

# Why Some Believe in Christ and Others Do Not Believe

The character of God should be comforting to every person on planet earth because Scripture says He is holy. He loves everyone, and He never changes. To say God is holy means He never sins or commits evil (1 Peter 1:15-16). Because He loves us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:16) means that He always does what is best for us (Philippians 2:1, 4). He loves even His enemies, and these character traits never change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). These are just three of His marvelous character traits that should cause us to rejoice when we think of His sovereignty.

Scripture teaches that God is the sovereign ruler of our universe and everything in it, including angels and humans because God created everything that is invisible and visible (Colossians 1:16). When we were born, He gave us to our parents. He did not ask us to choose our parents, the country in which we would be born, or the color of our eyes or hair. God made those decisions for us. He designed our bodies (Psalm 139:13-16). He made us either a biological male or female as He desired. So we should not be surprised that He knows our thoughts and everything about us (Proverbs 21:2; 24:12; Luke 9:47; 11:17).

He can influence the decisions we make. Proverbs 21:1 tells us that He can turn the hearts of national leaders like water in His hand. Ezra 1:1 says He can motivate us to make or change our decision. He sovereignly decided the year, month, and day we will die (Job 14:1, 5). He raises up nations and tears down nations (Daniel 4:34-35). He pulls down the proud and exalts the humble (1 Peter 5:6). He kills and makes alive (1 Samuel 2:6). Throughout Scripture we are told that God will send us to hell or heaven when we die based on our decision to either accept or reject Christ. He can keep His promises and prophecies because no one can frustrate His plans (Proverbs 16:9; Isaiah 14:27). The message is that God is the all powerful and sovereign ruler. That is an important background to our study which is in John 12:36-43.

