



Nikolay Koshelev, Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, 1890–1918, oil on canvas, 50 x 94 cm, private collection. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

MATTHEW 21–23; MARK 11; LUKE 19–20; JOHN 12

JESUS'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY & FIRST DAYS IN JERUSALEM

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The last few days of Jesus's life are detailed in all four Gospels, though the timeline is different in the Synoptic Gospels than in John's Gospel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke organized their Gospels by location, not chronology. Everything they include about Jesus's Jerusalem ministry is telescoped into the last few days of His mortal life. On the other hand, John's Gospel is more chronological. It describes Jesus traveling back and forth to Jerusalem at least six times during His ministry, three of which were for the Passover festival (Jn 2:13; 6:4, 12–21). John's Gospel organizes Jesus's last week with the dates in the table below.

The timing in the Gospels is often misunderstood because each author put the Passover on a different day and because two Sabbaths in a row: the Passover Sabbath and the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. Also,

Table 1. Overview of Jesus's last week

Jewish day	Day <i>(from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.)</i>	Day count	Events	Reference
Nisan 8	Friday–Saturday	6 days before Passover, Sabbath day finishes	Jesus comes to Bethany, and Mary anoints Him	Jn 12:1
Nisan 9	Saturday–Sunday	5 days before Passover	Palm Sunday, triumphal entry	Jn 12:14–19
Nisan 10	Sunday–Monday	4 days before Passover	Jesus teaches, and Passover lambs are chosen and brought to Jerusalem	Ex 12:3
Nisan 11	Monday–Tuesday	3 days before Passover	Jesus teaches at temple and sleeps on the Mount of Olives	
Nisan 12	Tuesday–Wednesday	2 days before Passover	Jesus prepares for and begins the Last Supper	Jn 13:2
Nisan 13	Wednesday–Thursday	1 day before Passover, day 1 in tomb	Last Supper finished, Gethsemane, Jesus's trial, Crucifixion, and death by 3:00 p.m. when lambs are killed	
Nisan 14	Thursday–Friday	Passover, night 1 and day 2 in tomb	Jesus buried Thursday evening, Jews eat Passover	Lev 23:5
Nisan 15	Friday–Saturday	Night 2 and day 3 in tomb	Jesus organizes missionary work in the spirit world, weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread starts	1 Pe 3:18–20; D&C 138
Nisan 16	Saturday–Sunday	Night 3 in tomb, Resurrection morning	Jesus rises before dawn and performs at least five visitations on Easter Sunday	Jn 21; Lk 24

in that era days were counted in many different ways. It helps to remember that in the Jewish tradition, the new day started at night (about 6:00 p.m.).¹ The twelve hours of the night were divided into watches, and the twelve hours of daylight started at about 6:00 a.m. (known as the first hour; noon was the sixth hour, and so on). Ancient Jews counted even a portion of the daylight hours as a day. Also remember that all holy days were also called Sabbaths. According to John's Gospel, the year Jesus died, Passover began on Thursday night, followed by the weekly Sabbath starting Friday night.²

Six Days before Passover

Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem

The Mishnah recorded the command for every Jewish male to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover feast if they were physically able and lived within fifteen miles of the temple. Archeologists estimate the population

of Jerusalem at Jesus's time was 25,000. The estimate of pilgrims that came to the feast ranged from 85,000 to over 2.5 million.³ In addition to the pilgrims, all the priests of Aaron came to assist at the temple too. The center of the feast was the temple mount.

Mary anoints Jesus in Bethany—Jn 12:1–11

Jn 12:1. “*Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany.*” En route from the city called Ephraim to Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus and His traveling companions stopped in Bethany for a dinner party (Mt 26:6; Jn 12:1–2). We assume that the Sabbath had come to an end and the dinner party began after sundown on Saturday night.

Jn 12:2. “*There they made him a supper; and Martha served.*” This story shares similarities to two others that take place in Bethany, found in Mt 26:6 and Mk 14:3–9. The three accounts may be the same, but they contain minor differences. (Mark claims it took place two days before Passover, and John six days before; Matthew records an anointing of Jesus's head only.) Both dinner parties occurred in Bethany. John has Martha serving in the home where Lazarus is living. In a previous story, Luke referred to the home as Martha's house (Lk 10:38). Yet Matthew and Mark refer to it as Simon the Leper's home. However, it may still be the same house. As women were generally not allowed to own property, we assume the large home where Martha served was actually her husband's or father's home. If this is the same story, then Simon the Leper may have been a close relation and unable to live in his home because of his leprosy, leaving Martha and her siblings to care for the home.

Mary anointing Jesus in Bethany shortly before His death is a different story than that of the crying Galilean woman who washed Jesus's feet with her tears earlier in Jesus's ministry (Lk 7:36–38). Luke's unknown woman is labeled a sinner. That epithet, “sinner,” was given for minor social infractions, like a woman talking in public, as well as for offenses like immorality. Mary is honored as one of the most sensitive disciples of the Lord.

Centuries ago, Christians mixed up Mary of Bethany with Mary of Magdala and the unnamed crying woman from Galilee. Around the time of Bishop Gregory the Great (590–604), a Catholic feast was created to honor this fictional person. For centuries after this time in Catholicism, Mary Magdalene was known as a prostitute. With only limited circulation of biblical texts, Christians continued passing on this mistaken identity. We see the same problem perpetuated in fictional works today like *The Chosen*.

Jn 12:3. “*took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly.*” At the time of the KJV translation, a pound was twelve ounces. *Spike* meant “pure, or genuine.” Nard, known today as *nardostachys nardus jatamansi*, was a very costly fragrant plant oil from the Himalayan mountains in India.

Jn 12:3. “*and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair.*” Women were not to cut their hair and were to keep their faces and heads completely veiled in public. Yet, Mary used her hair as an expression of devotion. James E. Talmage explained the culture of anointings from that time:

To anoint the head of a guest with ordinary oil was to do him honor; to anoint his feet also was to show unusual and signal regard; but the anointing of the head and feet with spikenard, and in such abundance, was an act of reverential homage rarely rendered even to kings. Mary's act was an expression of adoration.⁴

Kelly Ogden published more details on the ointment:

Spikenard was a costly, scented ointment imported from the Himalayas. A pound of pure spikenard could be sold for over three hundred denarii, the better part of a year's wages. . . . The general term ointment is a translation of the Greek word *muron*, signifying perfumed oil or salve. The word *muron* is related to the word myrrh, this spice being used frequently in ointments. Olive oil was usually used as the base for ointments, to which spices like myrrh and spikenard were added (Ex 30:23–25.) In Jesus's day, ointments were commonly stored in alabaster boxes or jars.⁵

Jn 12:3 (BSB). *“the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”* Perfumes were important in the ancient world to cover the smells of daily life. Without refrigeration, plumbing, and garbage pickup, bad odors were a constant problem. Midrash Rabbah recorded, “The fragrance of a good perfume spreads from the bedroom to the dining room; so does a good name spread from one end of the world to the other.”⁶

Jn 12:5–6. *“Why was not this ointment sold? . . . not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief.”* The name Judas is the Greek equivalent of the name Judah. The Gospel of John foreshadows Judas's role by portraying him as a thief already taking some of the disciples' money.

