He knew Jerusalem had stored up for herself. The present scene faded and He saw forty years into the future. This was a city that would be surrounded by a Roman army, and which would be destroyed along with the people. Their rejection of Him in a few days would blind them to the possibility of peace which Jesus presented. (Luke 19:41-46) But now the procession moved on again. The roaring crowds swept down the slopes of Olivet, crossed the waters of the brook Kidron, and entered through the gate into the city.

In the narrow streets, the confusion would become chaotic, and the shouting inarticulate. We can picture the inhabitants of the city rushing to their doors, climbing on their roof tops, and asking “who is this?” The multitude flung back the answer proudly: “...**This is the Prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.**” Matthew tells us that all the city was moved. (Matthew 21:10,11)

### **The Second Day - Mark 11:11-19; Matthew 21:12-19**

Each day now brought fresh evidence of the breach between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Before His encounter with the Priests began on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, He indicated the moral barrenness of the nation by cursing a barren fig tree. (Mark 11:12-14) The fig tree represented Israel. (Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7, 12; Jeremiah 24:2) Jesus had come seeking “fruit” on it. There was none. The Israel fig tree would, therefore, be cursed and smitten. The Mosaic order of things, the Priesthood would vanish and the observance of the Law of Moses would cease to function as a national way of life. (Compare Luke 21:21-31) Immediately following the cursing of this tree, Jesus confronted one clear evidence of the barrenness of these people. The Temple was profaned by businessmen whose commerce corrupted God’s worship. Thus as He had done once before, Jesus again boldly cleansed the Temple. (Mark 11:15, 16; Matthew 21:12, 13) Jesus clearly foresaw the coming day when God’s Temple would be the centre of world wide worship:

**“Even those I will bring to My Holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer...My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”** Isaiah 56:7

But for the moment, through the activities of the Religious Leaders of that era, it fulfilled Jeremiah’s prediction, (7:11), and it had become “a den of robbers.” No one attempted to stand up to Jesus of Nazareth, that day, as He began to drive out these profiteers. In this mood, He, this King, who only yesterday had meekly come to the Holy City on an ass, was to be feared. In addition to the force of His own presence,

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the sympathies of many of the people were solidly behind Him. So, tables, market-stalls, and cash desks were unceremoniously overthrown, and their owners cleared out. This was being done at Passover, when because of the many visitors who converged upon the city, business was at its highest level.

But there was a difference between this and His previous cleansing of the Temple for Jesus introduced a new development. Those who were buying with an intention to sacrifice were also turned out of the Temple area along with the sellers. (Mark 11:15) It was Christ's open declaration that the time for the abolition of Mosaic sacrifices was at hand. The final sacrifice was to be made on this Passover. Jesus had not driven out the buyers on the earlier occasion because their sacrifices were still required. However, now the time had come to assert the truth of Malachi 1:10,11: ***"...I am not pleased with you, says the Lord of Hosts, nor will I accept an offering from you...My name will be great among the nations..., says the Lord of Hosts."***

For a brief moment, the fickle multitude was with Jesus and He enjoyed great popularity albeit but for a brief period. The people followed their Lord and Messiah into the Temple, and were healed, the Temple resounding with their cries of gratitude. The Priests however were indignant. They appealed to Him: "Do you hear what these people are saying?" (Matthew 21:16) Jesus' answer was devastating: ***"...Yes; have you never read, out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes thou hast prepared praise for thyself?" Matthew 21:16***

This quotation was taken from verse 2 of Psalm 8. It is the echo from this Psalm that would so devastate these Priests. It commemorated David's victory over Goliath, which was a foreshadow of Christ's victory over sin. In associating this Psalm with the Priests' question to Him, Jesus would provide them with an echo that would represent an accusation against them. These Priests were not only robbers of the people, (den of robbers), but Jesus was inferring that they were aligning themselves with the Philistine Goliath and would as surely be destroyed. Thus we can maybe imagine the anger of His opponents that evening, as the Lord once more retired to Bethany. (Mark 11:18, 19; Matthew 21:17)

### **The Third Day - Matt:21:20 through chap. 22; - Mark 11:20 through chap.12**

The third day dawned. Jesus and His Disciples returned to the city. On the way the disciples noted that the cursed fig tree had withered away. This symbol of impending judgment on Israel caused wonderment among the Disciples. But it became the means of Jesus instructing them in the method whereby they themselves (by

