

The Gospel Is Also For The Gentiles

The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem occurred on a Sunday. Then on Monday morning, Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. This study is about events that occurred later in the day on Monday, March 28, A.D. 33 or Nisan 11 in the Hebrew year of 3793. On Thursday evening, Jesus will be betrayed by Judas, arrested by Roman soldiers, and found guilty by the Sanhedrin Council for saying He was the Son of God. Then on Friday Jesus will be crucified. This week is filled with significant events. The one that will be described in this study is that Jesus revealed salvation was not for the Jewish people only, but also for the Gentiles. The disciples did not understand this truth until later. This study is from the gospel of John because John captured the next chronological event in the life of Christ. The previous study was recorded in Mathew, Mark, and Luke. The Holy Spirit may have included this event in the gospel of John because it was written for Gentiles. As you read it, notice that it is about Gentiles. Our study is from John 12:20-26.

Gentiles Came for the Passover. John 12:20 states that some Greeks (or Gentiles) had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, which was on Nisan 14 in the Hebrew year of 3793 (April 1, A.D. 33).

Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast. John 12:20 (NASB)

We do not know anything about these Greeks except that they came up to worship at the Passover feast. The words “came up” means they had climbed from the plain below up to Jerusalem, which sat on Mount Zion. They were travelers, not residents of Jerusalem.

A proselyte was one who had converted to Judaism. They could not work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10), blaspheme Yahweh (Leviticus 24:16), worship idols (Leviticus 20:2), commit certain acts described in Leviticus 18:26), eat unleavened bread on the Passover (Exodus 12:16), and had

to obey some dietary laws (Leviticus 17:10 and 15).¹ Josephus states that a convert must adopt the Jewish customs including being circumcised, must obey the Jewish laws and worship God.² While we do not know if these Greeks were proselytes or God-fearers, it is clear they came to celebrate the Passover feast.

So, verse 20 tells us they came to worship, and verse 21 adds that they wished to see Jesus.



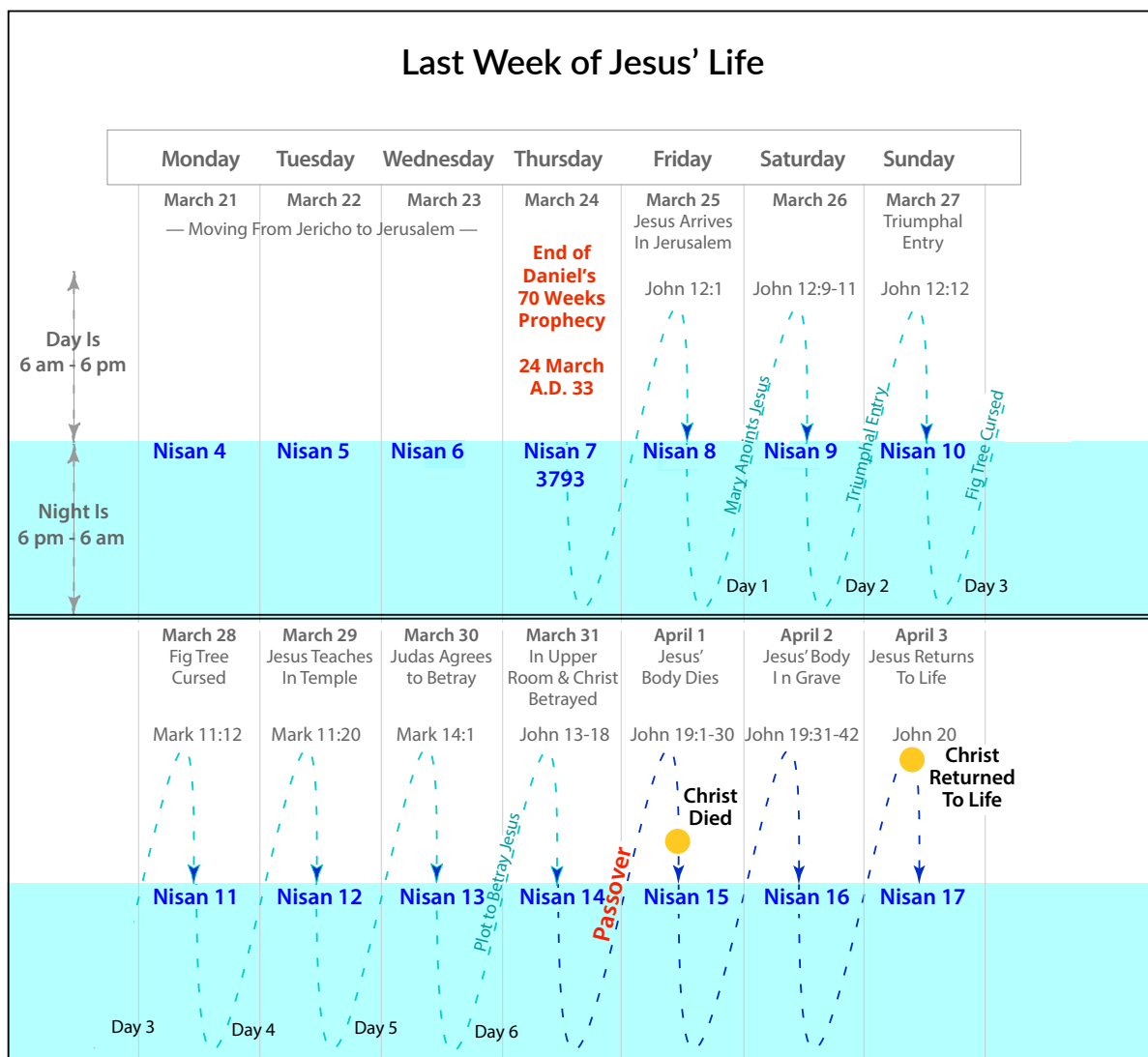
These then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and