Jn 12:7. *“Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.”* Jesus's response lets us know that He knew the timing of His death was close. He appreciated Mary's devotion. In rabbinic theology, almsgiving was “an act of justice,” while care for burial was an “act of charity,” a higher class of good works.⁷ (Note that JST, Mk 14:7 changes the verse to match Jn 12:7.)

Jn 12:10. *“the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death.”* News of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead was well enough known that the Jewish leaders wanted Lazarus killed too. The leaders were worried that Jesus's vast following posed a threat to the theological status quo and their delicate balance of power with Rome.

Five Days before Passover

Jesus rides a donkey down the Mount of Olives—Mt 21:1–4; Mk 11:4; Lk 19:28; Jn 12:12

Jn 12:12. *“On the next day.”* This traditionally became known as Palm Sunday. Only John tells us that it is now Nisan 10, or five days before the Passover feast. According to the law of Moses, Passover lambs are chosen on this day (Ex 12:3).

Lk 19:28. *“he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem.”* At that time, one traveling to Jerusalem always “ascended” to the city because of its holiness—no matter where one traveled from or what geographic altitude they started at. With the temple there, it was metaphorically the highest and holiest place on earth to the ancient Jews.⁸

Mt 21:1 (Mk 11:1; Lk 19:29; Jn 12:12). *“they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were came to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives.”* Bethphage is thought to be on the crest of the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem. Its name means “house of affliction” or “house of dates,” and it is on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem (where Jesus set the parable of the good Samaritan). Rabbis referred to a village “with a similar name whose outer wall was the official city limit of Jerusalem.”⁹

Mt 21:2 (Mk 11:2; Lk 19:30). *“Go into the village . . . ye shall find an ass.”* The Old Testament is filled with promises, types, and shadows of the coming Messiah. At least two Old Testament prophecies and patterns are being fulfilled with this event:

- Gen 22:5 foreshadows Jesus going up to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed, just as Abraham told his servants: “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy [Isaac] will go over there and worship” (ESV).
- Gen 49:10–11 is Jacob’s blessing to Judah: “Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt.”
- Zech 9:9 prophesies that the promised king will come riding in on a donkey: “Thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

Only the Gospel of Matthew mentions two donkeys (the mother and colt); the other Gospels mention only one. Perhaps Matthew interpreted Zech 9:9 differently. We note that Matthew recorded double numbers in several places when compared to numbers recorded in parallel stories in the other Gospels.¹⁰ Also, Matthew’s citations of the Old Testament are recorded in a slightly different form than what we find in our scriptures today.¹¹

Mk 11:4. *“colt tied by the door.”* The Greek for “door” here is also translated as “gate, or entrance,” but the textual scholar Joel Marcus points out that it is similar to the Greek word for “vine,” which would connect the prophecy from Gen 49:11 closely with Jesus’s role as the vine.¹²

Mt 21:4. *“All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet.”* This is the twelfth of fourteen times that the Gospel of Matthew repeats this message to highlight Jesus fulfilling Old Testament prophecies.¹³ These citations call out Matthew’s focus and provide structure.

Triumphal entry into Jerusalem—Mt 21:1–10; Mk 11:1–11; Lk 19:29–44; Jn 12:12–19
Jn 12:12–13. *“much people . . . when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him.”* Throngs of people followed the custom of coming together to honor a national liberator. Matthew and Mark mention people cutting off live branches

to wave, with only John specifying they used palm fronds to welcome Jesus as a great leader. Palm trees were a symbol of peace, victory, and fertility. They were usually associated with the Feast of the Tabernacles or Dedication (Jews imported palm fronds to build booths around the temple). Some scholars interpret the gesture of waving palm fronds on Palm Sunday as “evocative of Maccabean nationalism.”¹⁴

Mt 21:8 (Mk 11:8; Lk 19:36). *“a very great multitude spread their garments in the way.”* John does not include the detail that the disciples spread their clothes on the donkey and on the road. The other addition, “Blessed is the King of Israel,” is specifically added for Jesus as the King of kings. This is similar to Zeph 3:17: “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save.” The next verse, Zeph 3:18, also fits with the death of Lazarus, which was the previous scene: “I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly.”

Jn 12:15. *“behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt.”* All four Gospels include the fulfillment of Zech 9:9–10. When Jesus rides in on a donkey, He is following the example of King Solomon. Jesus acts as a king of peace, not one ready for battle (which would be the message if he had ridden in on a horse). Jesus was not a Zealot trying to overthrow the political landlords. He does not fulfill the hope of the conquering messiah yet. John’s account has Jesus finding the donkey after receiving the crowd’s acclamation—unlike the Synoptic versions, which have the disciples fetching the young donkey in Bethphage.

Mt 21:9 (Mk 11:9; Jn 12:13). *“Hosanna.”* This word initially was a plea for deliverance but evolved to become an expression of adoration. It literally means “Save, please!” or “Oh, save now!” At that time, the word may have lost its original meaning, expressing only praise.

Mt 21:9. *“Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!”* All four Gospels include the cheering crowd chanting or singing this phrase from Ps 118:26 (this psalm is recited as part of Passover meal). The crowd misunderstands Jesus’s intent and hopes that He will become their king. The Gospels each include references of the kingship promised to David’s heirs in 2 Sam 7:12–26. Each Gospel includes additional words of praise uttered by the crowd:

- “Hosanna to the Son of David! . . . Hosanna in the highest” (Mt 21:9)
- “Blessed be the kingdom of our father David . . . : Hosanna in the highest” (Mk 11:10)
- “Blessed be the King . . . : peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” (Lk 19:38)
- “Blessed is the King of Israel” (Jn 12:13)

Jn 12:19. *“The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing?”* The Jewish leaders are jealous of Jesus’s following and are fearful that it will ruin their relationship with Rome. The phrase “the world” in this verse is a Semitic idiom for “everyone.”

Lk 19:39–40 (BSB). *“Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!’ ‘I tell you,’ He answered, ‘if they remain silent, the very stones will cry out.’”* In this rare event of Jesus accepting praise, the leaders who oppose Him find fault and denounce Him for it. But Jesus, knowing His past and future, announces that even though the leaders don’t see it, He is their God. Even the stones are willing to testify that He is the Creator.

Lk 19:41. “When he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it.” Luke alone mentions Jesus weeping over Jerusalem because its inhabitants would not repent. Jesus prophesies of the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in AD 68–70 and the destruction of the temple. His claim that the stones would not be left “upon another” seemed impossible. They were enormous blocks and so carefully cut that they did not need mortar. Most weighed more than five tons, and some weighed up to eighty tons.

Synoptics’ cleansing of the temple—Mt 21:12–16; Mk 11:15–18; Lk 19:45–48

As discussed earlier, each Gospel records that Jesus cleansed the temple only once. John records it happened at the beginning of Jesus’s ministry (Jn 2:13–17), and the others place it on different days during His last week when they record everything that happened in Jerusalem. John’s timing appears more feasible because by the last week of Jesus’s life, the local leaders were already planning on killing Him. Cleansing the temple then would have triggered them to put Jesus to death days before the Passover.

