

QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS ASK

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

MATTHEW 21:1-17



The Heart of the Matter

We Christians are notorious for answering the wrong questions — questions no one is asking. And when we do answer the right questions, we often do it in a way that doesn't connect — we either fail to identify with people's struggles or fail to answer in terms they understand. Christians need to take time to answer a few of the more significant biblical questions people have. And many of those questions have to do with the identity of Jesus. Who is He? Why did He come? What did He teach? How can I connect with Him? These are the same questions asked centuries ago by people who lived when Jesus did. Let's see how Matthew's gospel answers these questions.



Discovering the Way

1. Some Background Information

Matthew 21 appears to be a simple story, but between the lines we find a historical context that we often overlook. The triumphal entry took place only one week before Jesus's crucifixion. It began the last act in the drama of His life, occurring at the time of Passover, the single most significant season of celebration in Jewish life. Jerusalem was packed with people, including pilgrims. Within the crowded streets of Jerusalem we find Jesus's disciples, plus a growing number of followers who had listened to His teaching and witnessed His miracles. But the majority of those in the crowd just happened to be there and didn't know much about Jesus.



Tools for Digging Deeper



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2. An Unusual Celebration (Matthew 21:1–17)

Jesus's journey toward Jerusalem took Him along the dusty road from Bethany to Bethphage, over the crest of the Mount of Olives. Just before He reached the city, He paused to give His disciples some last-minute instructions. Then Jesus entered the city on a donkey, received the praise and the questions of the crowd, and cleansed God's temple.

- Jesus and His Disciples (21:1–7)
- The Messiah and His Multitude (21:8–9)
- The Savior and the City (21:10–11)
- The Lord and the Temple (21:12–17)



DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Passover

The Passover masses rumbled as they questioned, “Who is this Jesus?” Why did Jesus choose to enter Jerusalem during this important Jewish celebration?

The traditional Passover meal finds its roots in God's rescue of His people from Egyptian bondage. Before they fled for freedom, God commanded His people to sacrifice a lamb at twilight, spread the lamb's blood on the doorposts of the home, roast the lamb whole over a fire, eat bitter herbs and unleavened bread with the meal, and consume the meal while dressed to leave at a moment's notice (Exodus 12:3–11). Then the Lord passed over their homes as He struck down all the firstborn males in Egypt (12:29).

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Continued from previous page

The Passover feast, which commemorated God's mercy and deliverance, was celebrated throughout Jewish biblical history, if not regularly, then at least during times of faithfulness and obedience. By New Testament times, the Jews had added several elements to the traditional celebration, including the consumption of four cups of wine symbolizing God's redeeming work (Exodus 6:6–7): the cup of sanctification ("I will bring you out from under the burdens"); the cup of deliverance ("I will deliver you"); the cup of redemption ("I will also redeem you"); and the cup of praise ("I will take you for My people"). When Jesus drank from the cup at the Last Supper—itsself a Passover meal—many scholars believe He commented as He drank from the third cup, the cup of redemption (Matthew 26:27–28). Jesus had entered Jerusalem as the Lamb who would be led to slaughter—the Redeemer who would give Himself, not just for the Jews but also for you and me.¹



Starting Your Journey

The majority of the people in the crowded streets of our lives still have the same question: *Who is this Jesus?* And Matthew's account of the triumphal entry gives four answers to this most crucial question:

- *Jesus is a courageous Man.* It took inner strength to enter the hostile city, to stand alone, and to clean up the temple.
- *Jesus is a humble King.* He didn't demand royal treatment, and He took time to meet people's needs for healing.
- *Jesus is a patient Lord.* He willingly waited for His crown and accepted the insults and misunderstandings of the chief priests and scribes.
- *Jesus is the sinner's Savior.* Even though many of the bystanders didn't know the fullness of Jesus's identity, they cried out, "Hosanna!" which means, "Save us *now*!"

How would you answer questions about Jesus? Do you help others understand Jesus's identity?

ENDNOTE

1. Adapted from Insight for Living, "Exodus," in *Insight's Handbook of Old Testament Backgrounds: Key Customs from Each Book, Genesis–Esther* (Plano, Tex.: IFL Publishing House, 2013), 14.