

# Matthew 21:8-11

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*Jesus simultaneously enters the city of Jerusalem triumphantly as the Messiah and as the Passover Lamb. Crowds of people shout “Hosanna” and Messianic lines from Psalm 118. His entrance causes a stir among those who are in the city and attracts their curiosity about who He is.*

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 11:8-11, Luke 19:37-44, and John 12:12-19.

The first mention of *Jesus*'s name in the book of Matthew occurs when the heavenly messenger spoke to Mary's husband, Joseph, telling him not to be afraid to take her as his wife because the Child inside her was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

(Matthew 1:21)

Two particularly Jewish ways that *Jesus* would “save His people from their sins” was as their

1. Messiah
2. and as their Passover Lamb.

When *Jesus entered* into *Jerusalem* He came as the Messiah and as God's Passover Lamb.

The Messiah was God's promised leader to the children of Israel. God had promised to send to Israel a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). This prophet would speak God's words directly to the people. God had also promised King *David* that he would have a descendant who would sit upon his throne forever (2 Samuel 8:12-13). *Jesus* fulfilled both of these prophecies.

Messianic hopes were bursting in the hearts of first century Jews. They believed that God's Messiah would overthrow their national yoke of political servitude to Rome, and restore the Kingdom of Israel to glory. And they were fervently looking for God's Messiah (John 1:19-28).

*Jesus* was that Messiah. However, God had a deliverance in mind of a much greater scope than what the Jews apparently expected; *Jesus* came to deliver the entire world from sin (Colossians 1:24-27).

Over the course of His teachings and miracles, many had begun to suspect *Jesus* as the possible Messiah (Matthew 11:9). Some even began to identify *Jesus* as the Messiah and address Him through the Messianic moniker, *Son of David* (Matthew 20:30). God revealed to Peter that *Jesus* was the Messiah and *Jesus* acknowledged this privately to His disciples (Matthew 16:16-17).

Matthew and the other Gospel writers describe *Jesus's* entry into *Jerusalem* as the coming of Messiah. The moment *Jesus* entered Jerusalem was the Messianic moment they and their forefathers had long been waiting for. And *most of the crowds* entering *the city* with *Him* seemed to glimpse at least something Messianic about this event. But whether they did or not, the truth was that the Messiah was now entering *Jerusalem* from the east by way of the Mount of Olives, humbly riding on the colt of a donkey, just as prophesied by Zechariah 9:9. *Jesus* was entering *the city*, offering Himself to the people of *Jerusalem* as their King and Messiah.

The disciples had placed their coats over the donkey and were leading the way (Mark 11:9). Luke wrote, "As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole *crowd* of disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen" (Luke 19:37). John reported that the miracle foremost in *most everyone's* minds was *Jesus's* recent miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead (John 12:17-18).

The timing of *Jesus's* entrance was near the Jewish celebration of the Passover (John 12:1, Matthew 26:2). *Jesus* came into the city as both Messiah and as the Passover lamb. As *Jesus* entered *Jerusalem* with His disciples, their group was among many other groups crowding into *the city* to celebrate the holy day.

The traveling *crowds* entering Jerusalem were enormous. A generation later, the historian Josephus, reported that 256,000 Passover lambs were slaughtered *in Jerusalem*, and that each lamb was sacrificed on behalf of ten to twenty people per lamb (Josephus, "The Wars of the Jews" Book VI. 9.3) When he adds those who did not participate in the sacrifice, because of uncleanness, Josephus calculated that the total population of *the city* and the surrounding area swelled to "not less than three million" at this time of year (Josephus, "The Wars of the Jews" Book 2. 280). The flow of traffic entering *Jerusalem* at this time would have been considerable.

*The crowds* of Passover travelers seemed to take notice of what the disciples were shouting and began to participate in the parade. Many among *the crowd* likely had previously seen or heard of *Jesus*, His wonders, and His teachings. Matthew reported that *most of this crowd* followed the disciples' example and began *to spread their coats in the road* before *Jesus*. The people were honoring *Jesus* so that even the colt *He* road upon would not have to tread *the dusty road*. They preferred that *their coats* would become dirty and trampled than the hooves of *Jesus's* colt take another step in the undignified dust. This was a remarkable display of honor. *Others were cutting down branches from the trees and spreading them over the road*. *Most everyone* was offering whatever they could to honor *Jesus*.