Herod’s expansions and flourishing touches to the second temple were still underway during Jesus’s lifetime (20 BC–AD 63). Some Jews were upset by the flamboyant excesses and materialistic focus of the temple. A group known as the Essenes were upset enough that they stopped worshiping at the temple and chose to worship God out in the desert. They became the most extreme sect of Judaism in living the letter of the law.¹⁵ Jesus physically cleansing the temple from the money changers who sold in the court of the Gentiles also represented the need for a spiritual cleansing of the people and place.

At that time corruption crept into the temple not just through those seeking more money but also through the political and financial motives of the leaders. God called the high priest to be descendants of Aaron and to serve for life, but Herod had effaced the sacred nature of the high priest’s role by making the position a short-term political honor, thus fostering priesthood aristocracy. Chief priests vied for the position, and the high priest was changed regularly under Herod’s reign.¹⁶

Symbolism of the Mosaic tabernacle. The law of Moses outlined a ritual focus on the tabernacle’s vicarious sacrifice and cleaning. Nearly every aspect of the Mosaic temple worship typified the promised Messiah. The ritual priestly path included the washing, anointing, clothing, and vicarious sacrificing of pure, unblemished animals. The holy sanctuary took the priests back to a figurative Creation, the Garden of Eden, and possibly to God’s presence again. The priestly path represented the way back to the tree of life (Gen 3:24). The menorah was a tree of light that represented the tree of life. As the high priest performed all the vicarious sacrifices and ritualized cleansing on the Day of Atonement, he symbolically returned to the presence of God by entering the Holy Place. He passed the table of shewbread (or bread of his presence), the menorah, and the table of incense to the veil, where he communed with God (and mentioned His sacred name ten times). At last on that sacred day, once a year, he was allowed to enter into God’s throne room, known as the most holy place, or Holy of Holies (Lev 16; 2 Chr 4:22).

The temple had been cleansed at other points in Jewish history also. Over a century earlier, the priests who joined the Maccabean Revolt attempted to cleanse the temple from the pollutions caused by the Greek ruler Antiochus IV (2 Mac 10:5). Jesus’s cleansing removed the moneymakers in the outer courtyard for a time. Yet, it appears He did not touch the sacred courtyards of the sanctuary (which housed the Holy Place and Holy of Holies). That cleansing figuratively took place during Jesus’s suffering and death. As the veil was rent, the inner cleansing took place, opening a way for all cleansed through covenant to enter the presence of God.

Mt 21:12 (Mk 11:15; Lk 19:45). “**Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold.**” The Greek word here for “cast out” is elsewhere translated “exorcism” (Mk 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22). This connects those who profane the temple with the devil’s work. Travelers coming to the temple needed to exchange their currency with the temple Tyrian to purchase unblemished animals for the sacrifices, but it appears that the exchange process had gone awry and that moneymaking was corrupting the temple.

Mt 21:13. “**My house shall be called the house of prayer.**” The temple being cleansed was a sign of the promised Messiah.¹⁷ To answer His attackers, Jesus quotes one of His favorite books of scripture—Isaiah (56:7). Matthew includes Jesus quoting “Esaias” (Isaiah) eight times (twice without noting the prophet’s name).¹⁸ He often cites scripture to answer attacks from the devil and the Pharisees. Jesus goes on to mention that He will also heal the blind and lame—both of which were also understood to be messianic signs.

Mt 21:16. “**Out of the mouth of babes . . . thou hast perfected praise?**” This is Ps 8:2, from the Jewish hymnal. In the KJV version of the Bible, the end of the psalm is different: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightiest still the enemy and the avenger.” Jesus quotes the Psalms eleven times—more than any other book of scripture.¹⁹

Jesus foretells His death to pilgrims in Jerusalem—Jn 12:20–25

Jn 12:20–21. “**certain Greeks . . . saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.**” More Jews lived outside of Palestine than did inside. The Greeks in this encounter probably either were Jews living in the diaspora or were God-fearing men. At the time, a God-fearing man was a convert to Judaism who lived the law of Moses without undergoing the dangerous ritual of adult circumcision, which had a 50 percent fatality rate. Because they did not have to undergo surgery, it was easier for women to convert to Judaism (this is seen several times in the book of Acts and in the Pauline epistles).

In Jn 12:21, the Greek word translated as “see” also means “to inspect, examine, or know.” On a broader scale, this may be an example of Gentiles seeking Jesus. John just referenced this idea in 11:52, which points to God’s intent to save the Gentiles too (even if these Greeks were converts or Jews from the diaspora, they are identified as foreigners). John emphasizes that they came, but we never learn what happens to them. It is their coming that John finds important rather than any interaction they may have had with the Lord.

Jn 12:22. “**Philip cometh and telleth Andrew.**” Philip and Andrew are acting as good missionary companions here and are doing their duties as Apostles, or “those sent.”

Jn 12:23. *“The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.”* Jesus answers the Greek men’s question by foretelling His death and glory. Was He finished preaching to Israel?

Jn 12:24 (NIV). *“a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, . . . it produces many seeds.”* Jesus explains that seeds must die to bear fruit and then gives a second example of the hope of a better afterlife. Both demonstrate that Jesus must die in order for humankind to achieve eternal life. These themes are repeated five times in the Synoptic Gospels.²⁰ The Gospels’ repetition demonstrates how important it is to understand the necessity of Jesus’s death to God’s plan.

Jn 12:27. *“Now is my soul troubled.”* This is the only place that John alludes to Jesus’s agony before the cross (John does not record the suffering in Gethsemane).

Jn 12:28. *“Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, . . .”* This is the first time in John that the Father has spoken from heaven (at Jesus’s baptism, John records only the sign of the dove, not the voice of the Father; see Jn 1:33). The voice from heaven fulfills prophecy from the apocryphal literature, *The Testament of Levi* 18:6–7: “The skies shall be opened and sanctification shall come upon him from the Temple of glory with the Father’s voice as from Abraham to Isaac; and the glory of the Highest shall be uttered over him.”²¹

Jn 12:29–30. *“it thundered. . . . This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.”* Not all people understand heavenly voices, so thunder is used to describe the unintelligible voice of the Lord—just like in 1 Sam 12:18, 1 Ne 17:45, and 3 Ne 11:4. When the Father’s voice is heard in the New Testament, it identifies the Son.

Jn 12:31. *“Now is the judgment of this world.”* Jesus begins His last words of public ministry with judgment. The “prince of this world” is Satan, the one who deceives, usurps, and counterfeits.

Jn 12:32. *“if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”* Jesus’s death is part of the plan (see Isa 53:1–9; 65:2). When He is lifted up on His cross, His outstretched arms will continue to draw all humankind to Him.

Jn 12:34. *“who is this Son of man?”* The audience did not understand the title “Son of man” since their scripture applied it to mortals too (especially to Ezekiel). Restoration scripture teaches that God is called Man of Holiness (Mose 6:57), making the title “Son of Man” synonymous with the title “Son of God.” This question references verses like Isa 9:7; Ezk 37:25; Ps 89:4; 110:4.

