

Jesus Wept Over Jerusalem's Destruction

Two significant prophecies were fulfilled on Nisan 10 in the year AD. 33. Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118:26 foretold of the day the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would ride on a one-year old donkey into Jerusalem. They spoke of the praises He would receive from a large crowd. Luke 19:40 reveals that the stones would have shouted the praises of Christ if the crowd had been silent. That reveals that the prophecies were going to be fulfilled, even if the stones had to shout Christ's praises. It also reveals Jesus deserved the praises for He was and is the Messiah. So, as He rode the donkey up the Mount of Olives to an elevation of 2,710 ft (826 m), the crowds followed Him. When He reached the top of the hill, He could see the city which was about 500 feet (152.4 m) below. He would have had a magnificent view of the city and the temple itself. But Jesus did not rejoice in the praises of the people or of the beautiful city and its temple. Instead, He burst into tears. It was a time of deep grief and not one of joy. Why did He respond by crying over Jerusalem? Our study is from Luke 19:41-44.

Love of Christ Displayed. Luke 19:41-42 states that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, he wept.

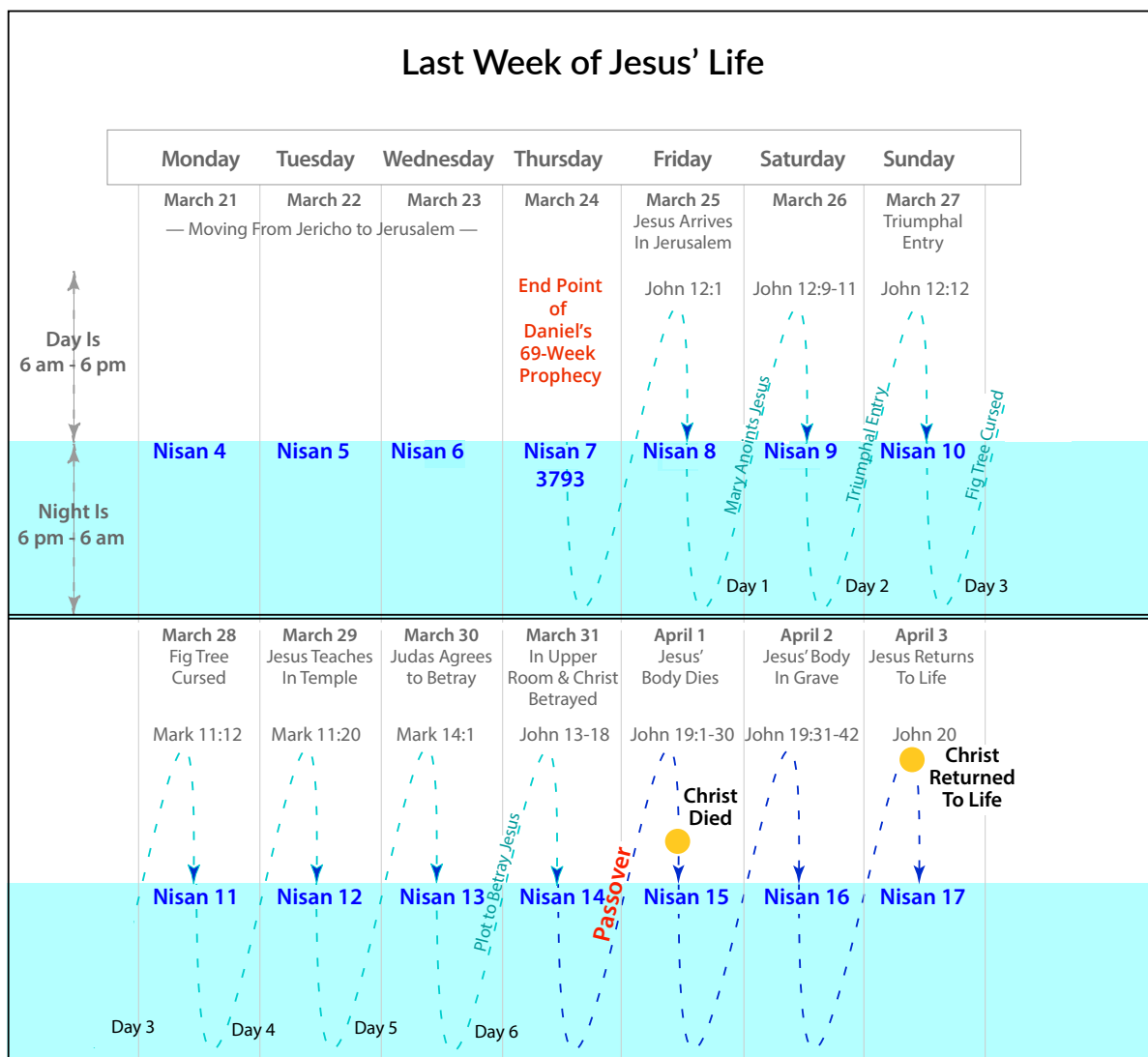
When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! Luke 19:41-42a (NASB)

