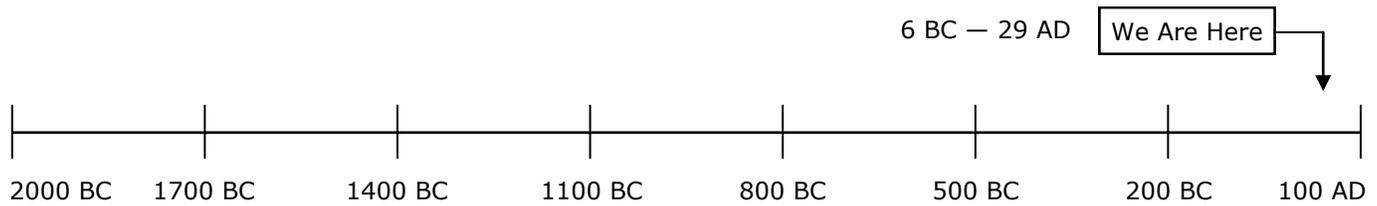


Tricks and Treats

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Week 43: October 22-28 — *The Gospels*

82% Complete — 64 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Map of Palestine in the Time of Christ (p.119)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

For a month now, we have read of the ministry of Christ. It has been refreshing to review the Gospels, to see the brilliance of Jesus and to watch His ministry unfold and reveal the plan of God. Each week, we have been given a little bit more to consider concerning the Kingdom of God; but now, Jesus has come to His last days before being delivered up to and crucified by religious leaders. What would He choose to teach then? What further insight would He reveal? What challenges would He lay down to those who did not believe? In those last weeks, Jesus' ministry came to a climax, and His teachings became very pointed. As His popularity grew and the leaders felt threatened, they tried to play some tricks on Him and catch Him in a trap. Of course, their tricks didn't work, because Jesus was too wise for them. His answers both amazed and silenced His accusers. In the meantime, before being handed over to be crucified, Jesus offered several treats to those who would listen, treats concerning the latter days.

A Bag of Tricks

1. **By Whose Authority?** (*Mark 11:27-33*): "Jesus was an unrecognized, untrained, seemingly self-appointed Rabbi, and leaders wanted to see His credentials" (MacArthur). However, Jesus turned their own orneriness back on them by asking about John's credentials.
2. **Taxes for Caesar** (*Mark 12:13-17*): Hoping to catch Jesus declaring Himself a troublemaker, the leaders asked Him if they should pay or refuse taxes to Rome. Jesus shocked them, as He taught that everyone was obligated to pay taxes to the ruling authority.
3. **Resurrection Rascals** (*Mark 12:18-27*): Trying to corner Jesus in a complex resurrection question, the Sadducees (did not believe in literal resurrection) asked about marriage in the afterlife. Who better than Jesus to answer that question; He exposed their ignorance.
4. **Chief Commandment** (*Mark 12:28-34*): With the hundreds of Mosaic laws to choose from, the leaders hoped to incriminate Jesus by asking Him which was the most important. However, He summarized them all by answering to love God and your neighbors.
5. **David's Lord** (*Mark 12:35-37*): After the leaders were silenced, Jesus had a trick or two up His sleeve. He challenged their thinking on the Messiah as being more than just a Son of David, but also being the Son of God. Thus, Jesus exposed the leaders' ignorance about the true nature of the Messiah and their errant interpretations of the prophecies.

"After that, no one dared to ask Him any more questions."

6. **Curse of the Fig Tree** (*John 12:37-50; Mark 11:12-14, 20, 21*): After recognizing the spiritual fruitlessness of the Jewish nation (especially its leaders), Jesus chose to use an object lesson to make His point. He cursed a fig tree for looking like it was ready to sprout but for having no fruit to show. In essence, Jesus was condemning the entire nation for its unbelief after all that God had done to make ready the soil and the timing.

A Bunch of Treats

1. **Plethora of Parables:** Jesus seemed to describe the Kingdom of God in many ways.

Vineyard Workers (*Matt. 20:1-16*): A picture of God's grace in salvation

Evil Farmers (*Mark 12:1-12*): A picture of the hypocritical Jewish leaders

Wedding Feast (*Matt. 22:1-14*): A picture of the free offer of the gospel to all men

Talents (*Luke 19:11-27; Matt. 25:14-30*): A picture of wasted opportunities on earth

2. **Back to the Future:** In Jesus' last days, He seemed to focus more on events to come. [Prophetic Passages]

His Crucifixion (*Mark 10:32-34; John 12:20-36*)

Destruction of Jerusalem (*Luke 19:41-44*): A few years after Jesus' ascension, the Romans destroyed the holy city (70 AD).

End Times (*Mark 13:1-31; Matt. 24:36-51*) and its many signs

Second Coming (*Matt. 25:1-13*): A parable to warn us to be prepared for His return

Final Judgment (*Matt. 25:31-46*): The final separation between good and evil.

- Personal Application

It's easy to read about the people of Jesus' day and consider them ignorant or hypocritical, simply because they did not believe in Him or because they questioned His ways. However, the people of our day are not much different. People still question the validity of Jesus' claims, the credentials that He had, the wisdom of His words, or even the reality of His existence. We all find ourselves at times siding up with our own mind and heart; but just as those in Jesus' day found out, our mind is feeble and limited, and our heart is deceitful and wicked. Like they did, we must sit amazed at God's wisdom and silence our doubts.

The Bottom Line

Christianity makes the best sense of the world; our *worldview* can stand the *scrutiny*.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you remember a time when you've argued against God's ways? What happened?
2. Why do we think that our limited human mind is more reliable than God's wisdom?
3. What kind of fruit tree have you been — fruitful or fruitless? Explain.