The Bible does not specify what type of *branches the crowds were cutting and spreading over the road*. But it is reasonable to speculate that they were palm *branches* because palm trees were common in that part of Judea, and their *branches* are relatively easy to cut or pluck. Palm branches were a symbol of Jewish independence and nationalism. (Palm branches were depicted on the currency when Judea was last free.) This event occurred on a Sunday, five days before the national celebration of Passover (John 12:1; 12:12); Passover began at sunset on Friday. That is why this day is traditionally known as "Palm Sunday."

Although *Jesus's* triumphant entry into Jerusalem occurs just prior to Passover (in the Spring), it has imagery of the *Feast of Booths (a Fall Festival)* with *the crowds waving palm branches and rejoicing*, welcoming their King into *Jerusalem*. The Feast of Booths is sometimes called the Feast of Tabernacles. This holy celebration occurs five days after the Day of Atonement. The Feast of Booths actively memorializes the wilderness wandering of the children of Israel, but it also anticipates the time of rejoicing when Christ's kingdom is fully established on earth. The Feast of Booths is prescribed in Leviticus 23:33-44.

God described the four types of *branches* that shall be used during this festival.

“Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves [1] the foliage of beautiful trees, [2] palm branches and [3] boughs of leafy trees and [4] willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.”  
(Leviticus 23:40)

Jews today bind these four species of plants together into what is called a “Lulav and Etrog.” There is much symbolism regarding the four species, but the most recurring theme is that each of the four species represents a letter of God's divine name spelled in transliterated Hebrew “YHWH.” When the four species are bound as one it represents the unification of God's name, something Jews pray for three times a day.

The reason *the crowds were honoring Him and spreading palm branches* is because they believed *Jesus* to be their Messiah. And their voices matched their actions.

*As the crowds going ahead in front of Him and the crowds pressing up to Him and the crowds who followed behind Him did these things, they were boldly shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”*

This was an explicitly Messianic proclamation. Unlike earlier times in His ministry (Mark 1:43; Mark 5:43; Mark 7:36; Mark 8:30), *Jesus*, the Messiah, did not attempt to quiet them. *He* permitted *the crowds* to publicly acknowledge His kingly identity.

*Hosanna* is a term rich in meaning. It is an English transliteration of the Greek word “hosanna.” The Greek term is a transliteration of a Hebrew expression that *the crowds were* cheering. *Hosanna* in the Hebrew language is not one word, but two. The first word is “yaw-shah.” “Yaw-shah” means “to save, to deliver.” The second word is “naw.” It is a particle of incitement. It is a way to emphasize a sense of desperation or urgency in a personal request. It is sometimes rendered “I pray,” “save now,” or “please.” Both words combine in the expression, *Hosanna*, to convey adoration, praise, and a desperate plea. The expression means “Oh, save us!” or “Praise to the Savior!” *Hosanna* is both a cry for rescue and a declaration of praise.

The expression *Hosanna* never appears in the Old Testament, but its sentiment is strongly felt in Psalm 118. The major themes of this psalm are political and spiritual deliverance. It is brimming with Messianic hope. Several of its lines are used in this chapter of Matthew (Psalm 118:22-23 and 118:26 are directly quoted on two separate occasions). Perhaps the most poignant portion of Psalm 118 for this occasion are verses 19-26.

“Open to me the gates of righteousness;  
I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the Lord.  
This is the gate of the Lord;  
The righteous will enter through it.  
I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me,  
And You have become my salvation.  
The stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the chief corner stone.  
This is the Lord’s doing;  
It is marvelous in our eyes.  
This is the day which the Lord has made;  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
O Lord, do save, we beseech You;  
O Lord, we beseech You, do send prosperity!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord;  
We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.”  
(Psalm 118:19-26)

The Jews who were praising *Jesus* had the words and sentiments of Psalm 118. It is likely that they had this Psalm in mind as they proclaimed *Jesus* as their Messiah.

A marvelous thing was taking place before their eyes (Psalm 118:23). *Jesus*, the righteous, miracle-performing rabbi, was entering the gates of the Lord’s *city* (Psalm 118:19-20). *He* was an answer to their prayers (Psalm 118:21). This wonder was worth celebrating (Psalm 118:24). *The crowds* implored *Jesus* to save them with their shouts of *Hosanna* (Psalm 118:25). It is worth pointing out that Psalm 118:25 is descriptive of what the Jews meant *when* they shouted *Hosanna*. And *the crowds* blessed *Jesus* for the deliverance *He* offered (Psalm 118:26). *The crowds* literally shouted the first line of Psalm 118:26 after they cried *Hosanna to the Son of David*.