Bethphage and Bethany. We were also told Bethany was near the Mount of Olives. Then in verse 37 we are told Jesus approaching the "descent of the Mount of Olives." So, the Triumphal Entry occurred on the road from the village of Bethany up the slope of the Mount of Olives to the peak. Now we are told He is descending the slope as He approaches Jerusalem. The verse seems to imply that He must have stopped. Whatever the meaning of "approached," Jesus would have been able to see the city below and the

Earlier in verse 29 we were told that Jesus had approached



Destruction of Jerusalem
by the Romans in A.D. 70



magnificent white temple.¹ Alfred Edersheim writes this wonderful description of what Jesus would have been able to see,

What a panorama over which to roam with hungry eagerness! At one glance he would see before him the whole city - its valleys and hills, its walls and towers, its palaces and streets, and its magnificent Temple — almost like a vision from another world. There could be no difficulty in making out the general features of the scene. Altogether the city was only thirty-three stadia, or about four English miles, in circumference. Within this compass dwelt a population of 600,000 (according to Tacitus), but, according to the Jewish historian,

amounting at the time of the Passover to between two and three million . . .²

The temple was a beautiful sight. It was approximately 60 cubits (90 ft) long, 20 (30 ft) cubits wide, and 60 (90 ft) cubits high.³ It had 162 Corinthian marble pillars around the temple and its courts.⁴ It could be seen from anywhere in Jerusalem.⁵ What a sight for Jesus to see as He descended the Mount of Olives.

Yet, He cried or wept for the city. The Greek word “wept” is *klao*. It referred to crying and deep sobbing. It is the

2. Alfred Edersheim. The Temple. Hendrickson Publishers. 1994. p. 8.

3. T. W. Davies. Temple. A Dictionary of the Bible Dealing With Its Language, Literature, and Contents. Charles Scribner's Sons. vol. IV. p. 714.

4. Josephus. Ibid. Book 15. Chap. 11, Section 5.

5. B. A. Levine. Temple. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Moody Publishers. 2005. p. 1262.

1. Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews. Book 15. Chap. 11, Section 3. Josephus. Winston. Kregel Publications. 1974. p. 334.

strongest Greek word for weeping in the New Testament. As Jesus wept He said in verse 42, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes." Jesus wept because the city did not understand the "things which make for peace." That is, they did not recognize their Messiah. They did not understand He came to give spiritual peace. In the Upper Room, Jesus said this to the disciples,

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. John 14:27 (NASB)

It is obvious Jesus was not talking about creating military peace treaties between nations. He was speaking about spiritual peace with God. For He said, "not as the world gives." Then in John 16:33, He makes it clear the peace He spoke about could only be found in Him.

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33 (NASB)

He did not come to establish military peace for Israel. He came to offer peace with God. Later the apostle Paul wrote that believers have peace with God because of Jesus.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1-2 (NASB)

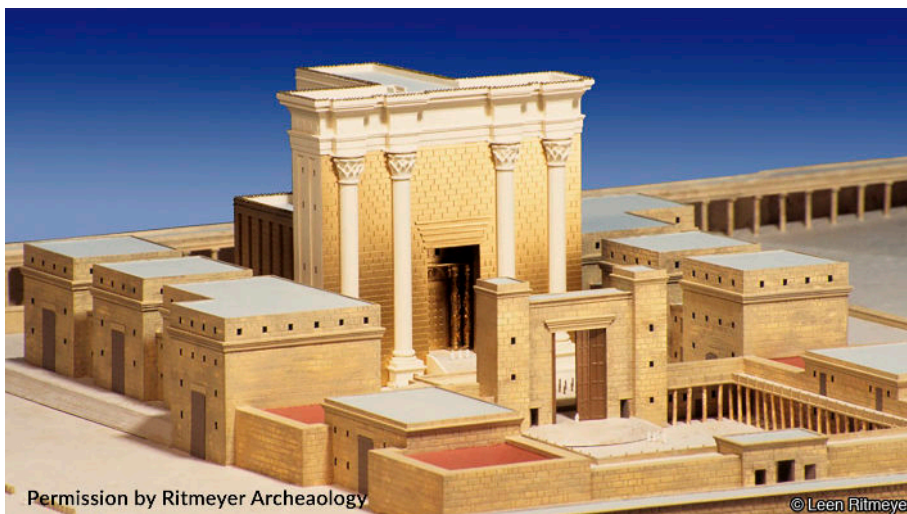
Peace with God comes by having faith in Jesus. By faith our sins are forgiven, and we stand in His grace. The citizens of Jerusalem did not know the true peace Jesus offered. That is the first reason He wept.