told Jesus. John 12:21-22 (NASB)

This would have been a wonderful event to watch. I wish

¹ Merrill F. Unger. The New Dictionary. Moody Publishers. 2005. p. 1044.

² Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, book xx, chapter 2, and sections 1 and 4.



we could go back in time and watch them and hear them tell Philip that they wanted to see Jesus. Then watch Philip tell Andrew, who told Peter, who then told Jesus. Why didn't Philip just go to Jesus? We are not told, but once again this appears to reveal that Peter was the leader among the apostles. What an amazing chain of events.

Why did the Greeks speak to Philip and not to one of the other apostles? The answer may be given when we are told that Philip was from Bethsaida. This is significant because there was a very large Greek population in the Decapolis near Bethsaida.³ This information helps us to understand why the Greeks may have spoken to Philip, who spoke to Andrew, and then he spoke to Peter.

In addition, John 1:44 has already told us that Philip was from Bethsaida, and so were Andrew and Peter, who were brothers (John 1:40). The fact that Philip, Andrew, and Peter were from the same town is important information. Matthew 26:73 also reveals that Peter had an accent when we are told the people recognized that he was from Galilee. That suggests Philip and Andrew would have had a dialect too. So these Greeks felt comfortable with Philip and approached him. They told him they would like to speak to Jesus. Most likely the Greeks spoke to Philip because he would have recognized his dialect as belonging to someone who had been living in Bethsaida which was near the Decapolis territory, which was Greek territory.

This also suggests the Greeks may have been from the region of Decapolis themselves since Bethsaida was near

³ B. F. Westcott. The Gospel According to St. John. Eerdmans Publishing. 1975., p. 180.

Decapolis. If they were, they may have heard about Jesus feeding five thousand men, plus women and children. They may have heard about His healing many of the ill and casting out of demons (Matthew 4:25; Mark 5:20). Jesus' fame had spread throughout Judea, Galilee, and the regions of Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis.

Time to Be Glorified. When Jesus heard that the Greeks wanted to speak to Him,

... Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." John 12:23 (NASB)

Jesus's answer is unexpected. He did not ask why the Greeks wanted to speak with Him. Instead, He said that the hour had come for Him to be glorified. Throughout His ministry, He had said He came for various reasons! For example, Matthew 5:17 records that Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law and not abolish it. That is, He would keep the Law perfectly and fulfill the prophecies about Himself. He also fulfilled His mission of calling not the righteous but sinners to repent (Matthew 9:11; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). In Matthew 5:3-4 He taught us that only the humble would enter the kingdom of heaven. Only they would repent and be comforted. Only humble, repentant, believing sinners will come to Christ. Men and women who consider themselves to be righteous will not sense their need to be forgiven. They are too proud and arrogant. In Matthew 10:34, we are told that He did not come to give us peace but a sword.

He knew that people would not agree about Him. Families and nations would be divided. Wars between nations, murders within nations, and hatred would exist between neighbors and within families (Matthew 10:34-35; 24:9-10; Luke 12:51). Also, Jesus said that He came "to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10). The rest who rejected Him would pay the unending agonizing penalty—eternity in hell.

