

What Does “Hosanna” Mean?

Question:

During a recent sermon my pastor read the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey. When He did, the people started shouting out the word “Hosanna.” I always thought this word to mean something like “Praise God” but am not sure. Can you explain what “hosanna” means and why the crowds would use it?

Our Answer:

“Hosanna” is a Hebrew expression meaning literally “Save now!” When the people cried it out they were expressing the words recorded in the psalms.

Save now, I beseech you, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech you, send now prosperity.
Blessed be he that comes in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of
the house of the Lord. (Pslm118: 25-26)

With these words the Jews in Jerusalem may have been appealing to Jesus to take immediate action as the Messiah and rescue them from Roman occupation. It is clear by their use of this term that they saw Him as a great deliverer.

It is also interesting to note that when the crowds cried out “Hosanna to the son of David: blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest,” they spread their garments in the way and cut down branches spreading them in the way too. The use of palm branches (implied) in praising Jesus was unusual because they were normally used during the Feast of Tabernacles which took place in the fall (Lev. 23:40). The fall festivals picture a time of great deliverance—a time of great peace and prosperity (Isa. 30:23; 33:15; 35:1 & 41:17-20 et al). It is a time of which the ancient prophets spoke—when a great deliverer will establish a super-kingdom.

It may well have been that the use of palm branches reflected the people’s desire for Jesus to take charge and rescue them from Rome.