

Palm Sunday

Nisan 10

The King Comes on a Donkey — The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

"His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him."

JOHN 12:16

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Work through each section in order, or choose sections that fit your study time. Questions marked *For Groups* work best with discussion. Write spaces are for personal notes. The guide pairs directly with the Palm Sunday devotional post.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

ZECHARIAH 9:9 · WRITTEN C. 520 BC · FULFILLED NISAN 10

Fill in the blanks from memory:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of _____ ! Shout aloud, O daughter of _____ ! Behold, your _____ is coming to you; righteous and having _____ is he, humble and mounted on a _____, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Setting the Stage

Palm Sunday is the most familiar day of Holy Week — and perhaps the most misread. We often picture it as a joyful celebration, a triumphant moment before the tragedy of Good Friday. But read carefully and something more complex emerges: a crowd with urgent, desperate hope; a king who weeps in the middle of his own procession; and a calendar alignment that had been planned for centuries.

This study guide will help you slow down and enter the world of Nisan 10 — to feel what those in the crowd felt, to notice what the Gospel writers want you to see, and to ask what this day demands of you now.

OPENING REFLECTION — BEFORE READING FURTHER

When you picture Palm Sunday, what do you see? What emotions does the scene carry for you? Write your instinctive impressions before working through the study.

YOUR THOUGHTS

The Four Gospel Accounts

Read all four accounts before answering any questions. Each Gospel writer notices different details — together they give you a fuller picture than any one account alone.

GOSPEL	PASSAGE	UNIQUE DETAIL TO NOTICE
MATTHEW	Matthew 21:1–11	Distinguishes "the crowds" from "the city" (v.10–11) — two different groups asking two different questions
MARK	Mark 11:1–11	Ends with Jesus simply looking around the Temple and leaving quietly (v.11) — the only Gospel to include this moment
LUKE	Luke 19:28–44	Records Jesus weeping over Jerusalem mid-procession (v.41–44) — the emotional heart of the day, omitted in other accounts
JOHN	John 12:12–19	Notes the disciples did not understand at the time (v.16); records the Pharisees' panicked comment, "the world has gone after him" (v.19)

WHAT STANDS OUT TO YOU ACROSS ALL FOUR ACCOUNTS?

Words That Unlock the Text

Understanding the original Greek and Hebrew words behind these familiar scenes changes how they read. Take time with each one.

הוֹשִׁי'א נָא

HOSHI'A NA · HEBREW

Literal meaning: "Save now!" or "Save, please!" — an urgent cry for immediate deliverance. Taken from Psalm 118:25, a pilgrimage psalm sung as worshippers approached the Temple.

This was not a praise song — it was a desperate prayer. The crowd was not celebrating salvation already received; they were crying out for it. "Hosanna" carries both worship and desperation in the same breath.

ἐκλαίω

EKLAIEN · GREEK

Literal meaning: To weep audibly, to sob aloud. Luke uses this word for Jesus' weeping in Luke 19:41. It is the same word used for Lazarus's mourners in John 11:33.

This was not a quiet tear. Jesus sobbed — loudly, visibly — in the middle of his own royal procession. The word leaves no room for a dignified, composed grief. He wailed over Jerusalem.

ἐσεισθη

ESEISTHĒ · GREEK

Literal meaning: Was shaken, as in an earthquake (Matthew 21:10). Matthew uses the same root word for the earthquake at Jesus' death (27:51) and resurrection (28:2).

Matthew is connecting Palm Sunday to Good Friday and Easter through this word. The city's reaction to the entry anticipates the earth's reaction to the cross and the empty tomb — everything is being shaken.

τετέλεσται

TETELESTAI · GREEK

Literal meaning: "It is finished" or "paid in full." A commercial term stamped on receipts in the ancient world to mark a debt as completely settled (John 19:30).

Though spoken at the cross, this word is the destination Palm Sunday is heading toward. The lamb selected on Nisan 10 would be the one who said tetelestai on Nisan 14. Palm Sunday is the beginning of this sentence.

πῶλον

POLON · GREEK

Literal meaning: A young animal, specifically a colt or foal that has not yet been ridden (Mark 11:2). Used in LXX (Greek OT) for Zechariah 9:9's prophecy.