The people also used the term *Son of David* in their shout *Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*. *Son of David* was a common term for the Messiah. It went back to the promise that *the Lord* made to King *David* through Nathan the prophet that his descendent would establish the throne of His kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:8-16). In saying *Hosanna to the Son of David*, *the crowds* were joyfully proclaiming *Jesus* as their Savior and *David*’s heir.

Their statement *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord* was a recognition that *Jesus* was God’s *blessed* and anointed. They believed *Jesus* to be the Messiah who was coming *in the name of the Lord*.

Luke, whose intended audience included Gentiles, recorded the *crowds* as shouting “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38). The crowd’s shouts as recorded by Luke were reminiscent of the heavenly host’s song of praise when they announced *Jesus*’s birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem (Luke 2:14).

Both expressions “*Hosanna in the highest!*” and “Blessed is the King” were *the crowds’* ecstatic recognition that this was the ultimate salvation that generations of their people had been longing for. At long last, their Messiah had come!

Matthew wrote that by the time *Jesus had entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred*. The procession had caught the attention of *all in the city*. Apparently, many were unaware of what was taking place. And the inhabitants of *Jerusalem* began asking one another, “*Who is this?*” *And the crowds* entering with the Messiah, were enthusiastically answering back, “*This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.*”

*Nazareth* was the town where *Jesus* grew up (Matthew 2:22-23). It was located about sixty five miles north of *Jerusalem* and few miles to the southwest of the Sea of *Galilee* where His ministry was functionally headquartered in the town of Capernaum. *Nazareth* was located in the province of *Galilee*. In Matthew 2:23, Matthew pointed out that *Jesus’s* upbringing in *Nazareth* was a fulfillment of Isaiah 11:1, “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.” The Hebrew word for “branch” is “netzer” and *Nazareth* means “place of the branch.”

John reported that it was primarily “the people who were with *Him* when *He* called Lazarus out of the tomb” who “continued to testify about *Him*” (John 12:17). Those who lived *in Jerusalem* had likely heard of *Jesus* and His wonders, but it is possible, if not likely, that many of them had never really seen *Jesus*. The reason for this possibility is that *most* of His miracles were performed not in Jerusalem, but *in Galilee*. But if they had not previously seen *Him* or heard *Him* teach, this was their opportunity. For this reason *when* many Jerusalemites heard that this was the man who raised Lazarus from the dead, they went out to see who *He* was.

Matthew points out that *most* of the crowd joined in the celebration of *Jesus’s* triumphal entry. But not everyone was happy that *Jesus* had come to town.

Luke reported in his Gospel account that “Some of the Pharisees *in the crowd* said to *Him*, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples” (Luke 19:39). These Pharisees did not like the *crowds* acknowledging and openly celebrating *Jesus* as the Messiah. Neither did they approve of *Jesus* accepting their praises. To the Pharisees, who had already rejected the possibility that *Jesus* was the Messiah (Matthew 12:14), *He* was committing blasphemy by not telling them to quiet down. The Pharisees had rejected *Jesus* because *He* refused to submit Himself to their authority; His moral challenges to them (Matthew 5:20; 9:4; 12:27); His knowledge of the scriptures (Matthew 12:3-7); the authority with which *He* taught (Matthew 7:28-29); His shrewd answers (Matthew 9:11-13); not to mention the signs and wonders *He* performed (Matthew 15:30-31); all of which made *Jesus* a serious threat to their cultural influence and political power.

But *Jesus* did not obey the Pharisees. The *crowds* were right to welcome and receive *Him* as their Messiah, and the Pharisees were wrong to reject *Him*.

*Jesus* informed the Pharisees of their error with a bold claim: “I tell you, if these [*crowds*] become silent, the stones will cry out [proclaiming who I am in their place]” (Luke 19:40).