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exercising faith in God, prayer and forgiveness of others) could escape a similar judgment. (Mark 11:20-26; Matthew 21:20-22)

No sooner did He come to the Temple than His enemies were ready for Him. It was evident that they had agreed to challenge Him openly and forcibly. (Mark 11:27) So they joined in asking Him a question; the first of five important questions that were asked that day: ***By what authority are you doing these things?*** It was reminiscent of the question asked of Moses 1,500 years before: “...***Who made you a prince or a judge over us?***” Exodus 2:14 In the presence of the people, these leaders formally and repeatedly demanded an explanation regarding Jesus’ authority. It was a strong opening to their attacks that day. After cleansing the Temple at the outset of His ministry, the question had been, “what sign do you show to us, seeing that You do these things?” (John 2:18)

For three years the Messiah had given them abundant signs of His authority. But they had been wilfully blind. Now they did not ask for signs, but authority. A Rabbi was not entitled to teach without the consent of the Sanhedrin. There was a form of ordination by which a teacher, having first been steeped in the tradition of the elders, was recruited into the service of Temple and Synagogue as a Scribe and Rabbi. No such consent had been obtained by Christ, yet not only had He taught openly in the Temple, He had criticised its ministers and their practice within the Temple.

So in an attempt to embarrass and even condemn Him before the crowd, they wanted to know whether He had either civil or ecclesiastical sanction for this high-handed action. How could He behave in this manner in the Temple of God, without explicit authority from God? These evil men sought to catch Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If He asserted a royal right as King for His actions they could immediately hand Him over to Pilate for treason. If He disclaimed royal privilege, He would find Himself discredited among His nationalistic followers. But Jesus immediately saw what they were attempting. The charges which were actually to be made at His trial, were already crystallising; blasphemy, for assuming Divine Right, and for insurrection, for taking the Law into His own hands, rebelling against Rome.

Jesus met their question with another, promising to answer theirs when they answered His. Yet His question was in effect both an answer to theirs, and an exposure of their hypocritical motives. This question told them immediately that He saw through their tactics. In itself, it would be enough to expose them. He simply asked: ***“The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men...?”*** Matthew 21:25

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They were caught. If they said, “of heaven,” He would then say that, since John endorsed Him, “why are you not supporting Me instead of opposing Me?” But if they said, “of men,” they would have to contend with the people, for no one (except them) ever doubted John’s qualifications. To acknowledge John was to acknowledge Christ. Obviously they were not prepared to do this. Yet to condemn the ministry of John was equally impossible in view of the unshakable conviction of the people concerning him. Their only escape lay in a confession of their ignorance, emphasising the completeness of their defeat:

*“...We do not know...” Matthew 21:27*

But Jesus did not allow them time to regain their composure. Immediately, by means of three Parables, He taught the injustice of their position, and the judgment that would eventually befall them:

### **The Two Sons - Matthew 21:28-32**

A man having two sons asked the first one to go and work in his vineyard. This son refused, but later he repented and went. When the second son was so instructed, he promised willingly, but did not go. It was a simple story and there was only one answer to the question Jesus put to His accusers, “which of the two did the will of his father?” They were forced to acknowledge that it was the one who repented of his decision and obeyed his father’s request. Out of their own mouths they were convicted for they were the ones who professed to obey the Father and followed their own will and interests. The sinners who crowded to Jesus repented and desired to follow the will of His Father. Jesus left them know doubt and told them bluntly:

*“...Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you.”*

To be so exposed and condemned by Jesus in front of those whom they looked upon as sinners would certainly have intensified their hatred of the Lord. Yet Jesus spoke only the truth. The Jews were divided into those who sought righteousness by the Law and those who completely ignored the commands of God. When true righteousness was revealed in the person of Christ, it was the moral and spiritual outcasts who recognised and received it. The ministers of ceremonial righteousness had found so much personal satisfaction in the dignity and power which their office brought, that they rejected the righteousness which is by faith.

### **The Wicked Husbandmen - Matthew 21:33-46**

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In this second Parable Jesus confronted His enemies with the fact of their conspiracy against His life. In the Parable of the wicked husbandmen, He showed them their coming rejection of Him, as viewed from the purpose of God. He came as the Son of God, in direct line with the Prophets sent by His Father to His people down the centuries. He was seeking the legitimate fruits of His Father's vineyard. In keeping with the character of the faithless vine keepers in the Parable, these leaders, as keepers of God's vineyard, refused to reverence the Son.