An unridden animal was required for sacred use in the Old Testament (Num. 19:2; 1 Sam. 6:7). By specifying a colt never ridden, Mark signals this is holy ground — a sacred act, not a political stunt.

εἰρήνη

EIRĒNĒ · GREEK

Literal meaning: Peace — completeness, wholeness, the restoration of right relationship. Luke records the crowd singing "Peace in heaven!" (19:38), not "Victory to our king!"

The crowd wanted a military Messiah. Jesus rode in on a donkey — the ancient symbol of a king arriving in peace, not war. He was offering eirēnē when they were demanding a revolution. He still does.

Written Centuries Before

Check each prophecy as you read both the original text and the Gospel fulfilment. Note the gap in years between the writing and the fulfilment.

- The king enters on a donkey.** Zechariah wrote that Israel's king would come "humble, mounted on a donkey" — not a conquering warhorse. Written around 520 BC, approximately 550 years before the Triumphal Entry. ZECH. 9:9
MATT. 21:5
JOHN 12:15
-
- Greeted with Psalm 118.** The specific psalm the crowd quoted — "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD" — is Psalm 118:26, a psalm that also speaks of the rejected cornerstone becoming the foundation. The crowd sang of rejection while welcoming someone. PS. 118:25–26
MATT. 21:9
MARK 11:9
-
- Nisan 10 — Lamb Selection Day.** Exodus 12:3 commanded the Passover lamb be selected on the 10th of Nisan — exactly four days before sacrifice. Jesus entered Jerusalem on Nisan 10. For four days he would be examined and found without fault, before dying on Nisan 14. EX. 12:3–6
JOHN 1:29
1 PET. 1:19
-
- The rejected cornerstone.** Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 both anticipate the suffering and rejection of the Servant-King. The same crowd quoting Psalm 118's cornerstone passage would, days later, call for his crucifixion — unknowingly acting out the full arc of the prophecy they were singing. PS. 118:22
ISA. 53:3
ACTS 4:11
-
- Weeping over Jerusalem.** Moses (Deut. 32) and the prophets repeatedly lament Israel's failure to receive God's covenant. Jesus's tears in Luke 19:41–44 echo Moses's farewell lament and Jeremiah's weeping — but with a specificity of prophecy: he names the coming Roman siege of AD 70. DEUT. 32:29
JER. 8:18–22
LUKE 19:43–44

WHICH FULFILMENT IS MOST STRIKING TO YOU, AND WHY?

Everyone Saw Something Different

The same event looked completely different depending on where you were standing. Read each perspective, then answer the question beneath it.

THE DISCIPLES

Swept up in excitement. Peter, James, and John likely shouted with the crowd. John later admits they didn't understand what was happening until after the resurrection.

When have you celebrated something about Jesus that you didn't actually understand yet?

THE PHARISEES

Panic dressed as outrage. Their real fear was Roman reprisal — not theological error. They had built a careful compromise with Rome that this procession threatened to destroy.

What "arrangements" with worldly power might cause you to resist what God is doing?

THE GALILEAN CROWD

Euphoric hope, catastrophically misaimed. They wanted a general, a liberator, a king who would drive out Rome. Jesus gave them a donkey and tears.

Where are you asking God for a warhorse when he is offering you peace?

JUDAS ISCARIOT

Possibly his last surge of hope — or deepening disillusionment. He would betray Jesus days later. Was Palm Sunday the moment his expectations finally shattered?

What happens in you when God refuses to be the Messiah you designed?

WHICH PERSPECTIVE DO YOU MOST IDENTIFY WITH ON PALM SUNDAY — AND WHY?

For Personal Reflection or Group Study

1

WORSHIP & LONGING

"Hosanna!" — Save now! — was both worship and urgent need in the same cry. What does it mean that the crowd's praise and their desperation were the same word?