Holiness of Christ Displayed. A second reason Jesus wept is given to us in the last part of verse 42 when He said,

But now they have been hidden from your eyes. Luke 19:42b (NASB)

He said this because the people had already heard Him teach, and had seen Him do miracles, and yet they will reject Him in a few days. Even after coming to full light they will reject him. Consequently, God the Father had confirmed them in

their unbelief. The same principle is illustrated in Malachi 2:2-4. In that passage, God warned the priests to repent, but then He immediately stated that they did not take His warning to heart. So, they would suffer punishment. The



principle is also given in Ezekiel 2:1-7 when God tells the prophet Ezekiel the Israelites were a stubborn and rebellious people. He was to warn them but God knew they would not listen. Then starting in chapter 4, God prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army because the Jews had refused to repent and obey.

Now we must not think that God is eager to punish those who disobey and reject Him. Consider Psalm 103:10 which reminds us that Yahweh loves us. Yet in Ezekiel 33:11, we read,

"As I live!" declares the Lord GOD, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live." Ezekiel 33:11a (NASB)

This verse reveals that Yahweh hates to punish the wicked. It also reveals He has no choice. Ezekiel 18:23 and verse 32 give us another peek into Yahweh's heart.

“Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? Ezekiel 18:23 (NASB)

For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.” Ezekiel 18:32 (NASB)

Also in Lamentations, Yahweh states,

**For He does not afflict willingly
Or grieve the sons of men.
Lamentations 3:33 (NASB)**

This gives insight into a wonderful understanding of God's character. Even though God loves everyone and hates afflicting us, His character cannot allow anyone who continues sinning to escape punishment. Yes, He is slow to anger (Psalms 86:15). But if an individual does not repent, He must eventually be punished. His holiness demands that evil be suppressed.

Also, Jeremiah 18:6-10 teaches us that God operates on by a divine principle. If a good nation becomes wicked, He will punish it. If a wicked nation repents of its evil and does good, then He will bless it. So Christ weeps for the people in the city of Jerusalem because He knows that punishment cannot be avoided.

We find the same principle in John 3:16. Jesus said,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NASB)

Notice that Jesus did not just make a positive statement. He made both a positive and a negative statement. The negative statement is made first. Anyone who believes in Christ shall

not perish. It is a warning that anyone who does not believe in Christ will perish. True belief contains three parts. First it believes the fact the Jesus is God who died for our sins and was resurrected. Second, it is accompanied by sorrow over one's sins and seeks forgiveness. The person realizes they displeased God. Third, true belief submits to God and wants Him to change them.

John 3:18 now gives the warning, just as God did in Ezekiel. He shows love by warning us, because if we do not respond correctly He must punish us. He warns,

**He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
John 3:18 (NASB)**

May I ask if you believe Jesus Christ is our God and the only one who save you from the punishment of hell?

Judgment of Christ Displayed. Jesus wept in great anguish since He knew judgment was coming on His beloved city (Psalm 87:2; 132:13-14). He had healed, performed miracles, done signs, taught the Scriptures, but most of the religious leaders and people rejected Him rather than honor Him. After three to four years of ministry among them, they were without excuse. They saw Him perform acts that only God could do. They heard Him speak as no other person could (Mark 1:27; Luke 4:32, 36; John 7:28, 46), but they concluded He was empowered by demons. So judgment was coming.

Verses 43-44 record Jesus' description of the punishment that was going to occur on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus said,

“For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.” Luke 19:43-44 (NASB)

Jesus' prophecy contains four distinct features. First, Jesus

said, “For the days will come upon you.” He was referring to the years of A.D. 66-73 when the Roman army entered into battle against the city.

Second, Jesus said the Roman army will “throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side.” Flavius Josephus, the Roman historian, tells us that this literally occurred. Since Jerusalem was built on two hills and was surrounded by a valley and deep ravines on three sides, the Roman army attacked from the north using siege towers. Josephus says the Roman army built these siege engines and then threw rocks and darts against the city and its inhabitants.⁶ They built towers and then threw darts, shot arrows, and slung rocks.⁷ This protected the Roman soldiers from the Jews who would throw things from the walls upon the soldiers below. With the siege works in place, the Jews could not successfully attack the Romans. Eventually, the Roman army broke through the first wall and the second wall on the north side of the city.⁸ Note that valleys and ravines were on the east, south, and west.

As the battle between the Jews and Romans raged on, the people suffered from severe famine within the city. The Romans had surrounded the city to cut off supplies and food. On one occasion, Josephus states that Titus ordered a group of horsemen to ambush anyone who tried to secretly escape the walls of the city and collect food down in the valleys and ravines below. Consequently, some Jews were whipped, tortured, and crucified. Here is part of Josephus’ report.