As long as they could pay lip service to God, and enjoy the fruits of the vineyard themselves, they were content. Any attempt to change these favourable conditions, must be effectively subdued. Jesus had come with formidable claims. He had done many wonderful works. But He was contesting their power and authority, so He must go. The power of Christ's teaching was so impressive that they found themselves reluctantly, yet spontaneously, answering the question He put to them:

*“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine growers?” Matthew 21:40*

They responded that he would destroy these wicked men, and let out his vineyard to other husbandmen who would render him the fruits of their seasons. Without hesitation, Jesus brought home the indictment with deadly precision, leaving them condemned by their own judgment:

*“Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it.”  
Matthew 21:43*

There was no doubt in the minds of these Chief Priests and Pharisees that Jesus was talking about them. Unlike other Parables, these were not mysteries to them that needed explaining. They sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the people.

Nevertheless, it was open warfare now. There could be no retreat. He was exposing them before all the people, laying bare the poverty of spirit and the iniquity that lay beneath their bright robes and pious practices.

Knowing their hatred and knowing their intentions, Jesus continued relentlessly.

**The Marriage of the King's Son - Matthew 22:1-14**

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A King made a great marriage feast for his son and sent his servants to call the guests. Those who had been invited made light of it and would not come to the feast. Not only did they insult the King by casting his favours back in his face, but they mistreated those whom he had sent to remind them of their privilege. As Jesus speaks, the image quickly becomes identifiable as Jerusalem. The people of this city would reject their invitation to the marriage feast of the Lamb, and as a result the judgment of God would be carried out by the armies of Rome, and the city and its people would be destroyed.

But the King's son will have his wedding. Other guests will sit at the table and enjoy the feast. The servants went into the highways to bid them come. Their poverty, their toil stained clothes, their ignorance of courtly ways did not matter. They will be washed and the King will furnish them with robes. This gracious invitation must not be lightly esteemed. One who refuses to wear the wedding garment will enjoy neither the richness of the banquet nor the fellowship of the King's son, but will be cast into outer darkness.

The responsibility of accepting the invitation to this great wedding must be taken seriously, and those wishing to attend must don robes of righteousness. Some who receive the invitation and wish to go, but refuse to accept the responsibility involved in attending, will be cast out. Jesus leaves no doubt concerning this meaning when He concludes the Parable with the simple statement: **"For many are called, but few are chosen"**

### **Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar or not?**

The first phase of the battle had been lost by the Pharisees. The attempt to break Christ's hold over the people had proved to be a failure. It had ended in their own disgrace. They withdrew to further consider how they might trap Him. As a result, another question was subsequently presented to Jesus. It was presented by the pro-government Herodians, in collusion with the Pharisees. (Mark 12:13) This strange alliance demonstrated the desperation of these men. Ordinarily the pro-nationalist Pharisees would have been directly opposed to the Herodians. The question, founded in hypocrisy, was one of politics. Either a "yes" or "no" answer would be wrong. Jesus answered neither.

Instead, taking a coin with Caesar's image on it, He pointed out that those demands of Caesar which are valid should not be withheld from him. Equally as well, the just demands of God cannot be withheld. Caesar may claim his due, but judgment belongs to God. (Matthew 22:15-22)

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## Whose wife shall she be? Matthew 22:23-33

The other two groups having failed, the Sadducees now appeared with a question. They accepted only Moses as authentic, and believed that “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” They rejected the ideas of resurrection and any life hereafter, and so therefore, also rejected the doctrine of coming judgment. The doctrinal problem that they put to Jesus, regarding the resurrected status of a woman married to seven husbands, was an attempt at ridicule. Jesus rebutted the question easily using their own standards of measurement. Because the Sadducees only accepted the authority of the Pentateuch, Jesus confined His answer to the first two books of Scripture.

They would accept the fact declared to Moses at the burning bush which was expressed in the Book of Exodus 3:6.

*“I am the God of Abraham...Isaac...Jacob...” Matthew 22:32*

If it was true, on the one hand, that these forefathers were dead, and then on the other hand, that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, the only alternative is that they must yet considered live, that is by resurrection. Thus, the doctrine of coming judgment remained valid. The Sadducees were men of action rather than words. They had nothing more to say, and left Him with the astonished multitudes around Him.

