

# Echoes of Scripture

## Palm Sunday – Matthew 21:1-11

### Summary of Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus sends his disciples ahead of him to secure transportation for his entry into Jerusalem and when he arrives the crowd goes wild with their messianic royal expectations.

### Suggested Course of Study

- Read 2 Samuel 7
- Read Psalm 118
- Read Zechariah 9-14; focusing on 9:9-11 and 14:3-11
- Read Matthew 20:17-21:46

### Immediate Context

Matthew 20:1-16	The laborers in the vineyard	Matthew 21:12-17	Jesus cleanses the temple
Matthew 20:17-19	Jesus foretells his death #3	Matthew 21:18-22	Jesus curses the fig tree
Matthew 20:20-28	The mother of James and John	Matthew 21:23-27	Questioning Jesus' authority
Matthew 20:29-34	Jesus heals two blind men	Matthew 21:28-32	Parable of two sons
<b>Matthew 21:1-11</b>	<b>Jesus enters Jerusalem</b>	Matthew 21:33-46	Parable of the wicked tenants

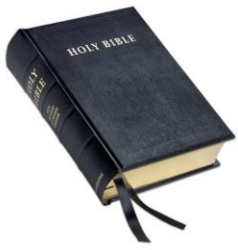
**HEADING TO JERUSALEM** – In Matthew 16:21, Jesus begins to talk about going to Jerusalem. In chapter 19, Jesus leaves Galilee and heads to the region beyond the Jordan. In chapter 20 verse 17, Jesus is heading up towards Jerusalem. In chapter 20 verse 29, they are leaving Jericho (the city of Palms).

**THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL** – The week preceding the Jewish Passover was a time when Jews from all over the civilized world would make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Jewish historian, Josephus, estimates that the pilgrims who gathered for Passover numbered somewhere above two million. The nationalistic hope for a Messianic liberator ran especially high during this time. As Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, the whole procession was cheering with expectation that Jesus would be the Messiah, the King of Israel, the Son of David, who would set his people free and restore the great Kingdom of God, fulfilling the promise of 2 Samuel 7:12-17.

### Key Words

**BETHPHAGE** – Βηθφαγή a village near Bethany, east of the Mount of Olives, on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. The name is transliterated from the Hebrew (Aramaic) name which means “house of green (unripe) figs”.

**MOUNT OF OLIVES** – The Mount of Olives is the central of three main summits of a range rising from the Kidron valley, east of the city and running north-south. Bethphage would have been on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. Mentioned in 2 Samuel 15:30 as King David fled Jerusalem weeping; Zechariah 14:4 in Zechariah's description of the Day of Yahweh where God will establish the kingdom of the Messiah over all the earth; and indirectly in Ezekiel where the prophet sees the glory of God depart from the temple (Ezekiel 10-11) and return to the temple (Ezekiel 43:2-5). Though not mentioned by name, this is also the location (near Bethany) of Jesus' ascension (see Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). It is also likely that the Mount of Olives was in view



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when Jesus taught that the person of faith could say to the mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” and it would happen (Matthew 21:21). And the Mount of Olives is Jesus’ frequent destination before his passion; particularly the Garden of Gethsemane located on the western side.

**VILLAGE AHEAD OF YOU** – Most likely this village was Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, as well as Simon the Leper. It is mentioned in verse 17 (Jesus goes to spend the night there) and in Matthew 26:6 where Jesus is anointed at the home of Simon the Leper.

**DONKEY AND A COLT** – In the Bible, a donkey or a mule was often the preferred mount of royalty. See Genesis 49:10-11 for the story of the royal figure who ties up his donkey to a vine so that he can celebrate with much wine and milk. Almost the exact opposite of this image of self-indulgence, Jesus borrows a donkey in order to stage his own royal entry into Jerusalem—knowing full well that he will be rejected and executed. Instead of tying up his mount in order to celebrate, Jesus arranges for the mounts to be untied and carry him to his fate of suffering in the royal city.

See 1 Kings 1:33-38 where King David commanded his servants to have Solomon ride the king’s mule as a sign that David had chosen Solomon to be his successor. Jesus is presenting himself not just as a king, but as the promised Messianic King of Israel who fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 9.

Finally, take a look at Revelation 19:11. There we have the prophetic announcement that the Messiah will come again. But this time, at his Second Coming, he will come mounted upon a war-horse.

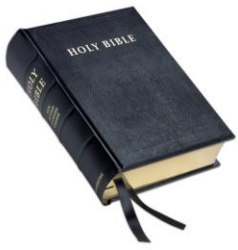
**THE LORD NEEDS THEM** – Beginning in chapter 8, Jesus is frequently called Lord. Jesus is only *ὁ κύριος* (‘the Lord’) elsewhere in Matthew in 3:3 in an Old Testament citation, but the regular use of *κύριε* in addressing Jesus as ‘Lord’ from the beginning of chap. 8 (see discussion at 7:21) probably has its counterpart in speaking about him as ‘the Lord’.

**SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHET** – Jesus deliberately entered Jerusalem upon a donkey in order to fulfill the Old Testament promise of a coming messianic king found in Zechariah 9:9. A close examination of this promise in its context reveals not merely a prediction of a coming Messiah, but also a description of His coming kingdom. In other words, Zechariah did not merely predict that the Messiah would come, but that He would come and establish His kingdom in a particular manner. This is the part of that prophecy that was missed both by the multitudes and by Jesus’ disciples. This is why He rode into Jerusalem upon a young donkey, rather than upon a chariot and war-horse.