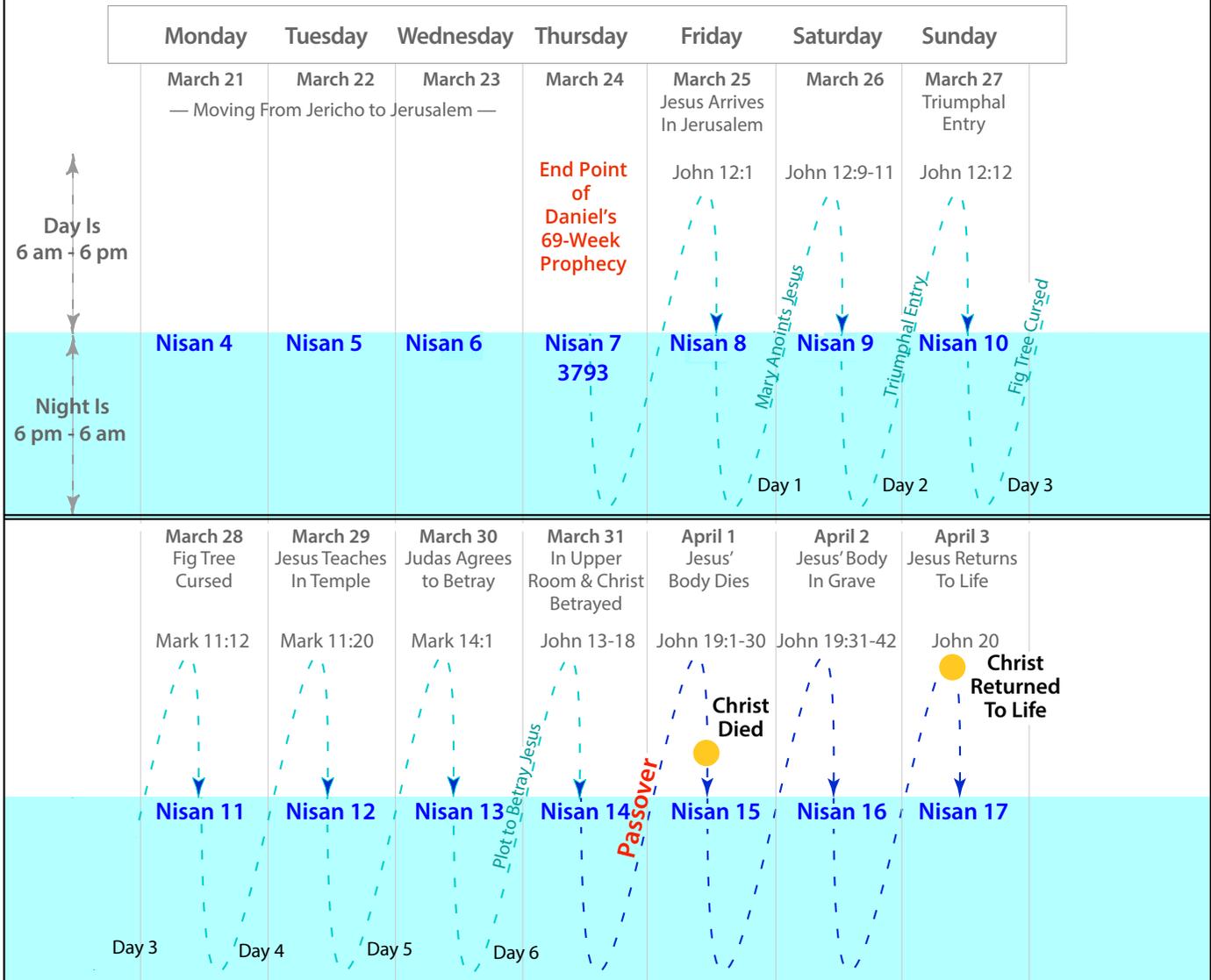


**JESUS HIDES FROM THE CROWD.** The first verse of our study is John 12:36b

**These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them. John 12:36b (NASB)**

Immediately we are told that after Jesus had just finished speaking to the crowd, He hid Himself. The day was still Monday, March 28, A.D. 33. The events that are described in this study must have occurred late in the day because Jesus had already cursed a fig tree, cleansed the temple, presented the gospel to some Gentiles, and foretold His death on the cross

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all on this day.

We are not told why Jesus hid Himself from the crowd, yet the Holy Spirit found it to be important to tell us. It may be that the events of the day had been fatiguing; but most likely, Jesus needed to avoid the crowd and get some rest. Verses 44-50 tell us that Jesus spoke later to a group of people about how to have eternal life. That means Jesus hid from the people only briefly.

**RESPONSE TO JESUS WAS MOSTLY UNBELIEF.** Our study has two major divisions. The first section (v. 37-43) summarizes the response of the people to Jesus' ministry from its very

beginning. In this section, Jesus does not speak. The comments are given by the Holy Spirit. He tells us that the signs Jesus performed were designed to authenticate His identity. He was both God and the Messiah. The four gospels tell us that Jesus taught about seventy parables and forty-five discourses, including the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the Kingdom Parables (Matthew 13), the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36), and the Upper Room Discourse (John 15-16).

The gospels tell us that He performed at least thirty-six miracles. The gospel of John records only seven of the signs

that Jesus performed. The sign at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-12) was Jesus' first sign and His last sign was the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44). The first sign revealed He could create and the last sign taught us that He has control over life and death. When Jesus raised Lazarus (John 11), He revealed that He could raise him by a simple command of His voice. He did not do magic tricks or use chemicals, wands, or dances.

Verse 37 now gives us a summary of how the people responded to His incredible ministry.

**But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. John 12:37 (NASB)**

Some people believe this verse reveals that the apostle John was disappointed that so few people believed in Jesus after watching and hearing all that Jesus did! But that comment misses the fact that the Holy Spirit moved John to write the verse. The verse is simply an accurate and trustworthy statement of fact. It does not necessarily reveal any attitude of the apostle, but it does reveal the fact that few believed in Him.

Verse 37 gives us two insights. The first insight is that miracles do not guarantee that anyone will believe in Christ. I am always surprised when someone says that if a certain person could just see some miracle or sign, that person would believe in Jesus. But the verse reveals that miraculous signs do not cause people to believe in Christ. They do not guarantee hearts will change. Yet, John 20:30-31 says that the signs Jesus performed . . .