As we have already seen, Jesus or the Holy Spirit has repeatedly told the disciples His hour had not come. (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 7:6-8). Now Jesus said His hour had come. He came to earth so that He could become our Savior from sin. The perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) was soon to make that a reality.

Mark 10:45 says that everything Jesus did, every healing, every teaching, every miracle, and every wonder was not for His own personal glory but to serve us. If you are reading this study, this means He came to serve you too! He did not come to give you wealth or a wonderful marriage. He came to save men and women from their sins. He also came to cast fire upon the earth according to Luke 12:49. That is, He came to

judge the unrepentant. Yet in John 12:47, He said He did not come to judge the world for that was the Father's responsibility. Finally, John 18:37 records that Jesus told Pilate He came to testify of the truth, and that He did. His words are recorded in four gospels.

Jesus also said that when His hour came, He would be glorified. All of the events that occurred during His life revealed His glory for John 1:14 says,



And the Word

became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NASB)

When Jesus had performed His first miracle of turning water into wine, John 2:11 says,

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. John 2:11 (NASB)

All that Jesus did revealed His glory. One of the major revelations of Jesus' glory occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke 9:32 says that the three disciples who were with Jesus saw His glory and Moses and Elijah too!

Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. Luke 9:32 (NASB)

So He came to do many things. In the process, His glory was revealed as the people watched. But the major revelation of His glory was going to occur when He was crucified and died on the cross. That is what He referred to when He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." That hour was only days away! It was time to be glorified! So, Jesus began immediately preaching the gospel to these Greeks, these God-fearers who had become proselytes.

Parable of the Fallen Grain. Then Jesus gave them a parable that illustrated what was going to happen on Friday. It illustrates the necessity that He had to die so believers could have eternal life. Had He not died, then everyone would have remained in their sins and sped toward hell like a blind man in a car.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." John 12:24 (NASB)

If you had any doubt about what Jesus meant that His hour

was coming, Jesus now tells us. He does it with a parable using a grain of wheat. The parable is simple. Anyone who has planted a seed into the ground and watered it knows that a little seed can grow into a tree or a plant if it is not dry or dead. But if the seed is dry, it will produce nothing. The parable also illustrates the benefits of His death.

When He died, much fruit would be produced. When Jesus died on the cross, He became the Savior of those who believed He was God and died on the cross to forgive our sins. Ephesians 2:8 says that we are saved by the grace of God. God's grace caused Him to die on the cross. He was the seed that figuratively fell to the ground and died.

The fruit that Jesus would produce are those people who would believe in Him. That fruit would equally include both Jews and Gentiles. That is why Jesus spoke these words to these Greeks. He was offering them salvation. The Jews believed, then and even today, that Gentiles had to convert in order to partake of the blessings available of the Mosaic Covenant and to draw close to God. So, some Gentiles did convert. Some of them were listening to Jesus. Jonah is a good example of a prophet who had the wrong theology about the exclusivity of Judaism. He also hated the Ninevites. But Isaiah 42:1-2 announced the Messiah would offer salvation to Gentiles. In Acts 15:1-21 we are told the apostles, the elders of the first Christian church in Jerusalem, and members of the church gathered together to determine if God was offering salvation to the Gentiles. The apostles missed both the message of Isaiah 42:1-2 and this parable of Jesus. They concluded that God was offering salvation to Gentiles too! During the discussion Peter quoted Amos 9:11-12,

That they may possess the remnant of Edom
And all the nations who are called by My name,"
Declares the LORD who does this.
Amos 9:11-12 (NASB)

The Hebrew word for "nations" is *goy*. It means Gentiles. So, Peter and everyone present finally understood that salvation was for Jew and Gentile. That is why Jesus told them in Acts 1:8 to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the remotest parts of the earth. In Romans 2:10 and 3:29,

the apostle Paul taught that the gospel was for both Jews and Gentiles. So, Jesus was the seed and the fruit that He would produce would be both the Jewish and Gentile believers. I wonder if the Greeks understood the message. The apostles did not.

