

- How did a person like Jesus come to be executed?
- Why did Jesus have to die?

## One week in Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the centre of power in the region both for Rome and for the religious leaders who opposed Jesus, making it a dangerous place for Him. In the third year of His ministry, despite growing opposition to His ministry, Jesus made His usual journey to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. In fact, He “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (John 9:51). The Gospels remind us that He was aware that He must be arrested and executed. This was the reason for His coming into the world. Jesus arrived at Jerusalem on a Sunday, and the following Friday He was executed. We can date these events based on references in the Gospels:

- The day of the crucifixion was the day before the Sabbath, that is a Friday (Matthew 27:62; John 19:31).
- It was also the Day of Preparation for the Passover (John 18:28; 19:14) – this is the Jewish date 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan. The 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan only fell on a Friday twice between AD 28 and 34: 7<sup>th</sup> April 30 and 3<sup>rd</sup> April 33. Since the ministry of John the Baptist began in 28-29 AD (Part 11), **3<sup>rd</sup> April 33** is the likely date of Jesus’ crucifixion. This final week in Jerusalem is traditionally called ‘Holy Week’ and some days have been given special names.

***Palm Sunday – Jesus enters Jerusalem*** [Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19] Arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus was surrounded by a crowd of His followers, mainly from Galilee. He asked His disciples to get Him a donkey to ride into the city, fulfilling a prophecy that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). Jesus’ followers rejoiced as they believed Jesus would now become king in Jerusalem, restoring God’s Kingdom on earth. They waved palm branches in the air and shouted praises to God. Jesus, however, spoke once more about the need for Him to die to enter His glory, like a grain of wheat that must die to become fruitful, and called people to follow Him (John 12:23-26).

***Monday – Jesus cleanses the Temple*** [Matthew 21:12-20; Mark 11:12-21; Luke 19:45-46]

On Monday we see something unusual – Jesus becoming angry and overturning tables of moneylenders in the Temple. Jesus’ anger was because these people were misusing the Temple. It was supposed to be a place where people from all nations could worship God, but these men were using it to profit through business and in the process blocking the only area that was available for non-Jews to pray! This action threatened the Sadducees. As High Priests they controlled the Temple and made money from the business conducted there. Jesus’ action was right, but it also provoked them to act on their plans to arrange His execution.

***Tuesday / Wednesday – Jesus’ enemies’ plot*** [Matthew 21:23-26:5; Mark 11:27-14:2; Luke 20:1-22:6]

Jesus taught in Jerusalem, mainly about the future. He faced some challenges about His authority and criticised hypocritical religious leaders (Luke 20:1--19). His enemies plotted to arrest Jesus were afraid of causing a riot among His Galilean followers. Then Judas Iscariot presented them with an opportunity, agreeing to hand Jesus over to them in exchange for a payment of thirty pieces of silver.

***Maundy Thursday – Jesus arrested*** [Matthew 26:17-56; Mark 14:12-52; Luke 22:7-51; John 12:1-18:13]

Jesus celebrated Passover with the twelve. Before the meal He dramatically washed their feet, a job a servant should do (John 13:1-17). This showed His love for them and set an example of servanthood for them to follow. After the meal, He took some bread and broke it, saying it represented His body given for them, and a cup of wine to represent God’s **New Covenant** sealed by the blood He would pour out. Jesus said they should re-enact this taking of bread and wine to remember Him and Christians continue to do so (Part 20).

After this ‘Last Supper’, Jesus shared some teaching alone with the remaining eleven apostles, recorded in John 14-16. He explained that He must leave them soon but would prepare a place for them in God’s house, one day returning to take them to live there with Him. He also promised to send the Holy Spirit to live with them as their teacher and comforter after He had left them. Lastly, He prayed a wonderful prayer for His disciples and all those who would believe in Him through their message (John 17).

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

### **Good Friday – Jesus Dies** [Matthew 26:57-27:66; Mark 14:53-15:47; Luke 22:54-23:53; John 18:13-42]

Jesus was taken for trial before the High Priest. He was beaten by soldiers and accused of blasphemy by false witnesses. Unable to execute Jesus themselves, the Jewish leaders sent Him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. He believed Jesus was innocent of any crime and tried to pass the case to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. Herod, however, returned Jesus to Pilate, who had Him beaten in the hope that this would be enough to please the priests and their supporters. A crowd called out for Jesus to be executed, so Pilate, afraid the Jews might riot if he did not agree, condemned Jesus to be crucified. Jesus was led out of the city to a hill where He was nailed to a cross. The disciples were confused and dismayed, losing all hope. Simon Peter even denied that he knew Jesus. Jesus cried out to God from the cross and told a thief who died beside Him that he would be with him that day in Paradise, then He died a painful and shameful death, alone and rejected.

## **The significance of the cross**

The Bible describes death as the result of sin. Before sin came into the world there was no death, but after Adam sinned, death came into the world. It is the wages sin pays (Romans 6:23). Jesus was universally acknowledged to be sinless (Part 10), so why did He need to die? The answer is found in the Old Testament prophecies about God's **Suffering Servant**. Isaiah 53:10-12 tells us the Messiah had to suffer at God's hand as an "offering for sin" and in doing so "make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins." The Messiah would not die for His own sins – He is God's righteous Servant – but bearing the sins of others (as a sacrifice) so they could be counted righteous (echoing Genesis 15:6, which says that God counted Abraham as righteous through faith). Amazingly, God will rescue us from sin at great cost to Himself. The cross shows the extent of God's love as Jesus faces utter humiliation and experiences our pain.

Jesus was aware of the reasons for His death. Unlike all other human beings, who are under death's control, Jesus claimed to have control over when He would die (John 10:17-18). He said His death would:

- Offer His life as a ransom for many, that is a price to set them free (Matthew 10:28; Mark 10:45);
- Bring eternal life to those who believe (John 3:14-15);
- Forge the new covenant with God's people (Luke 22:20);
- Defeat the "prince of this world", meaning Satan (John 12:31).

Jesus took our sins on Himself and died in our place, taking the punishment that we deserved for our sins, and so made it possible for us to be declared "not guilty" (righteous) by God and to have eternal life. The letters of the New Testament explain it in these same terms that Jesus used (Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 10:1-18; 1 Peter 3:18). The timing of Jesus death at Passover also reminds us that it fulfilled the meaning of sacrifice. As John the Baptist had said when He introduced Jesus, the Lamb of God was taking away the sins of the world. The Old Testament sacrifices were pictures of the one sacrifice Jesus would make for the sins of all people. They could never really pay the price for our sins, but Jesus, the only sinless human being, became the perfect sacrifice really paid for our sins. This is how God can forgive us for our sins but remain holy. Sin is forgiven not by ignoring it but because Jesus has already paid for it. We must admit it and seek forgiveness to be saved.

The message of the Bible – the good news about Jesus (the gospel) – can be summarised in five simple points:

1. **God rules** – He loves us and created us to know Him, to love Him and obey Him as our King;
2. **We rebelled** – we rejected God's rule and stand condemned in our sin, deserving death and judgement;
3. **God rescues** – Jesus the Messiah, promised descendant of Eve, Abraham and David, died for our sins.
4. **We respond** – we must repentance (admitting our sin) and trust in Jesus to be Lord over our lives;
5. **God restores** – God accepts those who believe in Jesus as His children and gives them full, eternal life.

#### **SUMMARY: Jesus was betrayed and died outside Jerusalem as a sacrifice for sins**

- From a human perspective, Jesus was betrayed, rejected, falsely accused, denied and crucified.
- From a divine perspective, Jesus fulfilled prophecy and died to save people from sin and defeat Satan.