**. . . have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:31 (NASB)**

But we must notice the word "may." That is, signs do not guarantee that someone will believe in Jesus Christ because the spiritually blind cannot see. In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man thought that if someone were to return from the dead and visit his five brothers, they would repent and believe. But he was told,

**If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead. Luke 16:31 (NASB)**

The message is simple. We should quote and teach Scripture in order to encourage people to believe in Jesus Christ. They need to hear our God speak.

The second insight is that the rich man's approach to evangelism was wrong. To have someone return from the grave is like a miracle. But the rich man was told that if they did not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not believe someone from the grave. That is, if they will not believe what is written in the Scriptures, they will not believe anyone from the grave. The rich man thought that something more sensational than Scripture would cause people to believe. Sadly, that is occurring in some churches today. The teaching of Scripture does not seem to be powerful by itself to some pastors and teachers. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18 that the gospel is powerful all by itself.

**For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NASB)**

Sadly, some teachers of Scripture even think that adding fellowship to the teaching of Scripture is needed to get people to come and listen.

Often we miss the message that Christ sent to the church in Sardis in Revelation 3:1-4. Revelation 3:1 says the church was spiritually dead. Verse 4 reports that very few people were Christians. Yet, people thought that the church was spiritually alive. It must have been a very large church. Sadly, many believers have a wrong definition of spiritual success. Some people may attend a church like the ancient church in Sardis and think the church is on fire for God. But the size of a large church does not necessarily mean it is on fire for God or blessed of God.

When Jesus taught, He offended people. When Jesus taught, they heard they were sinners and would be eternally condemned. When Jesus taught, He explained that God is love. Proud people do not like such messages. As a result, few people walk through the narrow gate (Mathew 7:13-14). Few

loved the Good Shepherd. They considered Him to be an evil shepherd. So, verse 37 says only a minority of people believed in Jesus.

**HARDENED HEARTS JUDICIAALLY JUDGED.** Why did this occur? The answer is given in verses 38-41. They reveal a truth that makes some of us feel uncomfortable. Here is verse 38.

**This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?” John 12:38 (NASB)**

Immediately, the Holy Spirit tells us through the prophet Isaiah that it was prophesied few people would believe in Christ. He literally quotes Isaiah 53:1. The two questions in the verse imply very few people had believed. The first question is, “Who has believed our report?” The implied answer is very few. The second question is, “To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” That is, who has seen the power displayed by His signs? The answer is again - very few! Those were the facts. So, the prophecy confirmed that the people would and did reject their Messiah in spite of the prophecies He fulfilled, His teachings, and the signs He performed.

Now we wonder why they did not believe. Verse 39 gives us the answer when it says that God had prevented them from believing. Verse 40 quotes Isaiah 6:10 which tells us how God prevented the people from believing.

**For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, “HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM.” John 12:39-40 (NASB)**

So, Isaiah 53:1 prophesied that the people would not believe, and Isaiah 6:10 prophesied that God would blind their eyes and harden their hearts so they would not perceive and believe in Christ so as to be saved. The Greek word for a hardened heart is *poroo*. It means “to form a callus or a stone.” Their hearts were not soft. They had stony hearts which are hearts

that do not understand the Bible and have great difficulty knowing God (Mark 6:51-52). So why did God harden the hearts of the religious leaders and the people? There are two important points that we need to notice in verses 39-40.

The first important point is that God hardened their hearts. The verse does not tell us why. But Scripture reveals that God hardened the hearts of men because they had first hardened their own hearts and rejected Jesus during His ministry. That is the ultimate punishment for it results in eternal punishment. We will look at three examples. The first example is found in Exodus 7:13-14 where we are told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He was stubborn.