We can infer three types of people among *the crowds when Jesus entered Jerusalem* that day. There were those who recognized *Jesus* as their Messiah and celebrated His entry. These were out-of-town travelers coming into *the city* to celebrate Passover. And perhaps there were curious people who wanted to see the famous miracle worker. These, it seems were mostly *city dwellers*. And there were those who opposed *Jesus* and chaffed at the way *He had entered the city*. This group was led by the Jewish political leaders, including some Pharisees.

It is interesting to note that Luke reported that as *Jesus* “approached *Jerusalem*, *He saw the city* and wept over it” (Luke 19:41). Like His kingly forefather *David* who wept over the death of his rebellious son Absalom as he ascended the Mount of Olives (2 Samuel 15:30), so too *Jesus* wept over *the city* of *Jerusalem*. As *David*’s kingly heir, as *He* ascended the Mount of Olives, *Jesus* wept over His rebellious people, foreshadowed by the rebellion of Absalom.

The Gospel accounts seem to suggest that *Jesus* was literally offering Himself to begin His reign as the Messiah, and that He would have done so had the Jews accepted *Him* as their King. But despite this promising entrance, they ultimately rejected *Him* and had *Him* crucified only a few days later (Matthew 27:22).

The next time *Jesus*, the Messiah, comes to earth, *He* will not be coming in peace, riding on the colt of a donkey. *He* will be arrayed for battle and riding on a war horse (Revelation 19:11-19). In this manner He will be fulfilling a role as the second Joshua, which is *Jesus* in Hebrew, and means “Yahweh is salvation.”

But even as *He* publicly *entered Jerusalem* offering Himself as 1.) God’s anointed Messiah and King, *Jesus* was also entering *the city* as 2.) God’s Passover Lamb.

It was as the Passover Lamb that *Jesus* would “save His people from their sins” at this particular time (Matthew 1:21). He will return as Israel’s Messiah and be anointed as its King when He returns a second time.

Passover Lambs were substitutionary sacrifices offered to make peace with God. The first Passover occurred on the eve of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. On that night God commanded “each household” (Exodus 12:3) to take and kill an “unblemished lamb” (Exodus 12:5-6). They were to “take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it” (Exodus 12:7). Some have noted that this placement of blood formed the shape of a cross when connected.

If they did this God promised that “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13). God “passed over” the houses covered in blood. In the same fashion, God passes over those who receive the sacrifice that *Jesus* made on the cross for their sins.

This Passover event was to be commemorated as a sort of founding holy day every year by the Jews.

“It is a night to be observed for the Lord for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the Lord, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations.”  
(Exodus 12:42)

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord’s Passover.”  
(Leviticus 23:5)

Passover lambs had to meet three qualifications.

1. The lamb must be “unblemished” (healthy and without defect),
2. one-year-old (young and vigorous), and
3. “Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats” (Exodus 12:5).

The selection process of the Passover lamb and the sacrificial ceremony itself were to be arranged and carried out to specific timing. According to God’s command, the Passover lamb was selected four days before it was to be slaughtered (Exodus 12:3, 6). This allowed for the sacrificial animal to be thoroughly inspected and ensure that it was truly without blemish (Leviticus 22:18-25). The Passover lamb was to be slaughtered in the late afternoon on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the Jewish month of Nisan (Leviticus 23:5). This was the day that Jewish families celebrated their individual Passover feasts. A national Passover offering was sacrificed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan—the Feast day for the festival of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6). See the Hebrew Calendar in the Maps section.

As *Jesus* was the Messiah entering *into Jerusalem*, He was also the Passover Lamb.

*Jesus* met the qualifications for being the Passover lamb. He was unblemished in spirit (John 19:4, I Peter 2:22, I John 3:5) and body (John 19:32-36). He was male (Matthew 1:21). And although *Jesus* was obviously not a one-year-old baby at this point in His life at age thirty-three, He was in His prime, young and vigorous.

The timing of *Jesus*’s arrival into *the city of Jerusalem* coincided with the time that Passover lambs were being chosen.

There were essentially two Passover sacrifices: one sacrifice for each household, and a national offering. Individual Jewish household sacrificed and celebrated their family Passover offering on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nisan (Numbers 28:16).

The National Passover offering was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, and this was when the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be eaten (Numbers 28:17). It seems that because the two holidays commemorating the Exodus (Passover and Unleavened Bread) were back-to-back, allowances were made to celebrate them as families and nationally. It was like a weekend of multiple holidays with multiple celebrations occurring throughout the holidays.

