

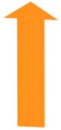
SEVEN ARROWS



What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

MATTHEW 16:13-23



The cross was no surprise for Jesus. He knew it was coming. His followers, on the other hand, had a hard time grasping what Jesus told them about his impending death. Peter made a clear statement about who Jesus was and what He came to do. He is the Christ, the anointed One, sent by God to save sinners and fix the broken world. It took the disciples a long time to realize the truth, but Peter seemed to finally get it. However, Peter couldn't imagine that the Christ would suffer and die on a cross reserved for criminals. He'd been with Jesus and knew that Jesus never sinned. He didn't deserve to die, much less such a humiliating and brutal death on a cross. Jesus knew this was His fate-He was sent to die, and any opposition to this purpose was straight from Satan himself.

MATTHEW 23:1-15



Throughout Jesus' ministry, religious leaders were the most vocal opponents to His work. They harassed Him at every turn and undermined His claims to be God. Jesus took direct aim at one group of these opponents, the Pharisees, with a lengthy list of accusations. In contrast to the blessing He pronounced in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned the Pharisees of their doom. The core of His condemnation focused on the Pharisees as frauds. Their outsides appeared to be holy, but their hearts oozed sin. They led others, but in the wrong direction—far away from God rather than toward Him. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees pictures an ever-present temptation for each of us. It's easy to do or say the right things without having a heart that loves Jesus. We can fool ourselves and others, but God sees clearly and He's not pleased with those who say they love God but live like they don't.

JOHN 11:45-57



It didn't take long for the leaders to determine that the best course of action was to get rid of Jesus. He threatened their way of life, openly criticized them, and performed miracles that could only come from God. Worse, there were huge crowds following Jesus. Knowing what's in the hearts and minds of all people, Jesus wasn't surprised by the religious leaders' plan to kill Him. However, it would happen according to God's purpose, and the timing of His death was His to determine. Jesus told the disciples that no one could take His life from Him—instead He would willingly lay it down. It's not as if some group of religious leaders could sneak up on Jesus and haul Him off to His death. Until the exact moment God had determined for Jesus to die, He lived freely. It might look like the leaders were setting a trap, but Jesus could not be caught by their plan.

LUKE 19:28-40



The details of Jesus' final week were predicted long ago by the prophets. They saw a coming day when the King of All would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, willingly moving towards His death. By this time, there were many who wanted Jesus dead, and the end was certainly near. But as Jesus courageously entered Jerusalem, the disciples sang praises to His glory and greatness. They know He was who He said, their song echoing the one sung at His birth. Jesus brings peace to the earth, but not in the way many expected. Jesus is no political leader who restored Israel as a national powerhouse. The peace He came to bring was of another sort—Jesus' life and death made peace between sinful humans and the God of the universe.

HEBREWS 12:1-2



The final chapters of the book of Hebrews describe the outcome of a life of faith for those who have trusted in Jesus' finished work. You've probably noticed God doesn't simply take His people to heaven once they are saved. We continue to run the race of life that God created us to run, and it's our purpose to reflect God's image for the years He gives us to live on this earth. To do this, we are called to throw off the sin that slows us down and hinders our ability to run in a race that is certainly going to be long and difficult. The author of Hebrews said the best way to run the race is to look to Jesus. He's the perfect example of someone who had a difficult race to run. His race led Him straight to a brutal death on a Roman cross, but He went to the cross joyfully because He knew the prize waiting for Him at the end of His race. He would rise from the dead and return to the Father having completed the work God gave Him to do. In the same way, Christians can run the race of life by focusing on the future hope that is sure to come when our bodies are freed from sin, the world is no longer broken, and we can worship God forever.