**Yet Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go.” Exodus 7:13-14 (NASB)**

Notice that a hardened heart is a stubborn one. It refuses to listen and believe. A hard heart is repeatedly stubborn. Then later in Exodus 8:15 and 22, we are told that Pharaoh hardened his heart again. As a result, God hardened his heart repeatedly (Exodus 4:21; 10:1, 20, 27; 14:17). Each time Pharaoh hardened his heart, his heart became progressively harder. Pharaoh had finally and ultimately rejected God, so God confirmed him in his hardness.

The second example is given to us in Matthew 13:10-15. It gives us another example of this principle when we are told that Jesus spoke in parables so that the people would not understand spiritual truth. Why? Verses 14-15 say because their hearts were dull. Then verse 16 adds that Jesus told the disciples they were blessed because they understood. Hard hearts do not understand truth because they have already rejected the truth that was given to them. If they continue rejecting, they reject more easily each time.

The third example occurs in Romans 1:22-24, 26, 28 in regards to sexual sins. These verses reveal God will give those who finally and ultimately reject Him over to their sin. He removes the restraints that hindered them from committing sin - not prevented them from sinning, but just slowed them down from sinning. They had hardened hearts. Eventually, God just “lets go” and gives them over to their hard hearts. It is

divine judgment.

The second important point we should notice is that God hardened the hearts of the religious leaders and of the people as part of His divine decree in eternity past to ensure that Christ was crucified on the cross. For Romans 11:11 reveals that because Israel had sinned by rejecting Christ, salvation was able to come to the Gentiles.

**But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Romans 11:11 (NASB)**

So, John 12:38-40 reveals that God not only planned our salvation, sent Christ to be our sacrifice, but He ensured that Christ would die on the cross for our sins. This is a masterful and insightful passage into the sinfulness of man's evil hearts. Because sinners had ultimately and finally rejected Christ, God was justified in confirming them in their rejection of Christ. It was an act of judicial judgment.

**SOFT HEARTS ACCEPT CHRIST.** Verse 41 reveals the rejection of Christ was foreknown by the prophet Isaiah himself. He knew it was going to occur.

**These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. John 12:41 (NASB)**

So Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke about Him. 1 Peter 1:10-12 is a fascinating verse for it says the ancient prophets tried to understand the very prophecies that were given to them by the Holy Spirit. The passage says they made careful searches and inquiries.

**As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10-12 (NASB)**

So Isaiah saw the glory of Christ. Most likely, just as the other prophets did, he searched the Old Testament Scriptures to know more about Him. I imagine he read the prophecies slowly and seriously. I wonder what he thought when he read chapter 53 of Isaiah? I wonder what he thought about Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7 and Micah 5:2-3?

Verse 41 says that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus. But what does that mean? The answer is given to us in John 1:14, which says that the people saw Christ's glory too! John 2:11 is more specific,

**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)**

The signs Jesus performed displayed His glory and revealed He was Deity. John 11:4, 40 says that God was glorified when Jesus raised Lazarus. When the people saw His miracles and heard His teaching, they saw His glory. Those who had soft hearts saw He was the God-man Himself. But the people with hard hearts did not understand what they saw. That is the result of sin upon a person. But Isaiah saw His glory six hundred years before He arrived and yet believed. But the hard-hearted people who saw Jesus face-to-face did not believe. Their unrepentant sin blinded their eyes.

