

Matthew 21:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

Analysis

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem for His final Passover, the narrative states: 'And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples.' This geographical precision marks the beginning of Passion Week—the culmination of Jesus's earthly ministry. The phrase 'drew nigh unto Jerusalem' (ῆγγισαν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα/ēngisan eis Hierosolyma) carries momentous weight: Jesus deliberately approaches the city that kills prophets (Matthew 23:37), fully aware of what awaits Him. Bethphage (בֵּית פָּגָא/'house of unripe figs') was a small village on the Mount of Olives' eastern slope, less than a mile from Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives held prophetic significance—Zechariah 14:4 prophesied Yahweh would stand there on the Day of the Lord. Jesus's intentional sending of two disciples to procure a donkey reveals His sovereign orchestration of events fulfilling prophecy. Reformed theology emphasizes Christ's voluntary self-offering—He wasn't victim of circumstances but actively accomplished redemption according to divine plan (John 10:18). This verse begins the 'Triumphal Entry' narrative, which is actually profoundly paradoxical: a King riding to His coronation via cross.

Historical Context

Jerusalem, the spiritual and political center of Judaism, held approximately 40,000-50,000 residents but swelled to perhaps 200,000+ during Passover as pilgrims from throughout the Roman Empire and beyond gathered for the feast.

The city sat on elevated terrain, requiring ascent from any direction. The Mount of Olives, rising 2,660 feet above sea level, provided the primary eastern approach. Bethphage lay along the road from Jericho—the route Jesus's pilgrim company would have traveled. The timing was deliberate: Jesus arrived during Passover week, when messianic expectations intensified. Pilgrims sang the 'Hallel' psalms (Psalms 113-118) including Psalm 118:25-26—'Hosanna! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord—which the crowds would soon shout (Matthew 21:9). The Romans maintained heightened military presence during feasts to suppress potential uprisings. Into this volatile mix, Jesus rode deliberately, openly claiming messianic identity while subverting expectations of political revolution by riding a donkey rather than a warhorse.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's deliberate approach to Jerusalem, knowing what awaited Him, demonstrate the voluntary nature of His sacrifice?
2. What does it mean that Jesus orchestrated the details of His entry, fulfilling specific prophecies?
3. How should Christ's purposeful movement toward suffering inform Christian discipleship when facing difficult obedience?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ὅτε ἤγγισαν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ ἦλθον εἰς
And when they drew nigh to Jerusalem And were come to
G2532 G3753 G1448 G1519 G2414 G2532 G2064 G1519

Βηθφαγὴ πρὸς τὸ Ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν τότε ὁ
Bethphage unto the mount of Olives then ὁ
G967 G4314 G3588 G3735 G1636 G5119 G3588

Ἰησοῦς ἀπέστειλεν δύο μαθητὰς
Jesus sent two disciples
G2424 G649 G1417 G3101

Additional Cross-References

Acts 1:12 (References Jerusalem): Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

Zechariah 14:4 (References Jerusalem): And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

Matthew 24:3 (Parallel theme): And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Matthew 26:30 (Parallel theme): And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

John 8:1 (References Jesus): Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.

Luke 21:37 (Parallel theme): And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives.

Luke 22:39 (Parallel theme): And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

Mark 14:26 (Parallel theme): And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

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