Zechariah 9:9–13 (NRSV): <sup>9</sup> *Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* <sup>10</sup> *He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.* <sup>11</sup> *As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.* <sup>12</sup> *Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.* <sup>13</sup> *For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will arouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior’s sword.*

Notice several things about this prophecy:

- Notice that the messiah’s kingdom would bring peace not just to Jerusalem but to all nations.
- Notice that the Messiah’s kingdom would be ratified by the sacrifice of blood (see Zechariah 9:11). God promises that God will set God’s people free from this bondage because of the blood of God’s



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covenant with them. And that phrase looks backward and forward. First, “the blood of my covenant” looks backward to the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant. In Exodus 24:8, we find Moses ratified the Old Covenant by sprinkling sacrificed blood upon the altar and upon the people of Israel. Israel could only enter into covenant with God through the shedding of blood. Second, “the blood of my covenant” looks forward to the ratification of the New Covenant. When the Messiah would come to deliver God’s people from bondage there would once again be the sacrifice of blood. Jesus Himself would explicitly refer to this four days later in an upper room with His disciples when he instituted the Lord’s Supper (see Matthew 26:27-28) *“Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*

- Notice what will be accomplished: *“I will set your prisoners free from the bondage of the waterless pit.”* Literally, “the waterless pit” is a dry cistern. You may recall that Joseph’s brothers had thrown him into such a pit and he ended up being taken to Egypt. Figuratively, it’s a reference to the bondage of captivity into which God’s people had fallen. On another level it serves as a reference to the bondage of sin.

### OTHER PROPHETIC VOICES

**Isaiah** spoke of a king coming from the line of David who would establish peace and rule with justice and righteousness forevermore (see Psalms 72; 89:4; Isaiah 9:2-7). He spoke of a new David, a “shoot from the stump of Jesse,” who would be concerned for the poor, rule with righteousness, and bring about shalom, pictured as peace among people and animals (see Psalm 72; Isaiah 11:1-9).

**Jeremiah** promised a “righteous branch” from David’s line, who would rule with justice and righteousness and bring about a time of peace (see Psalms 72; 89:4; Jeremiah 23:5-6).

**Micah** identified David’s home town Bethlehem as the place from where the king would come and promised that he would rule to the ends of the earth and bring about peace (see Psalm 2; Psalm 72; Micah 5:2-5).

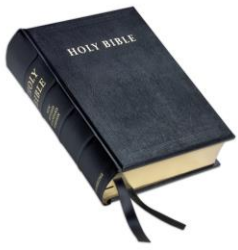
*Source: Matthew for Everyone by N.T. Wright*

**CLOAKS** – See 2 Kings 9:13 for the story of the anointing of Jehu as King of Israel. In this story, the officers of the armies hear what the prophet has said and done and so they spread their cloaks on the steps and blew the trumpet and announce “Jehu is king.” The laying down of their cloaks was like laying out the red carpet; a sign of honor and loyalty. Spreading their cloaks for Jesus shows that the people and the disciples thought they knew what was going on; they had great expectations for what would happen next.

**CUT BRANCHES** – God commanded that branches be waved with joy at the Festival of Booths; which doubled as an annual seven-day harvest festival (see Leviticus 23:40). By the time of Jesus, the palm had become a symbol of Jewish freedom; with its connection to the Exodus story as well as the stories of the Maccabees;

1 Maccabees 13:51–52—*On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred seventy-first year, the Jews entered it with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel. Simon decreed that every year they should celebrate this day with rejoicing.*

2 Maccabees 10:6–8—*They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place.*



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*They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.*

By Jesus' day, celebrating by waving palm branches was an act of defiance against the Romans; a symbol of their brave ancestors who rose up against the Greeks.

Furthermore, Revelation tells us that the Messiah will be totally victorious and that there will be a future victory celebration very much like the one celebrated on Palm Sunday.

Revelation 7:9-10—*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

**HOSANNA** – The Sukkot prayer, the Hosanna, Psalm 118:23-27; a Psalm commonly sung during the Passover festival.

**BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!** – See 1 Samuel 17:45 where David is talking to Goliath and he tells him "I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts." (The message: You will be destroyed because God's power is greater than your spear or javelin). See also Psalm 118:26.

**SON OF DAVID** – See Matthew 20:30-31; the blind men have this insight. See Matthew 21:15-16. An alternative, and infrequently used, title for Messiah. The messianic promises of the Old Testament often focus specifically on David's son, for example 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:19-37. Joseph, Mary's husband, is called 'son of David' by the angel in Matthew 1:20. This was, after all, the city which King David had made his capital a thousand years before, and for nearly half that time the Jews had been waiting and praying for a king like David to arrive and save them from oppression.

**THE HIGHEST HEAVEN** – See 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6, 6:18; Job 22:12; and Psalm 148:1-4.

**CITY IN TURMOIL** – ἐσεισθη from σείω meaning *shaken, stirred up, in turmoil*. This is the word from which we get our word "seismology"—the study of earthquakes. Matthew is saying that Jerusalem is "all shook up." Matthew uses this word, ἐσεισθη, on two other occasions in this Gospel—when the earth shook at Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51) and when a great earthquake preceded Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28:2).

Hear also a possible echo of Matthew 2:3, where King Herod and all Jerusalem with him are frightened when Herod hears the tale of the wise men who declared that the heavens were showing a sign (a star) that the Messiah had been born.

**PROPHET** – See Matthew 16:14; 21:46 where Jesus is called a prophet. The people wanted a prophet, but this prophet would tell them that their city was under God's imminent judgment (See Matthew 24).