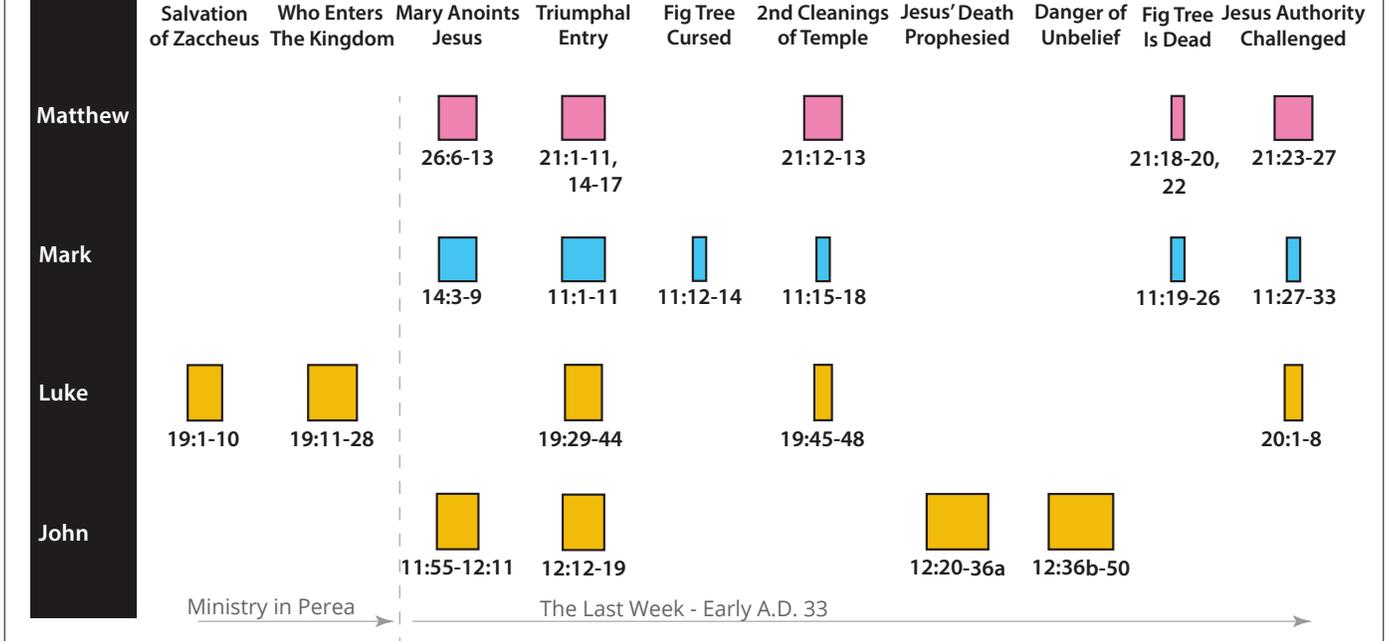
This is an important lesson for us. We do not need to be eyewitnesses of Jesus in order to see His glory. Isaiah was not an eyewitness, and we do not need to be an eyewitness of Jesus either in order to see the glories of Christ. This means that faith does not depend upon our being an eyewitness of Jesus' miracles and teachings. Distance and time is not the issue. Atheists and unbelievers do not need to see or to hear Jesus in person in order to believe in Jesus. They need to search for the true God and seek His forgiveness.

But John 12:42-43 says many of the rulers did believe in Christ.

**Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God. John 12:42-43 (NASB).**

# Life and Heart of Jesus

The Last Week - March A.D. 33



Many rulers believed in Christ. Verse 43 is important because it helps us to understand the individuals who believed in Christ at the end of His ministry were more concerned about themselves than Christ. So, they played it safe. They did not reveal they were followers of Christ. They were not the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). They were not lights to the world. We could say they hid themselves under a basket (Matthew 5:14-15). They were afraid to reveal that they believed in Jesus. They allowed Christ to be crucified. Yet, we can be thankful that they did not stop the evil proceedings that resulted in Jesus becoming the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

**CONCLUSION.** There are four important principles for us to remember. The first principle is that few people believe in Christ because God the Father did not choose them to believe in Christ. The second principle is that God faults those who reject Christ. The third principle is that God will confirm those who persistently refuse to believe in Christ in their unbelief by hardening their hearts. The third principle is that God wants us to understand why some people will never accept Christ. The fourth principle is that believers must not

hide ourselves under a basket but be bold for Christ and ready to die for Him.

Therefore, if you believe in Jesus Christ and want your sin to be forgiven, then ask the Father to forgive your sins and thank Him. Then please Him by living in obedience to Him and sharing the good news about Christ to others. In the next study you will learn the benefits of believing in Christ and the tragedy of rejecting Him.