... sent a party of horsemen, and ordered they should lay ambushes for those that went out into the valleys to gather food. Some of these were indeed fighting men, who were not contented with what they got by rapine; but the greater part of them were poor people, who were deterred from deserting by the concern they were under for their own relations; ... nay, the severity of the famine made them bold in thus going out; ... so they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city. This miserable

6. Flavius Josephus. Wars of the Jews. 5.6.3. William Whiston. The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged. Kregel. 1960. p. 557.

7. Ibid. 5.7.2, p. 558.

8. Ibid. 5.8.1, p. 560.

procedure made Titus greatly to pity them, while they caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more.⁹

So, Josephus reveals Jesus’ statement was fulfilled. The army did surround the city and hem them in on every side.

Third, Jesus prophesied, “they will level you to the ground and your children within you.” Josephus’ report to Rome reveals that the people were “leveled” by famine.”

Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged.¹⁰

In addition, the stomachs of those who deserted were cut open by the soldiers in order to find any gold they may have swallowed. It was a common practice in those times for deserters to swallow gold as a way to hide their money.¹¹

Eventually, the Roman army victoriously conquered the third northern wall of the city in August–September in 70 A.D. and the Roman army entered the city like a flood of water.¹² The soldiers raced inside eagerly killing them. The soldiers took 97,000 captive. During the entire siege 1.1 million people died.¹³ The army discovered that due to famine, some of the people had eaten human and cow dung.¹⁴ Josephus also reports that cannibalism occurred. One person is graphically described as killing, roasting, and eating her nursing child.¹⁵ The women and children were sold into slavery if someone would buy them.¹⁶

Fourth, Jesus said, “they will not leave in you one stone upon another.” Once again Josephus reports the fulfillment of Jesus’ words.

9. Ibid. 5.11.1, p. 565.

10. Ibid. 5.12.3, p. 565.

11. Ibid. 5.13.4, p. 569.

12. Ibid. 6.10.1, p. 588. Note that Vespasian was Roman emperor from A.D. 69 to 79, and the Hebrew month of Elul occurs in August–September in the Gregorian calendar.

13. Ibid. 6.9.3, p. 587.

14. Ibid. 5.13.7, p. 570.

15. Ibid. 6.3.4, p. 578.

16. Ibid. 6.10.1, p. 586.

Now the Romans set fire to the extreme parts of the city, and burnt them down, and entirely demolished its walls.¹⁷

The army also burned down the temple.¹⁸ Later Josephus adds this,

Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency; that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and Mariamne, and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison; as were the towers also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.

2. But Caesar resolved to leave there as a guard the tenth legion, with certain troops of horsemen, and companies of footmen. So, having entirely completed this war, he was desirous to commend his whole army, on account of the great exploits they had performed, and to bestow proper rewards on such as had signalized themselves therein.¹⁹

Conclusion. Finally, Jesus said that this will occur, “because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.” The Triumphal Entry had just occurred. He had been cheered and praised as the Messiah-king of Israel. The large crowd had followed him from Bethany to the top of the Mount of Olives. Jesus deserved the adoration that He received because

He was and is the Messiah-king.

But He knew another crowd and the religious leaders of Israel would reject Him as the Messiah-king on Friday as He stood with Pontius Pilate. He knew they would shout “Crucify Him!” He knew He would be crucified and the religious leaders would reject the sign above that said He was the king of the Jews. Consequently, the nation and its people would be destroyed by the Roman army. God the Father would use the Roman military to punish them.

We have discovered that Jesus was not rejoicing in their punishment. He was not calling them names. He was in anguish because they would be punished and Jerusalem would be destroyed. The character of God required they be punished for having full knowledge about Him and then concluding He lied about being God and performed His ministry using the powers of the occult. They had no hope since they reached the wrong conclusion.

God will do the same to any country that has been exposed to Jesus Christ and rejects Him. Any nation that has heard the gospel and eventually rejects the truth will be judged as the people in Jerusalem were judged. Unbelief cannot avoid punishment. For unbelief is sin. It is a refusal to believe and recognize God’s words and actions. Such arrogant and repetitive sin must be punished because it is a rejection of God. Unrepentant sin must eventually be punished.

Today, God is warning everyone to believe in Jesus Christ, accept Him as Lord and Savior, and escape eternal punishment.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. John 5:24 (NASB)

So, I urge you to call upon Him for your soul’s salvation!

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the

17. Ibid. 6.9.4, p.

18. Ibid. 6.8.2, p. 586.

19. Ibid. 7.1.1-2, p. 589.

Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM
WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” Romans 10:9-11
(NASB)

WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE
LORD WILL BE SAVED. Romans 10:13 (NASB)