Jn 12:35. *“Yet a little while is the light with you.”* Again the theme of light and darkness appears in John. Here it reflects the message that the disciples should walk with Jesus while they can. If we are not walking with Him, when darkness or temptations come upon us we won’t know where we are going.

Summary and evaluation of Jesus’s ministry to His own people—Jn 12:37–46

Jn 12:37. *“they believed not on him.”* John’s Gospel demonstrates how Jesus’s ministry fulfilled a Suffering Servant passage from Isa 53:1: “Who hath believed our report?” Mt 13:14 also quotes the same verse in a way similar to Isa 6:10 and Isa 44:18.

Jn 12:38. *“to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?”* The quote from Isa 53:1 continues and can be understood on multiple levels. The Lord’s literal arm was revealed to some, like the brother of Jared (Eth 3). His arms of mercy and justice are also extended, and they are revealed to temple covenant makers. Throughout the history of the world, the Lord has been rejected, as explained by Isaiah.²² Next Jesus quotes Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God (Isa 6:10).

Jn 12:42. *“chief rulers.”* Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were two of those rulers who believed. Yet these rulers “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” so did not publicly confess their discipleship yet (Jn 12 :43). Like in Lehi’s dream of the tree of life, the scoffing of the great and spacious building kept many away. These rulers kept their belief silent for fear of the other Jewish leaders.

Jn 12:46. *“I am come a light into the world.”* John concludes Jesus’s ministry with the same themes from the prologue: Logos, light and darkness, judgment, and the Son as a representation of the One who sent Him.

Four Days before Passover

Return to Bethany and cursing of the fig tree—Mt 21:17; Mk 11:19; Lk 21:37

Mk 11:19 (Mt 21:17; Lk 21:37). *“when even was come, he went out of the city.”* Matthew has Jesus and His traveling companions (the Apostles and the Galilean women) going to Bethany, a village approximately a couple of miles east of Jerusalem on the back side of the Mount of Olives. Luke has the company sleeping “in the mount” of Olives. The slight discrepancy is a function of oral history, authors’ different memories, and different ways of saying the same thing.

Mk 11:13 (Mt 21:19). *“seeing a fig tree afar off . . . he found nothing but leaves.”* Matthew and Mark record the fig tree story slightly differently—Mark spreads this incident over two days, and Matthew has it happening all at once. We assume the story was included for more reasons than to show Jesus’s disappointment. Full leaves yet no fruit symbolize hypocrites, those people who have an outward appearance of being whole yet who are not producing good fruits. The story also speaks of the prophecy in Jer 8:13: “There will be no figs on the tree” (NIV). Furthermore, in modern scripture the Lord revealed that it constitutes an eschatological sign: “And they shall learn the parable of the fig tree, for even now already summer is nigh”²³

Mt 21:21 (NIV; also Mk 11:23). *“if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go.’”* Jesus finds another chance to teach about faith. If disciples can develop their faith, they will find it to be more powerful than natural laws.

Mt 21:22 (JST; also Mk 11:24). *“whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, in faith believing, ye shall receive.”* We learn that God hears every prayer, but in order for Him to answer our prayers, we must believe. When He visits the Nephites, Jesus also includes faith as a qualification needed for God to answer

prayers. From the Nephite text we find one more requirement for receiving answers from God. We must ask for that “which is right” (3 Ne 18:20). We can always trust that God knows more than we do and that He will give us what we need most in the eternal scheme. With the combination of these (believing, asking in faith, and asking for the right things—plus humility and patience), God will work His miracles.

Chief priests question Jesus’s authority—Mt 21:23–27; Mk 11:27–33; Lk 20:1–8

Mt 21:23 (Mk 11:27; Lk 20:1) “chief priests.” During the late second temple period, chief priests came from wealthy Aaronic families who were willing to use their money and political prowess to gain these positions. They were Sadducees whose main role was to oversee temple functions—including its buildings, treasures, and the like. In the records from this time, we find corruption and financial extortion.²⁴

Mt 21:23. “elders.” This Greek word, *presbuteros*, refers to “a *mature man* having seasoned judgment or experience.”²⁵ Nearly half of the seventy times we find this word in the New Testament, it refers to leaders of the Jews. This could include leaders in the synagogue and Sanhedrin or even priests.

Mk 11:27. “scribes.” Scribes were more than clerks or secretaries. They were trained to draft legal documents including marriage and divorce contracts, inheritance documents, loans, and land sales. They were also professional theologians. Every village needed at least one.

Mt 21:23. “By what authority doest thou these things?” It appears that these leading men have devised a scheme to discredit Jesus. They hope to trap Him on the issue of authority to teach and act as He does. The Jewish nation was built on the law of Moses and its later rabbinic interpretations known as the oral laws of Moses. All teaching needed to follow these traditions. Outside of the Aaronic and Levitical blood lines, a teacher gained authority from his master teacher. After years of education, one was ordained to the office of rabbi, elder, or judge.

Mt 21:24–25 (JST; also Mk 11:29–30; Lk 20:3–4). “I will also ask you one thing. . . . Was the baptism of John from heaven or man?” Jesus turns the tables and asks His accusers a question. The answer to His question becomes the answer to theirs. Yet they see Jesus’s question as a trap and refuse to answer. Jesus responds with four parables as recorded in Mt 21:28–22:14 (only one parable each are recorded in Mark and Luke). The stories allow Him to teach on several levels in a way that helps them (and us) really understand His authority.

Parable of the two sons—Mt 21:28–32

The English translation of this parable obscures a large part of its meaning. In English the parable sounds like a lesson on acting on our promises, not just volunteering to serve God. But the Greek text has a deeper message that allows us to better see how this parable answers the questions of where Jesus received authority and who gave it to Him. Jesus ties the story back to John the Baptist, showing how the prophet testified of Jesus’s authority, and then applies to His questioners the condemnation of only giving lip service to God.

Mt 21:28. “a certain man had two sons.” One way to read this parable deals specifically with the question asked, “Who gave you this authority?” (Mt 21:23 NIV). The Greek text can be interpreted as referring to the premortal life when Jesus received authority from God. The two sons may refer to Jehovah and Lucifer.

Mt 21:29. “I will not.” John and Jeannie Welch have explained that the text here can be rendered, “I do not want to . . . but afterwards . . . reconciled himself to the task.”²⁶ The first son’s answer thus can be understood as being, “Not my will” or “Not as I will,” meaning that he reconciled himself and went.

Mt 21:30. “the second . . . said, I go, sir: and went not.” The second son is literally called “the other” and represents the opposition. The Greek text does not say, “I go”; it says simply, “I” (*ego*), as in “my way.”²⁷ By applying the context offered in Mose 4:1–2, we learn that premortally, the Father asked Jehovah and Lucifer to help Him with this earth, but only Jehovah submitted to the Father’s will. This Grand Council in Heaven is where Jesus received His authority.