Context: *Psalm 118:25 — the source of "Hosanna" — is a pilgrimage psalm sung approaching the Temple. It moves from desperate plea ("save now!") to triumphant arrival. The crowd was singing the whole arc of salvation history compressed into one phrase, without knowing it.*

PSALM 118:25-26 · LUKE 19:37-38 · PHILIPPIANS 4:6

YOUR RESPONSE

2

EXPECTATIONS OF GOD

The crowd wanted a conquering king on a warhorse. Jesus gave them a king on a donkey — the ancient symbol of peace. Where in your life are you demanding a warhorse when God is offering you a donkey?

Context: *In the ancient Near East, kings rode horses to war and donkeys in times of peace (see Solomon's coronation in 1 Kings 1:33). Jesus's choice of transport was a theological statement: the kingdom he brings is not won by force of arms. This was a direct contradiction of the crowd's Messianic expectations.*

ZECHARIAH 9:9-10 · MATTHEW 21:5 · JOHN 18:36

YOUR RESPONSE

3

Jesus wept loudly over Jerusalem in the middle of his own triumphal procession — because he could see what they couldn't. What does it mean to you that the one being celebrated was simultaneously mourning the people celebrating him?

Context: *Luke 19:41–44 is unique to Luke's Gospel. Jesus's weeping is not quiet — the Greek eklaien means audible sobbing. He prophesies the Roman siege of AD 70 in chilling detail: "your enemies will hem you in on every side... not leave one stone upon another." Within 40 years, the historian Josephus would describe exactly this happening.*

LUKE 19:41–44 · MATTHEW 23:37 · JEREMIAH 9:1

YOUR RESPONSE

4

UNDERSTANDING IN HINDSIGHT

John says the disciples "did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, they remembered." Think of a time when you only understood what God was doing after it was over. What does that teach you about faith in the middle?

Context: *This is one of the most honest statements in the Gospels. John, writing decades after the events, is admitting that he and the other disciples completely missed the significance of what was happening in real time. Understanding came only after the resurrection gave them the interpretive key to read everything backwards. This is the normal pattern of faith.*

JOHN 12:16 · ROMANS 8:28 · 1 CORINTHIANS 13:12

YOUR RESPONSE

5

Every household in Israel selected their Passover lamb on Nisan 10 — the exact day Jesus entered Jerusalem. For four days the lamb lived in the home, known and examined, before the sacrifice. What does this image of the known, close, examined lamb mean to you as a picture of what Jesus was doing?

Context: *Exodus 12:3–6 commands: "on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb... you shall keep it until the fourteenth day... then the whole assembly shall kill their lambs at twilight." Jesus entered Jerusalem on Nisan 10. He was examined by the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Herod, and Pilate over the next four days. All found no fault. He died on Nisan 14 at 3 PM — the hour of the Temple sacrifice.*

EXODUS 12:3–6 · JOHN 1:29 · 1 PETER 1:19–20

YOUR RESPONSE

6

INSTITUTIONAL FEAR · FOR GROUPS

The Pharisees' primary fear was not theological but institutional — they feared losing their arrangement with Rome and their position of power. How does institutional self-preservation shape the way communities resist movements of God today?

Context: *John 11:47–48 is remarkably transparent about the Sanhedrin's motivation: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Their concern is primarily political — "our place" (the Temple establishment) and "our nation" (their civic power). This is not cynicism on John's part — it is a straight report of what they said in council.*

JOHN 11:47–53 · ACTS 5:38–39 · MATTHEW 21:45–46

YOUR RESPONSE

Mark alone records that at the end of Palm Sunday, Jesus entered the Temple, "looked around at everything," and quietly left (Mark 11:11). What do you make of this deliberate, unhurried observation — before the dramatic cleansing he would perform the next morning?

Context: The Greek word *periblepsámenos* — "having looked around" — appears several times in Mark for Jesus's deliberate, penetrating gaze (e.g. 3:5, 3:34, 10:23). It is never a casual glance. Mark is showing a man who surveys with full awareness before he acts. The Temple cleansing on Monday was not impulsive — it was considered, deliberate, and purposeful.

MARK 11:11 · MARK 3:5, 3:34 · ISAIAH 50:7

YOUR RESPONSE

From the Text to Your Life

APPLICATION 1 — THE SHAPE OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS

The crowd had constructed a vision of what the Messiah should do — and they would be devastated when he didn't do it. Write down one area of your life where you have a specific expectation of what God should do. Hold it up against Zechariah 9:9: is your expectation a warhorse or a donkey?