First Characteristic of the Fruit. Then after Jesus figuratively referred to His crucifixion and the fruit as believers, He described the characteristic of the fruit in verses 25 and 26. In these two verses, it becomes obvious the fruit was not apples, oranges, or cherries but the characteristics of the people. Here is verse 25,

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. John 12:25 (NASB)

The first part of the verse is, “He who loves his life loses it.” Jesus used present participles for both “love” and “loses.” Present participles refer to ongoing activity in the present. That is, Jesus said people who are actively loving their lives in this world are going to lose their lives. In the Greek there are two words for “life.” The two words are *psyche* and *zoe*. *Psyche* refers to the essence of life (heart, mind, the breath of life), but *zoe* refers to the spirit. That is, *psyche* refers to what makes the body function in this world, but *zoe* refers to the spirit which will exist for eternity. Jesus used both words in this verse. He used *psyche* in the first part of the verse. That is, the people who love themselves are going to lose their life when they die. We know that He was talking about life on planet earth for he said “in this world.” May I ask you, “Do you love yourself?”

The Greek word for “lose” is *apollymi*. Most of the time this word is translated as destroy, or lose. Jesus’ point was if you are loving your life, you are actually destroying yourself. You are responsible for the destruction of your life. Now Jesus was speaking in spiritual terms. He meant that at the moment of death, you will destroy your very life.

Now we must pause for a minute and ask what did He mean? Matthew 16:25 helps us to understand. The verse says,

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and

whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Matthew 16:25 (NASB)

Here Jesus contrasted the man who prefers himself over Christ. The man or woman who prefers himself or herself above Christ is destroying his or her own life. Jesus will not be destroying them! The individual who rejects Jesus Christ and places himself or herself first is responsible for their own destiny.

Then in the second part of His statement in John 12:25, Jesus said that the person who is hating his soul, *psyche*, will be keeping it to life eternal. The Greek word for “hates” is *miseo*. It is a strong word for hate. Jesus has just given us the definition of a believer. When these people sincerely understand and believe the gospel they will hate themselves and in desperation seek God’s forgiveness. The gospel message is simple. Jesus is God, He died on the cross to forgive our sins, and was resurrected from the dead.

John 3:16 summarizes the gospel. It says,

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)

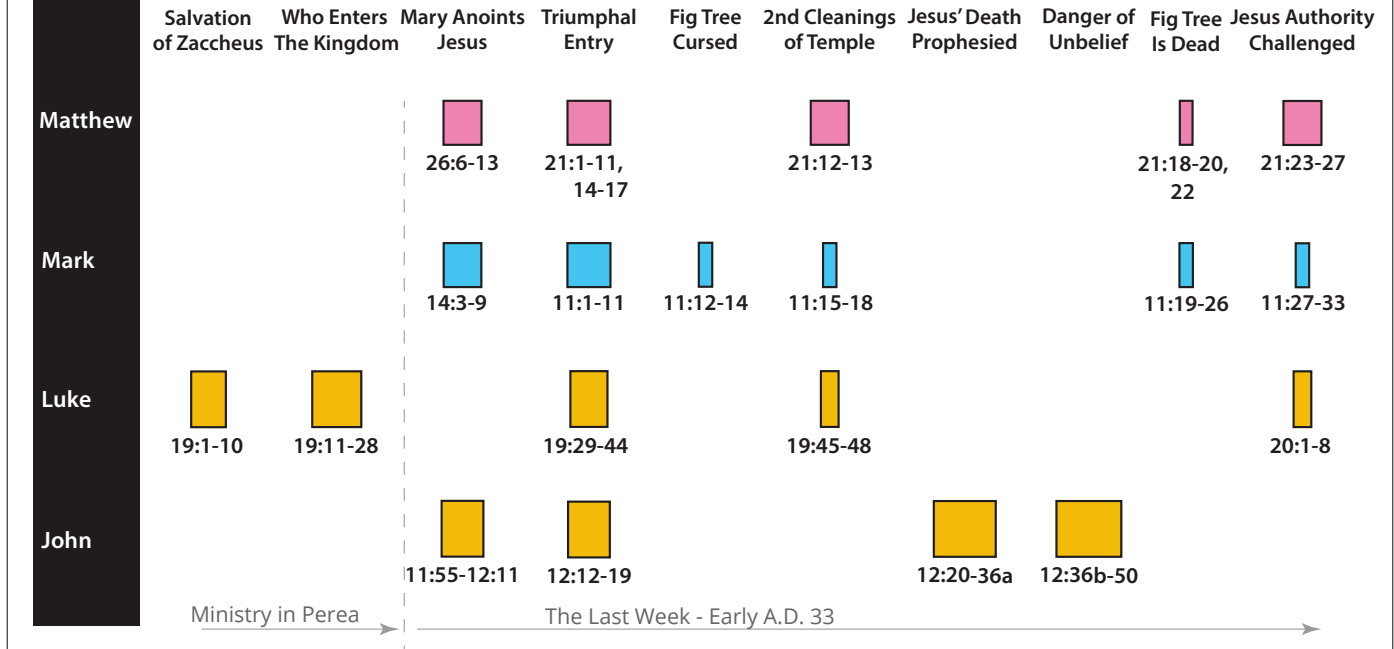
Jesus gave us two promises: we will not perish in hell, and we are given eternal life. At the moment of saving faith, the believer will respond in humility and seek His forgiveness as the Holy Spirit gives this new believer understanding of the gospel and of their horrible sinful condition. At the moment of saving faith, they will in humility seek His forgiveness and submit to Him. This is the definition of a believer in Jesus Christ. Their humility is displayed as hatred for themselves as they realize their horrible sinful condition will send them to hell. They will be embarrassed before our holy God. Real believers are those who hate their wretched or sinful selves.