Mt 21:32 (JST). “John came . . . and bore record of me, and ye believed him not.” Jesus’s dialogue returns to His question about John the Baptist’s heaven-sent authority. The JST addition testifies that when John the Baptist prepared the way of righteousness, he prepared the way for Jesus. Jesus’s challenge suggests that by rejecting the prophet John the Baptist’s authority, the leaders also rejected their Messiah and His message, authority, and salvation. The Book of Mormon taught the same message about rejecting the prophet—the words of the prophets represent authority to speak for God.²⁸ In the Book of Mormon, 2 Ne 25:18–19 also prophesied that the Jews would reject their Messiah.

*Parable of the wicked husbandmen—Mt 21:33–46; Mk 12:1–12; Lk 20:9–19*²⁹

Mk 12:1 (Mt 21:33; Lk 20:9). “A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it.”

Jesus begins with a familiar story from Isa 5:2–7 about a good farmer who carefully planted a vineyard. (It also sounds like Jac 5:3.) We see evidence that Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree was known in the Jewish world.³⁰ Isa 5:2–7 and Jac 5 helps us understand the symbolism of the phrases “dugged” and “hedged it round about” as demonstrations of divine nurturing. The vineyard of the Lord becomes the house of Israel.

Mt 21:34 (Mk 12:2; Lk 20:10). “he sent His servants.” God’s servants include His prophets. The husbandmen or workhands abuse the owner’s servants. Their cruel and exaggerated measures sound extreme, but Jesus frequently fills His parables with shocking hyperbole. It keeps his audience engaged, which opens new ways to learn. In this parable, Jesus answers the question about His authority by introducing the heir. The heir’s murder in the parable foreshadows Jesus’s arrest in Gethsemane and death in Golgotha.

Mt 21:41 (Mk 12:9; Lk 20:16). “destroy those wicked men.” When the Jewish leaders condemned the wicked husbandmen, they passed judgment on themselves.

Mt 21:42 (Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17). “Did ye never read in the scriptures . . .” Jesus quotes a very well-known passage from Ps 118. It was part of the Hallel, or six psalms that Jews regularly recite in ceremonies.³¹ Jews had a tradition that a stone first rejected by the builders later becomes the chief cornerstone. The “head of the corner” was the stone used at the building’s corner to bear the weight of two walls. It

functioned like a capstone and was crucial to the whole structure. Other Old Testament scriptures also describe important stones (Dan 2:34–35, 44–45; Isa 8:14–15). Even though the KJV refers to Jesus as a carpenter (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), the underlying Greek word, *tektōn*, means “builder.” *Tektōns* built with stone and wood, but since buildings were made of cement and stone and since wood was scarce in the area, it is not surprising that Jesus uses images of rocks and stones more often than of trees or wood. These details suggest that Joseph and, later, Jesus were stonemasons.

Mt 21:44 (Lk 20:18). “**grind him to powder.**” This description is a metaphorical definition of the word *contrite*. We must become broken hearted and contrite to follow in Christ’s footsteps.

Mt 21:51 (JST). “**I am the stone.**” The JST addition gives a long dialogue between Jesus and His disciples explaining the parable. “*I am the head of the corner. These Jews shall fall upon me, and shall be broken. And the kingdom of God shall be taken from them, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof; (meaning the Gentiles.) Wherefore, on whomsoever this stone shall fall, it shall grind him to powder.*”

Parable of the marriage of the king’s son—Mt 22:1–14

In Matthew’s Gospel, this is the third parable answering the leaders’ question about Jesus’s authority. The Lord tells a story about those who were given authority but do not live up to its requirements and are killed for their wickedness. In turn, all are invited to God’s banquet, but only those willing to be washed and clothed as God directs will be allowed to have a place at the feast. Jesus’s authority was not just given but earned. Likewise, His disciples must earn authority by obedience to the King.

The parable of the wedding feast is similar to that of the ten virgins: those not prepared will not be given a place at God’s banquet, or the heavenly kingdom. Across scripture we find wedding images to describe God’s relationship with His people.³² The banquet represents the joys of God’s kingdom. A few troublesome verses will be highlighted.

Mt 22:7 (JST). “**when the king heard that his servants were dead, he was wroth.**” The chosen guests act disrespectfully, ignore their king’s invitation, and even kill his servants. Their wickedness is punished. The message of accountability here can seem harsh. Jesus always taught the need for repentance to avoid punishment. Within the context of our Savior’s love, God’s punishment will actually open the way for the wicked to stop sinning, possibly see their folly, and repent in the next life.

Mt 22:9–10. “**Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage . . . both bad and good.**” God’s graciousness is stretched out to all; His mercy is extended to everyone. It is the individual who chooses to accept or reject the invitation to His banquet. Jesus emphasizes the importance of agency again at the end of the parable (Mt 21:14).

Mt 22:11 (BSB). “**not dressed in wedding clothes.**” This is reminiscent of the Old Testament account from Zech 3:3–4, in which the high priest has a vision of an angel but “was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel.” The angel then explains to the high priest, “See, I have removed

your iniquity, and I will clothe you with splendid robes” (Zech 3:3–4 BSB; in the EXV, “splendid robes” is rendered “pure vestments”). Once the priest is clothed, the angel puts a “mitre upon his head” (KJV), “a pure diadem” (ISV), or “a clean priestly turban” (CEV). Finally, the high priest is dressed appropriately to be in the presence of angels.

As is the case with many parables, having some knowledge of the historical context helps readers to understand this parable. In the ancient world, people invited to a special event, even to a kingly meal, must dress appropriately.³³ In the parable, it appears that some guests accept the king’s invitation but are not willing to comply or follow the royal protocol for dress. Jesus teaches that being invited to enter the kingdom of God is not enough; guests must follow His rules to become true disciples. The heavenly dress or robes are described in scripture as the robes of righteousness.³⁴ Yet, the parable is not about clothing. Rather it is about the importance of putting on godly attributes. The parable warns those who reject Jesus’s invitation to come unto Him and those who do not come on His terms. As John and Jeannie Welch explained, “these are cautionary tales to all disciples: look to your own life and behaviors.”³⁵

Mt 22:14. “many are called, but few are chosen.” Jesus’s warning does not speak of a God who predestines some to be chosen. On the contrary, Jesus often speaks of stewardships, responsibility, choice, and agency. Jesus is denouncing those who expect a free ride on their birthright and so do not develop godly traits. The Lord revealed as part of the Restoration that we can choose to be chosen: “Few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the power of heaven, and that the power of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:34–36). We choose to be chosen when we obey the principles of righteousness—gentleness, meekness, and love.

Tribute to Caesar—Mt 22:15–22; Mk 12:13–17; Lk 20:20–26

Mt 22:17 (Mk 12:14; Lk 20:22). “*Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?*” Herodians and Pharisees, two opposing parties, usually do not work together on anything. Herodians hoped to maintain power among the family of Herod; they did everything they could—including practically selling their souls to Rome—in hopes of maintaining power in that family. And Pharisees, of course, were the ultrapius men obsessed with exact obedience to the ten thousand oral laws tacked onto the law of Moses. The two diametrically opposed groups are mentioned to show how desperate they are to ensnare Jesus and find a reason to kill Him. The men begin with flattery and then ask about the volatile issue of Roman taxes.