According to the instructions set forth in Exodus 12:3 and 6, Passover lambs were selected five days before they were to be slaughtered (Exodus 12:3, 6). John recorded that *Jesus* entered

*Jerusalem* five days before the national Passover offering (John 12:1; 12:12). Mark indicated that His entrance took place “late” in the day (Mark 11:11). Assimilating this information together, *Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem* on the evening of Nisan 10—five days before He would celebrate the Passover with His disciples in the Upper Room (Matthew 26:19; Mark 14:12).

By the way, what we (Westerners) would call “four” days, Jews often call “five.” The Jews reckoned days as beginning at sunset, rather than sunrise. This can sometimes make counting these days a tricky task. While we are on the topic of time, it is also worth pointing out that the Jewish calendar operates on a lunar calendar. The Christian holiday of Easter coincides with the Jewish Passover, and that is why the Easter date is not fixed to a specific date year after year.

Following His entrance to *Jerusalem*, *Jesus* would be tested in the Temple by the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees (Matthew 21:23-22:46). *He* would be found without blemish (Matthew 22:46). *Jesus* would again be tested at His trial before the High Priest and later by the Roman governor Pilate. During these trials, *Jesus* told the truth, and though His claims were not believed, *He* was without blame (Matthew 26:57-66; 27:24; John 18:19-24; 19:12-15). *Jesus*, God’s Passover lamb, was therefore inspected and found spotless.

*Jesus* would be crucified on the day of Passover, between the sixth and ninth hours (Matthew 27:45; John 19:14). According to Jewish custom, this was the time when the national Passover lamb was being slaughtered in the Temple. *Jesus* would be God’s Passover lamb, offered once for all sins (Hebrews 9:27-28).

It was not just the events of His final week that associated *Jesus* as the Passover Lamb. Practically the whole narrative of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation depicts this symbol.

In Genesis, despite predating the Passover by 400 years, Abraham’s sacrifice of the lamb in place of his son was often conceived as a Passover-like sacrifice in Jewish thought. As Abraham and Isaac climbed Mt. Moriah (where the Temple in *Jerusalem* would later be built and Passover lambs would be sacrificed), Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering” (Genesis 22:8). This ascension and statement by Abraham foreshadowed God selecting *Jesus* to be the Passover lamb for the family of Israel. God made the selection, first in Genesis, and again in Matthew, thus twice fulfilling Abraham’s prophecy, and *He* set it according to His appointed times and specifications.

The circumstance of *Jesus*’s birth also relates to Passover. Traditionally, Passover lambs were selected from Bethlehem. *Jesus* was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4-6). The shepherds to whom the angel appeared were possibly tending the very flocks of sheep that Passover lambs would be chosen from (Luke 2:8-20).

Beyond these historical correlations, New Testament figures and authors regularly present and depict *Jesus* as the Passover lamb.

Twice, John the Baptist referred to *Jesus* as a sort of Passover lamb.



“The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”  
(John 1:29)

“and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’”  
(John 1:36)

After *Jesus*’s crucifixion, Paul explicitly identified *Jesus* as “Christ our Passover” (I Corinthians 5:7). The fact that Paul offers no qualifying explanation of this to his Gentile audience indicates that this was a widely accepted belief by the early Church.

Peter also uses the image of a Passover lamb to describe *Jesus* and His sacrifice for us:

“but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.”  
(1 Peter 1:19-20)

Finally in Revelation 5, John shares a glimpse into Heaven’s throne room where *Jesus* is depicted as a sacrificed but living Lamb. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

Matthew and the other Gospel writers present *Jesus*’s triumphal entry *into the city* as the people’s Savior. *Jesus* would “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21) both as the triumphant Messiah King and as a sacrificial Passover Lamb. As the Messiah, *He* will restore Israel’s glory, and as a Passover lamb, *He* would suffer God’s wrath on their behalf in exchange for their freedom from sin’s deadly penalty. Because of the rejection by the Jewish leaders, *Jesus* would only free the people from their sins this time, and not establish His earthly kingdom. But the rejection of Israel’s leaders became a great blessing to the rest of the world, opening the way for the Gentiles to be grafted into Israel (Romans 11:11-12).

## **Biblical Text**

**21:8-11 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,**

**“Hosanna to the Son of David;**

**Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;**

**Hosanna in the highest!”**

**When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.”**