

Passion Week - What is it?

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When we hear the word "passion," we usually think of strong emotion or intense love. But the Latin *passio* originally meant to endure suffering. So it is that Passion Week encompasses both the strong emotion and the suffering of Christ.

Passion Week (or Holy Week) is the week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. In Jesus' life, the week began with the Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:1-11) as He rode the colt of a donkey into Jerusalem while a hopeful crowd laid their cloaks and palm fronds on the ground before Him. Upon His arrival, He went to the temple and confronted the merchants and money changers who had set up shop in the Court of the Gentiles—hindering the Gentiles from worshipping God (Matthew 21:12-17). Later in the week, Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the chief priests (Matthew 21:23-46) who claimed to fear God, but had even greater fear for the crowd.

Jesus went on to explain more about God-followers and their place in the world—that Gentiles were welcome to the Gospel (Matthew 22:1-14), that God-followers are citizens of the Kingdom of God first and always (Matthew 22:15-22), and that salvation is not salvation without eternal life (Matthew 22:23-46). Jesus also went into great detail about His return and our part in it—mainly that we are to eagerly await His return (Matthew 25).

As the week progressed, the crucifixion grew nearer. Mary of Bethany anointed Him for His burial (Matthew 26:6-13), Judas planned to sell Him to the chief priests (Matthew 26:14-19), and Jesus celebrated the last Passover with His disciples. The night of the Last Supper, Jesus took His disciples to Gethsemane where He fellowshiped with God. He shared His anguish at the thought not only of the upcoming torture, but also that for the first time in history, Jesus would be removed from the presence of God's love (Matthew 26:36-46).

Following several sham trials and brutal beatings through the night and into the next day, Jesus was finally crucified—nailed to a wooden cross by His hands and feet. He hanged there until He died, later that day. He was placed in a tomb, but when the tomb was opened three days later, His body was gone. He appeared to His followers and many others. Easter is the day on which Christians celebrate the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection.

This entire week displayed the emotion and the suffering of Jesus. It is this suffering that we celebrate with Passion Week.

Our Passion Week begins with Palm Sunday. Where the crowds that celebrated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem were confused about the nature of the King and His Kingdom, we celebrate Jesus as King over all of creation—and our individual lives. It is common in many churches for children to make a processional around the church, waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna!"

Four days later is Maundy Thursday. Although we do not know the specific date of the crucifixion, Maundy Thursday is given as the day that Jesus had the Passover meal with His disciples. Some churches have a special Communion and foot-washing in honor of Jesus' command (or *mandatum* in Latin) to eat in honor of Him (Luke 22:14-20) and serve one another (John 13:5-20).

Next is Good Friday. The "good" of Good Friday doesn't mean pleasant. It is a reflection of a branch of ethics called consequentialism which states an act is good if it results in a good conclusion. The crucifixion that is honored on Good Friday certainly resulted in good for the whole world. Many churches hold a somber service on Good Friday, sometimes with a

Communion service, to remember Christ's death.

In churches that celebrate Passion Week liturgically, [Holy Saturday](#) is observed as a day of rest in memory of the day Jesus "rested" in the grave. It is also a time for contemplation about how dark the world would be if Jesus hadn't been resurrected. Few churches hold service on Holy Saturday.

Easter Sunday marks the end of Passion Week and the resolution of Jesus' suffering. It is common for Easter Sunday to be the biggest service of the year as Jesus-followers celebrate His resurrection.

Nowhere does the Bible say to acknowledge or celebrate the events of Passion Week. It is good to take time out of our lives to contemplate Jesus' suffering on our behalf, but it doesn't have to be at a specific time of year. We can thank Him for His sacrifice and celebrate His resurrection at any time.

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