Mt 22:18–19 (Mk 12:15; Lk 20:23–24). “*Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money.*” Jesus saw through the questioners’ pretended sincerity and taught an important lesson.

Mt 22:20–21 (JST; also Mk 12:16–17; Lk 20:24–25). “*Whose image is this . . . [render] unto God the things that are God’s.*” Jesus has no problem paying taxes, but He uses this opportunity to teach an important lesson. Gen 1:26–27 teaches that all humankind, both male and female, is created

in the image of God. The Lord asks that children and servants of God put on His image. (In the ancient world, some people even put an image of their god on their forehead.) Alma taught a similar message: “Have ye received his *image* in your countenances?” (Alma 5:14; emphasis added).

Marriage after the Resurrection—Mt 22:23–33; Mk 12:18–27; Lk 20:27–39

Lk 20:27 (Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18). “**Then came to him certain of the Sadducees.**” After Jesus stumped the Jerusalem Herodians and Pharisees, another opposing party steps up to try to entrap Him. The Sadducees focused on the temple and believed that only the Five Books of Moses were scripture.³⁶ As a result, when the temple was destroyed in AD 70, few of their sect and writings survived (one surviving record, *Ecclesiasticus* [also known as *Sirach*], is in the Apocrypha). Sadducees made up the majority of the chief priests.

Mt 22:28 (Mk 12:19–20; Lk 20:28–29). “**in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?**” Generally, Sadducees did not believe in life after death but felt that “one is survived by one’s good reputation and by one’s children.”³⁷ So the silly example was not a sincere question but a common practice of Jewish debate of the law. They are trying to find fault. The story describes an exaggerated example of a levirate marriage in which a woman married seven brothers. Deuteronomy describes the practice, which was given to make sure families took care of widows and kept their property within the family.³⁸

Mt 22:29 (JST; also Mk 12:27). “**Ye do err, therefore, because ye know not and understand not the scriptures, neither the power of God.**” Jesus focuses on the Resurrection and quotes Ex 6:3, silencing the Sadducees. He does not give a full explanation of the higher law of eternal marriage, probably because the audience is not ready to learn it. He points out that their misunderstanding of the Resurrection and of levirate marriage (which is not an eternal marriage) comes from a misreading of the scriptures and a disbelief in God’s power. We can also interpret Jesus’s response as saying that if the marriage is not sealed on earth, it has no eternal nature. Given the argumentative attitude of the Sadducees, it is not surprising that this was not the right time or place for Jesus to teach celestial marriage. Elsewhere Jesus did teach the high law of eternal sealings to His Apostles. They received authority and power so that “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Mt 16:19; 18:18). Also in Mt 19:4–7, Jesus taught a different audience that marriages are to last. “For this cause shall a man . . . cleave to his wife . . . they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt 19:5–6). We know the Lord revealed the higher ordinances of sealings because Peter mentions “calling and election made sure.”³⁹

The greatest commandment—Mt 22:34–40; Mk 12:28–34

Mt 22:36 (Mk 12:28). “**which is the great commandment in the law?**” The different antagonistic groups gathered at the temple continued to confront Jesus. The Pharisees saw that the Lord silenced their rivals, so they asked about one of their favorite topics—the commandments. In addition to recording and interpreting the law, scribes also did legal work, so it is not a problem that Mt 22:35 says a lawyer asked Jesus the question while Mk 12:28 says a scribe was the voice—it is probably the same person.

The Pharisees are known for their strict interpretation of the law of Moses. After the Jews were taken to Babylon, rabbis built a figurative “fence around The Law” in an attempt to protect it.⁴⁰ They counted 613 commandments in the Five Books of Moses⁴¹ and claimed that it was living the law that would save them. To protect their beloved laws, they added ten thousand additional commandments called the oral laws as a kind of buffer zone. Pharisees systematized these oral laws to govern a pious life. However, throughout His ministry, Jesus attacked and deliberately broke these oral laws.

Mt 22:37 (Mk 12:30). “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.*” Jesus answered the Pharisees’ question by going back to the basics. He first cited Deu 6:5, which the Jews recited once or twice a day. It is one of the verses in the *shema*, which was part of worship in Jewish homes, temples, and synagogues. It is written on doorposts and inside phylacteries.⁴²

Mt 22:39 (Mk 12:31). “*the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*” This commandment is found in the central position of the Torah, Lev 19:18: “Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” In ancient parallel poetry, known as chiasmus (which was used in Hebrew and other ancient languages to facilitate memorization and organization), the most important point is the central message. The words or concepts are first stated and then repeated in reverse order. The whole double message focuses on the most important message, or the central point.⁴³

Jesus points here to these two foundational laws that were well known but were seemingly underappreciated—love God and your neighbors. We see these two as the roots of the Ten Commandments as well (Ex 20:3–17). The first four commandments speak of how to love God:

- “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”
- “Thou shalt [have no] . . . graven image.”
- “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”
- “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

The second group all speak of how love one’s neighbor:

- “Honour thy father and thy mother.”
- “Thou shalt not kill.”
- “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”
- “Thou shalt not steal.”
- “Thou shalt not bear false witness.”
- “Thou shalt not covet.”

Jesus’s question—Mt 22:41–46; Mk 12:34–37; Lk 20:40–43

Mt 22:42 (Mk 12:35; Lk 20:41). “*What think ye of Christ?*” Jesus now asks those surrounding Him in the temple courtyard a question (Mt 21:23). Just as He had when He was a twelve-year-old, Jesus

joined in the popular Jewish tradition of questioning, debating, and discussing in the temple's Court of the Women. The name Christ is the Greek word for "Anointed One," or "Messiah" in Hebrew. Jesus's question is not only for His contemporaries but also for each reader to answer.

Mk 12:37 (JST). **"but the high priest and the elders were offended at him."** Jesus did not shy away from addressing confrontational topics. He defended truth even when it was rejected. But those who disagreed with Him could not reconcile His attacks of their beliefs. They were so offended by the current cultural issues that they could not see His signs and miracles as fulfilling the messianic prophecies.

Jesus warns against hypocrisy and pride—Mt 23:1–12; Mk 12:38–40; Lk 20:45–47

Mt 23:2 (Mk 12:38; Lk 20:46). **"Moses' seat."** After answering several questions, Jesus remains in the temple courtyard and begins to teach. He warns His listeners to beware of scribes and those who sit in "Moses' seat," or a seat of judgment (Ex 18:16). As this phase is mentioned only here in the New Testament, extra-scriptural texts help us identify that it was the name given to the seat in the synagogue where one gave a discourse or interpretation of the scriptures and law, or the place of judgment.

Mt 23:3 (JST). **"they will make you observe and do; for they are ministers of the law, and they make themselves your judges."** Jesus agrees that it is important to follow all counsel to live the law, but He denounces the hypocritical example given by the leaders and scribes. Jesus encourages them to live the law of Moses even though He is come to fulfill it. (We see the same sentiment in 2 Ne 25:24: "We keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.")⁴⁴

Mt 23:5. **"their works they do for to be seen of men."** Jesus warns that our motives matter. He wants us to serve and act righteously out of love for God and our fellow humans, not for selfish reasons. Ironically, the Pharisees and scribes inadvertently made the law of Moses into an idol that they worshipped. They surrounded the law with minutiae and endless debate. They neglected love, which was the sum or purpose of the law.