YOUR EXPECTATION

APPLICATION 2 — WHAT JESUS SEES IN YOU

Jesus wept over Jerusalem — not in anger or judgment, but in grief, because he could see what they couldn't. If Jesus looked at your life with the same penetrating tenderness he had for Jerusalem, what do you think he would weep over — not to condemn you, but because he loves you and can see what you cannot yet see about yourself?

HONEST REFLECTION

APPLICATION 3 — YOUR NISAN 10 MOMENT

The Passover household selected their lamb on Nisan 10 — brought it home, knew it, lived with it. Jesus presented himself to Jerusalem on exactly this day. In what sense have you "selected" and chosen to know Christ — not as an abstract doctrine but as a living presence in your daily life? What would it look like to live this week as if he were truly present in your home, as the Passover lamb was?

HOW YOU WILL LIVE THIS DIFFERENTLY THIS WEEK

STEP 7 — GUIDED PRAYER

Praying Through Palm Sunday

A

ADORATION — THE KING WHO COMES

Begin by simply worshipping Jesus as king — not the king you have constructed in your expectations, but the king who chose a donkey. Thank him for choosing peace over power, presence over performance. Use the crowd's words as your own: *Hosanna — save now — blessed is he who comes.*

C

CONFESSION — THE EXPECTATIONS I BROUGHT

The crowd's failure was not lack of devotion — it was projecting their own agenda onto Jesus. Confess the specific ways you have wanted God to serve your vision of your life rather than surrendering to his. Be specific. The Pharisees' problem was institutional self-protection; what is yours?

Sit with the Nisan 10 image: the lamb brought into the household, present, known, examined, then offered. Give thanks that God did not save you with an anonymous sacrifice — but with someone who was present, knowable, fully human, who looked around at everything (Mark 11:11) and chose to stay.

SUPPLICATION — WHAT YOU CANNOT YET SEE

Jesus wept because he could see what the crowd could not — both the coming destruction and the salvation they were missing. Pray honestly about what you cannot yet see in your own life: the patterns Jesus sees clearly, the grace you have not yet received, the peace you have been refusing. Ask him to give you eyes to see what he sees — even if it requires grief before the joy.

Resources for Further Study

These resources are arranged from most accessible to most scholarly. Start where you are comfortable.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Josephus — Jewish Wars & Antiquities

The first-century Jewish historian's account of Passover crowds, the Temple, Pilate's character, and the Roman siege of AD 70 — the fulfilment of Jesus's tears on Palm Sunday. Available free online.

CLASSIC STUDY

Alfred Edersheim — The Temple (1874)

The most detailed account of Temple ritual and Passover procedures available to the non-specialist. Particularly valuable on the Passover lamb selection and the timing of the Nisan 14 sacrifice.

SCHOLARLY

N.T. Wright — Jesus and the Victory of God

The definitive scholarly treatment of Jesus's Messianic self-understanding and his Temple action. Chapter 11 covers the Triumphal Entry in depth, placing it within first-century Jewish prophetic symbolism.

COMMENTARY

Craig Keener — Commentary on Matthew

Extraordinarily thorough on the cultural background of Matthew 21. Covers crowd dynamics, the two-crowd distinction, the significance of the colt, and the Hosanna acclamation in its Psalm 118 context.

ACCESSIBLE

Ray Vander Laan — That the World May Know

Video and study resources filmed on location in Israel. Episodes on the Passover, the Temple Mount, and Holy Week provide vivid cultural and archaeological context accessible to all levels of reader.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

Eilat Mazar — Ophel Excavations

Reports from the excavations south of the Temple Mount, including the Stepped Street pilgrims used to ascend to the Temple and Herodian stone vessels. Readable summaries available through the Biblical Archaeology Society.

WHAT FURTHER QUESTION DO YOU MOST WANT TO EXPLORE AFTER THIS STUDY?

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes."

Nisan 11 · Monday — The Cleansing of the Temple