Paul gave us a helpful example of a believer who has been saved when he wrote Romans 7:15-19,

For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not

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want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. Romans 7: 15-19 (NASB)

Paul hated his very own body because of his fight with sin. It humbled him. Romans 8:13-14 states the characteristic of a believer is one who is slowly “putting to death the deeds of the body,” that is, a believer is slowly achieving victory over sin. Yes, they will lose some battles, but they will be slowly winning the war.

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Romans 8:13-14

This is the heart of a believer. Their hatred for their sins humbles them.

The apostle Paul’s heart is revealed in Philippians 1:21,

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21 (NASB)

Then in Colossians 3:4 Paul added,

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4 (NASB)

Paul revealed his heart’s passion once again with, “Christ, who is our life.” In 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul revealed His heart when He said that he was not trying to please men, “but God who examines our hearts.” May I say that I hope you are loving Christ more than yourself? I hope your heart’s desire is to please Him and no one else, including yourself.

That gives us the message of John 12:25 and the first important characteristic of a true believer. Their hearts love

Jesus more than themselves. This is the internal characteristic of the fruit that Jesus produces. It loves Jesus more than self.

Second Characteristic of the Fruit. The second characteristic of the fruit is given in John 12:26. This characteristic is about the external behavior of the fruit. It reveals the external actions that result from the first characteristic. The evidence that someone is a true believer is revealed by their heart's devotion for Christ. It produces self-denial which leads to self-sacrifice. Here is how Jesus said it,

If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. John 12:26 (NASB)

Jesus makes three critical statements. The first statement begins with the if statement. He said that if anyone served Him, then that person will follow Him. We need to notice that Jesus did not say they may follow Him. He did not say that it was an option a believer added to his or her life later in time. He said the person “must” follow Him. The words “must follow” are an imperative in the Greek. An imperative in the Greek is a command. True believers are commanded to obey and follow Him. This is the mark of true fruit or true believers. This characteristic is the result of saving faith and not the means of acquiring salvation.

When I became a believer in Jesus Christ, I begged Him to forgive me. I told Him that I was willing to become a missionary if He wanted me to do that. But that was the last thing I wanted to do! That illustrated my willingness to follow Him anywhere.

In Hebrews 10:32-35, we are told the early believers were willing to suffer for Christ. Verses 33-35 say,

Being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Hebrews 10:33-35 (NASB)

Then in John 12:26, Jesus made a very important statement we must not miss. He said, “where I am, there My servant will be also.” That is, the true believers will be where Jesus is. Now think about His statement for a minute. First, He has told us that a true believer, the fruit, must follow Him. Now He emphasizes the fact that where He is, the true believer will be there also! That is the second characteristic of true believers—those who are real fruit.

True believers will have a heart's desire to follow Him. That is the real motivation Jesus is looking for in your life if you are a real Christian. Do you love Him and want to please Him? If so, you will follow our Lord, whatever the cost. There is nothing that a true believer will not do for Him, including sacrificing their own lives (*psyche*). In the parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46), the man sold everything that he had to buy the pearl. The pearl of great price is salvation. The same is true for the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44).

In John 12:2, Jesus said that the person who does these things will be honored by the Father. I do not know what that honor includes, but I do not need to know now.

Conclusion. That is the message Jesus sent to these Gentiles. Salvation is offered to both Jews and Gentiles by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It is offered because a seed died producing fruit. That fruit loves Jesus to the point of being willing to die for Him in order to serve Him! Then God the Father will honor them. For more on how the Father will honor them, read the study, “Bema Seat - Judgment of Christians”