Mt 23:5. **"phylacteries."** The phylacteries were texts of the law written on sheep skin enclosed in small containers and tied with leather strips to one's forehead or left forearm (to be over the heart) while praying. Some of the texts used in phylacteries are Ex 13:1–10, 11–16 and Deu 6:4–9. Archeologists have found many of these at Qumran. This is the only reference to phylacteries in the New Testament.⁴⁵

The phylacteries "were thought to have power, like amulets, to avert various evils and to drive away demons. . . . The Pharisees were accustomed to widen, make broad, their phylacteries, that they might render them more conspicuous and show themselves to be more eager than the majority to be reminded of the law of God."⁴⁶ The borders of the garments referenced here are also mentioned in Num 15:38 and Deu 22:12.

Lk 20:46 (Mt 23:6; Mk 12:39). **"long robes . . . highest seats . . . chief rooms."** Jesus condemns vain glory and putting on airs. Places of honor and social station were offensive to Him. He combats this social protocol in the next few verses in an effort to teach masters how to serve.

Mt 23:8. “one is your Master.” Jesus teaches that our master should be God. Jesus also despises dress and social position that elevate some above others. The Anchor Bible relates examples from Jewish literature of Jesus’s day in which disciples were obliged to follow a recognized teacher without question. A disciple was to afford his teacher the highest honor. They had rules for how disciples should walk behind their teacher—never beside him.⁴⁷ Even Jesus did not seek a position of honor but led by serving and ministering. He also did not ask for blind obedience.

Table 3. Comparison of eight woes in Mt 23 to Beatitudes in Mt 5

Woes	Beatitudes
“Woe unto you, . . . for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven” by rejecting Christ and revelation (Mt 23:13)	“Blessed are the poor in spirit <i>who come unto me</i> for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (JST, Mt 5:3)
“Woe unto you, . . . for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer,” thus hiding greed under a cloak of piety (Mt 23:14)	
“Woe unto you, [missionaries of false faiths], . . . for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell” (Mt 23:15)	“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Mt 5:6)
“Woe unto you, . . . which [give oaths without meaning and] say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor” (Mt 23:16)	“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8)
“Woe unto you, . . . for ye pay tithe . . . and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith” (Mt 23:23)	“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7)
“Woe unto you, . . . for ye make clean the outside . . . but within they are full of extortion and excess,” thus cleaning the body only and not the spirit (Mt 23:25)	“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8)
“Woe unto you, . . . for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones” (Mt 23:27)	
“Woe unto you, . . . because ye build the tombs of the prophets, . . . and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them of the blood of the prophets” but then do not live the prophets’ teachings or welcome those who come in your day (Mt 23:29)	“Great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets” (Mt 5:12)

Mt 23:9 (JST). “one is your creator and heavenly Father, even he who is in heaven.” Matthew prefers using “Father” in reference to Heavenly Father (forty-one times), rather than God (twenty-three times). Matthew’s usage speaks of the message or theology he wants pass on that he learned from Jesus.

Mt 23:11. “greatest among you shall be your servant.” This repeats a favorite theme of Jesus (see Mt 18–19). It also describes Jesus’s role as the One who comes to serve others with His healing, teaching, ministering, and even washing feet. Jesus refers to Himself here—His life was spent serving His fellow man and yet He is the greatest to ever live on earth.

Jesus declares eight woes—Mt 23:13–31

Matthew listed eight woes or denunciations that seem to share ideas with the Beatitudes Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount.

Mt 23:29. “Woe unto you . . . because ye build the tombs of the prophets.” The custom of venerating the prophets by paying honor to their grave sites was well established in Jesus’s day, and the graves of pious men were adorned with sepulchral monuments.⁴⁸

Mt 23:33. “Ye serpents.” This is a strong denunciation. In Hebrew lore, serpents were animals that injured without gain for themselves and grew stronger with age. Their venom builds up in the lymph tissues of those they bite then slowly destroys cells and ruptures capillaries, causing death by internal hemorrhage. The venom doesn’t necessarily cause intense pain; rather, bite victims may feel normal for a time while the internal destruction continues. The parallels to sin and Satan are obvious.

Mt 23:35 (Lk 11:50). “upon you may come all the . . . blood of Zacharias son of Barachias.” Jesus refers here to the ninth-century high priest who was killed in the temple. Lk 11:49–51 and Mt 23:35 both record Jesus saying this, but Matthew adds an extra phrase that he mixes up. He gives Zachariah the wrong heritage. This is understandable since Zachariah is the most common name in the Bible (we find approximately forty people with slightly different spellings of the name over the ten centuries). Matthew confuses the heritage of the sixth-century prophet Zachariah son of Berekiah with the ninth-century high priest Zachariah son of Jehoiada. The key scriptural clarifications describe these two Zachariahs:

- Mt 23:35: “Zacharias son of Barachias.” This man is the last of the minor prophets from the sixth century in our Old Testament (Zech 1:1). But Mt 23:35 mixes up the story and name. The story Jesus references belongs to the ninth-century high priest.
- 2 Chr 24:20–21: “Zachariah son of Jehoiada.” This ninth-century high priest was stoned to death in the temple court by King Jehoash. Luke references this Zachariah in his record (Lk 11:51).

The mix-up became further complicated in early Christian literature, including in our Church’s manuals, which added another Zachariah into the story and claimed that John the Baptist’s father, Zacharias, was the high priest Jesus mentioned who was slain in the temple, though he was not the high priest and

the event in question happened nine hundred years before John the Baptist’s lifetime. Unfortunately, the confusion between these two Zachariahs became embroiled in American religious history and then found its way into the *Times and Seasons* periodical and some Church manuals. ⁴⁹

Jesus laments over Jerusalem—Mt 23:36–39

Mt 23:37. “how often would I have gathered.” Jesus laments that He has called His people but they would not gather. The JST footnote expounds on how accountability spans generations: “*Behold your father did it through ignorance, but ye do not; wherefore, their sins shall be upon your heads.*”

Mt 23:37. “a hen gathereth her chickens.” Hens use a guttural sound known as a brooding call to gather their chicks for feeding. When the chicks are in danger, the sound changes to an alarm call that causes the chicks to run to their mother. If the danger persists, the mother fluffs out her feathers to further hide her chicks and scare the intruder away. The hen also attacks intruders with her beak. The Lord’s imagery of protection here is very maternal. He wants to help and protect His people but His calls go unheeded. The sad result is that the Judaic homeland would become desolate.

Notes

- 1 The Jewish day started at night because the Creation started with darkness before light.
- 2 Mark’s outline of the timing is problematic because it differs from the Lev 23:5–6 calendaring of Passover (the Passover meal is eaten in the evening on Nisan 14) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which begins on the fifteenth day of the first month). Mk 14:1 begins, “Two days before the Passover,” and then the Passover meal follows “on the first day of Unleavened Bread” (Mk 14:12). Either the author or editor uses these words differently or the timing is not understood. But it does not allow for Jesus to spend three days and nights in the tomb. The following chart outlines the ordering of the events in Jesus’s last week of life by each of the four Gospels.