## Which is the Greatest Commandment? - Matthew 22:34-40

The Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians, had been unsuccessful in assailing Jesus on a doctrinal basis. In their minds, only one issue remained on which He might conceivably lose ground and was upon a moral issue. The question was presented through one of the Scribes who were natural allies of the Pharisees. The question they asked was one of frequent debate among the Rabbis, and there was not a unity of opinion. Any answer that He gave, therefore, would expect Him to lose at least some support.

The answer came quickly providing a great echo from the original presentation of the commandments. Moses had descended from the Mount with two tablets of stone written with “the finger of God.” On one tablet were written five commandments dealing with God, which could be summed up as:

*“...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” Matthew 22:37*

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This was the first and the great commandment and as such was a statement delivered directly by God to Moses. (Deut. 6:5) The other tablet brought down by Moses had on it five commandments dealing with one's neighbour. These could be summed as:

*"...You shall love your neighbour as yourself" Matthew 22:39*

Once again Jesus had quoted a commandment given directly by God to Moses. (Lev. 19:18) On these two commandments hung all the Law and the Prophets. Love such as this transcended sacrificial offerings and anyone recognising it was not far from the Kingdom of God.

### **What do you think about the Christ, whose Son is He? Matt. 22:41-46**

All of Jesus' enemies were now silenced. He had run out of tempters. (Mark 12:34) Up until now, He had been answering their questions. He now decided to ask one Himself. Among the Hebrews, a mere son of the flesh could not be addressed as "Lord" by his father. Yet David had called his "son" his "Lord." In phrasing His question, Jesus quoted from the 1<sup>st</sup> verse of Psalm 110. As Matthew records it:

*"The Lord said to My Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet." Matthew 22:44*

How could David refer to his son in this manner? The answer was clear, the Lord He was referring to was the Son of God. Jesus did not go on to declare Himself in this manner and His accusers refused to supply the answer.

### **The Scribes and Pharisees**

Jesus then addressed the multitude presenting to them a searing denouncement of the Scribes and Pharisees. These are presented as the eight Woes, recorded in Matthew, chapter 23. They contrast in every detail the eight Beatitudes recorded in Matthew 5:1-12.

The week had begun with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Now as He contemplated the evil response of the nation's spiritual guides, He pronounced upon them the desolation that became fact in A.D. 70. They had not recognised Him as the Lamb of God, but in God's mercy, the time would come when they would:

*"For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Matthew 23:39*

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Present day Israel awaits that great day and we pray that it will come soon.

### **LESSON FOR US**

Continually throughout the three days that we have just examined, Jesus provided evidence that Israel, God's first born, was rejected because the people did not produce the fruits of redemption. The Religious Leaders placed their salvation in the formality of ritual but produced only hypocrisy and self-righteousness. This inevitably led to the rejection on the Son of God. Their daily lives did not reflect enlightenment or true worship of God.

The multitudes were swept up in the emotions of the moment, acclaiming Jesus and looking to an immediate kingship and casting off of the Roman yoke upon their nation. This emotion was based on a desire to fulfil their own interests to gain freedom from their oppressors. They had no regard for Jesus as the Passover Lamb who would die for their sins and bring about a greater freedom from the oppression of sin. As a result their shallow faith in Him failed and they joined in His rejection and crucifixion several days later.

True followers of Christ must take their lessons from this and search their own hearts for a true understanding of Him and His teachings. Such followers seek and proclaim Him in repentance, realising that they are sinners and recognising that salvation is only through Him. They search for the fruits of their lives testifying to the fact that they are not like the barren fig tree. Thus our attitude towards the Lord Jesus Christ and His Father will be reflected in what we do, not just in what we say. At the end of each day we can examine our activities to determine whether or not we have evidenced the spirit of Christ and reflected it for His glory. We might ask ourselves and honestly answer such questions as:

- Have I manifested the true fruitfulness of faith.
- Have I been showing love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith and temperance?
- Have I lost my temper, have I been irritable, have I upset people?
- Have I been the cause of or engaged in strife or have I taken with me the peace of Christ and of God?

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Israel did not produce the true fruitfulness of worship. Regardless of their claims, they rejected the Son of God, and so they were rejected.

*“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, So that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11*

## Test Yourself

1. Briefly discuss the significance of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a ‘*colt, the foal of a donkey*’
2. How did Jesus answer the question of the religious leaders when they said: ‘*By what authority are you doing these things?*’
3. What did Jesus say were the two greatest commandments?