

Bible Reading Challenge 40: MESSIAH – THE LAST WEEK

The last week in Jesus's life is sometimes called "Passion Week," relating to an old definition of the word Passion: "to affect (or afflict) with suffering," or "to show, affect, or be afflicted by deep feeling, especially sorrow." In other words, the time Jesus predicted after his transfiguration was close at hand, beginning with his entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

Everybody's talking now! Jesus used to tell people to keep quiet about his making them well, but small private healings are now big public events, which reach their peak with the raising of Lazarus. Jesus has raised the dead before: Jairus's daughter had been dead only a few hours at most, and the widow of Nain's son perhaps a day. But Lazarus has been dead and in the tomb three days, making it impossible to claim that he was just in a faint or suspended animation: the dude was *dead*, and everybody knew it. For Jesus to bring Lazarus out of the tomb was huge, and Jesus's enemies could no longer pretend he would quietly go away.

Months and years of conflict now lead to a plan: the scribes, Pharisees and temple officials will arrange this week to have Jesus arrested, though they have to be careful how they go about it. He's at the height of his popularity, so they can't just send the police after him in broad daylight—that could provoke a riot, the last thing they want. Then, all of a sudden, they find the perfect solution.

Jesus knows exactly what will happen, and why it has to happen. He will soon become the cornerstone—not just of Judea, or the Roman Empire, or the world of that time, but of all human history: "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone it will crush him" (Luke 20:18). From now on, everyone who has ever lived will either stand on Jesus as the rock, or be judged by him.

Our tour of Passion Week begins and ends with John:

Reading for this Week: John 11:12-36; Luke 19:20-38, Mark 14:1-25, John 17.

Further References: Genesis 49:10-11, Zechariah 9:9-10, Exodus 12:1-20

Key Verse: "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) [Or John 11:24: I am the resurrection]

Questions to Think and Talk About:

1. This week we read two anointing stories (remember that Christ, or Messiah, means "anointed one"). What similarities and differences do you see?
2. What reasons do the Pharisees and priests give for getting rid of Jesus in John 11? From various incidents in the reading this week, can you think of any others? What does John 11:51-53 say about Caiphas? What does 12:9-11 say about all of them?
3. How many moods does Jesus show in Luke 19?
4. Compare Luke 19:37-38 with Luke 2:10-14. Who is crying out "Glory to God in the highest" and why?
5. How does Jesus outsmart the Pharisees and Sadducees in Luke 20:1-8 and 19:26?
6. What was Passover all about? (See Exodus 12:1-20) What does it mean that this is Jesus' last meal?
7. List all the things Jesus asks his Father for in John 17. Who is he praying for in each case?

Activities:

- Make a timeline of the events we read about this week, from the raising of Lazarus to Passover.
- Research ancient burial customs of the Middle East and make a report. Are any of these customs still practiced?
- Draw a picture symbolizing John 13:35-36; compare with John 1:4-9.
- Produce a "readers theater" version of John 11 and 12: choose a narrator and assign a part to every character who speaks in this passage. The narrator will read everything that is not a direct quote and the other readers will read their own parts. Be dramatic!