Jewish day	Mt 21–28	Mk 11–16	Lk 19–24	Jn 12–21
Nisan 8 (Sabbath until 6 p.m.)				Evening, Jesus dines in Bethany and is anointed by Mary
Nisan 9 (Sunday)	Triumphal entry; Jesus cleanses the temple and returns to Bethany	Triumphal entry; Jesus leaves the city in the evening	Triumphal entry; Jesus weeps, cleanses and teaches at the temple	Triumphal entry; Jesus teaches at the temple
Nisan 10 (Jews choose Passover lambs)	Jesus curses fig tree, and it withers. Jesus laments and teaches at the temple	Jesus curses fig tree, cleanses the temple, and laments over Jerusalem	Jesus teaches at the temple	

Jewish day	Mt 21–28	Mk 11–16	Lk 19–24	Jn 12–21
Nisan 11	Jesus teaches at the temple, dines and is anointed in Bethany	Fig tree withers; Jesus dines and is anointed in Bethany	Jesus teaches at the temple	
Nisan 12	Last Supper is prepared and eaten, sacrament is instituted	Last Supper is prepared and eaten, sacrament is instituted	Last Supper is prepared and eaten, sacrament is instituted	Last Supper begins; Jesus washes feet and gives sermon: Spirit and new commandment
Nisan 13 (12–3 p.m. Passover lambs killed)	Jesus suffers in Gethsemane and is arrested. Trials, Crucifixion, death, burial	Jesus suffers in Gethsemane and is arrested. Trials, Crucifixion, death, burial	Jesus suffers on Mount of Olives and is arrested. Trials, Crucifixion, death, burial	No suffering recorded. Arrest trials, Crucifixion, death, burial
Nisan 14 (High-holy Passover)	Roman guards placed at tomb			
Nisan 15 (Sabbath)				
Nisan 16 (First day of the week)	Resurrection	Resurrection	Resurrection	Resurrection

3 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.217; Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 2.12. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 38. Historians looking at the whole country estimate the population of all Palestine to be between 500,000 and 600,000. Although Josephus's numbers sound exaggerated, he claimed that over two million pilgrims celebrated a Passover.

4 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 512.

5 Kelly D. Ogden, *Where Jesus Walked* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1991), 133–134.

6 Midrash Rabbah, *Ecclesiastes* 7:1.

7 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 67.

8 Mishnah, *Kelim* 1:6–9.

9 Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 771.

10 For example, Mt 9:27 and 20:30 has two blind men, while the parallel accounts in Mk 10:46–52 and Lk 18:35–43 have only one blind man.

11 Matthew quotes over fourteen Old Testament passages in his Gospel. Most are consistent with texts we now have, but some are not. This may be because he was quoting them from memory or perhaps because the text he cited was different from the texts currently available. Most Jewish villages had only a few scripture scrolls—usually the Torah and the Psalms. If the town had enough people and money, it usually had Isaiah as well. Only large, wealthy communities of Jews (like Magdala and Jerusalem) had a fuller set of the Writings and the Prophets. These scrolls were kept in a communal location for the people’s study and Sabbath worship. Because very few people had access to the scrolls daily, many people memorized them. It appears Matthew’s memory was different from that of the other Gospel writers, as we can also see when we compare Mt 23:35 with Lk 11:50–51.

12 Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 773.

13 Matthew’s fourteen fulfillment prophecies are found in Mt 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9. This use of the number fourteen points to Hebrew orthography where the name David (DWD) was equated with the number fourteen (as discussed in my commentary for Mt 1).

14 Raymond E. Brown, *John I–XII* (New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2007), 461.

15 Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 2.119–161.

16 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.230. Josephus records eighty-three high priests from Aaron to the temple’s destruction in AD 70.

17 See Mal 3:1; Jer 7:11; Zech 14:21; Isa 35:5.

18 Isa 5:1; 6:9; 29:13; 53:23; 54:13; 56:7; 61:1–2. Esaias is Isaiah.

19 Ps 8:2; 22:1; 25:19; 31:5; 41:9; 69:4; 78:24; 82:6; 110:1; 118:22–23, 26.

20 Mt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; 17:33.

21 “The Testament of Levi,” Firmament, <https://thefirmament.org/scripture/testaments/testament-of-levi/>.

22 Isa 42:1–9; 49:1–13, 50:4–11, 52:13–53:12.

23 D&C 35:16; see also JS—Mt 1:38; Isa 34:4.

24 Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1958), 38.

25 “*Presbuteros*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/4245.htm>. This word was also used to refer to a member of the Sanhedrin or an elder of a Christian assembly.

26 John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 45.

27 Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 45.

28 1 Ne 3:18; 7:14; Jac 6:8.

29 My discussion on this parable is copied from my commentary for Easter week. The JST adds substantial portions to Mt 21:33, 46. The text transitions from one parable to another in the JST by defending John the Baptist again and explaining that the audience is receiving parables because of their unbelief.

30 Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 290–293.

31 Hallel consisted of Psalms 113–118. It is chanted at Passover, at the Feast of the Tabernacles, at Hanukah, in synagogue worship, and at many other times and places.

32 See, for example, Isa 49:18; 51:1; 61:10; 62:5; Jer 2:32; 3:8; 33:11; Hos 3:3; 4:15.

33 Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Desert Book, 1974), 380–382.

34 See, for example, Isa 61:10; 2 Ne 9:14; D&C 29:12; 109:76.

35 John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 145.

36 David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 5:892.

37 Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45.

38 Deu 25:5–10; see examples of levirate marriage in Gen 38:6–11 and Ruth.

39 2 Pe 2:1–10. In the Restoration the Lord further taught that the ordinance of being sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is a gift available to couples through the prophet (D&C 132:19; also 53:1; 128:14).

40 Mishnah, *Avoth* 1:1.

41 Macy Nulman, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 220. By the Middle Ages, prayer shawls incorporated 613 threads for the commandments. “According to the Talmud, wearing tzitzit is equal in merit with observing the entire Torah. The numerical value of the word tzitzit equals 613, the number of precepts in the Torah.”

42 The Shema included three scriptures from the Torah: Deu 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41.

43 Hundreds of examples of chiasmus can be found in the scriptures. The book of Philemon and Alma 36 are excellent examples of large chiasmus. Three shorter examples are Lev 13:13–23; Mt 6:24; and Jn 13:36–14:5.

44 See also Alm 25:15; 30:3.

45 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 279.

46 Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson’s, 2002), s.v. “Phylacteries, φυλακτήριον.”

47 Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 279.

48 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 282.

49 Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 2 (2013): 107–123. A Christian apocryphal work, *The Protevangelium of James* 22–24, “adapted the biblical account of the ninth-

century high priest Zechariah's martyrdom referenced in Matthew 23:35 to claim that John the Baptist's father was the high priest slain in the temple, due to Herod's edict—not from Joash's conspiracy. Because the account made its way into the *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Latter-day Saints have also propagated it.”