

Mark Chapter 11

Verses 11:1 – 15:47: These are Jesus' final days in Jerusalem. While the exact chronology of the passage is disputed, tradition places (11:1), on the Sunday before the Resurrection.

This passage, traditionally called Jesus' triumphal entry (more accurately, it was Jesus' coronation as the true King), was His last major public appearance before His crucifixion. The importance of this event is indicated by the fact that this is only the second time all 4 gospels include the same event (Matt. 21:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19).

Mark 11:1 "And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples,"

“Came nigh to Jerusalem”: A general transition statement marking the end of the narrative in chapter 10. It also indicates the beginning of the final phase of Christ's 3 year ministry.

“Bethphage”: A small town just east of Jerusalem whose name literally means “house of unripe figs” (see note on Matt. 21:1).

“Bethany”: The hometown of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1), on the eastern slope of the Mt. of Olives, two miles east of Jerusalem.

“Mount of Olives”: This mountain stood between Bethany and Jerusalem (see note on Matt. 24:3).

The Mount of Olives overlooks Jerusalem. The time of Jesus' arrival here was on Palm Sunday.

Mark 11:2 "And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring [him]."

“The village over against you”: Most likely Bethphage. (Opposite” implies that it was somewhat off the main road).

“Colt”: According to usage of this word in Greek papyri (ordinary written documents dating from New Testament times that were made of papyrus reed), this was most likely a young donkey, a definition also in harmony with other Scripture usage (see note on Matt. 21:5; Gen. 49:11; Judges 10:4; 12:14; Zech. 9:9).

“Whereon never man sat”: The Jews regarded animals that had never been ridden as especially suited for holy purposes (Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3; 1 Sam. 6:7).

The two disciples sent were not mentioned by name. In Matthew, we are told "a colt and an ass ", here we see just the "colt". This varies a little in detail because two different people were telling the story. We discussed this in great detail in our Matthew study.

We will mention that an animal that had never been used by the owner or had never produced offspring was the only animal fit for God's use. That was why the colt no one had sat on was there. Jesus (God the Son), would be using this animal. By divine plan this animal would be there at this time for Jesus' use.

Mark 11:3 "And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither."

“If any man say unto you”: Because of its very nature, Jesus anticipated the disciples’ action would be challenged (verse 5).

“Lord”: Even though he does not use “Lord” with this meaning in the rest of his gospel, Mark was referring to Jesus. In Luke and John this appears often as a name for Jesus. People in the area knew Christ and the disciples well, and the owner would have understood the reference.

There was really no evidence that anyone tried to stop them. Here again, Jesus said this to them to let them know that what they were doing was right. This colt would not be a stolen animal. He had been placed there for just that purpose.

In Zechariah 9:9 it had been prophesied that Jesus would enter Jerusalem on the colt of an ass: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

You see, Jesus fulfills every prophesy of Him.

Mark 11:4 "And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him."

We see in this the plans of God carried out in every detail. We see these disciples obeyed Jesus. They took no thought for the harm that might come to them, if they were thought to be stealing the animals. It surely had to make their faith even stronger when the animals were where Jesus had told them they would be.

Mark 11:5 "And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt?"

There was really no opposition to them taking them. It seems as if the people who asked what they were going to do with them were curious more than anything, because they did not try to stop the disciples.

These animals are just like everything and everyone on the earth. We are all subject to the wishes of our Lord. Just as the money was in the fish's mouth when Jesus needed it to pay taxes, this shows divine provision.

Mark 11:6 "And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go."

It was exactly as Jesus said it would be.

Mark 11:7 "And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him."

These clothes were thrown across the animal like a saddle blanket, and Jesus sat upon him. Jesus showed complete humility in riding this colt, but all the time was being elevated by those who were with Him.

Mark 11:8 "And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strewed [them] in the way."

“Spread their garments”: Such action was part of the ancient practice of welcoming a new king (see note on Matt. 21:8).

“Branches”: Palm branches which symbolized joy and salvation and pictured future royal tribute to Christ (Rev. 7:9). The crowd was greatly excited and filled with praise for the Messiah who taught with such authority, healed the sick and raised the dead (Lazarus; John 12:12-18).

Verses 9-10: The crowd’s cry echoes words from (Psalm 118:25-26). The occasion recalls the prophecy of (Zechariah 9:9), a passage which rabbis of Jesus’ day were unable to account for. How could the Messiah be content with so lowly an entry?

“Hosanna” means “save, we pray,” or “save now”.

Mark 11:9 "And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed [is] he that cometh in the name of the Lord:"

"Hosanna" means Oh, save. This was Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This was Palm Sunday. You can see total adoration of Jesus by His followers here. Not even their own garments meant anything to them compared to Jesus, and they spread their garments on the ground for the ass to walk on. At this point, all these people were speaking of the blessedness of Jesus.

“Blessed is he that cometh” (see note on Matt. 21:9). This phrase is part (Psalm 118:26), of the Hallel (the Hebrew word for “praise”), comprised of (Psalms 113 – 118), which was sung at all the Jewish religious festivals, most notably at the Passover.

“He who comes” was not an Old Testament messianic title, but definitely had come to carry such implications for the Jews (Matt. 11:3; Luke 7:19; John 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; Heb. 10:37).

Mark 11:10 "Blessed [be] the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest."

“The kingdom of our father David”: This tribute, recorded only by Mark, acknowledges Jesus as bringing in the messianic kingdom promised to David’s Son. The crowd paraphrased the quote from (Psalm 118:26; verse 9), in anticipation that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy by bringing in the kingdom.

At this time, the Lord Jesus could have easily taken Jerusalem away from the Romans. His followers believed He was going into Jerusalem to reign as King then. They had no understanding of His mission at all.

Mark 11:11 "And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve."

“Temple”: Not a reference limited to the inner, sacred sanctuary, but the entire area of courts and buildings.

“Looked round about upon all things”: A description distinctive to Mark, quite possibly based on one of Peter’s eyewitness memories. Christ acted as one who had the authority to inspect temple conditions, and His observation missed nothing.

“Went out unto Bethany”: Nearby “Bethany” was a relatively safe place to avoid sudden, premature arrest by the Jewish leaders.

Notice here too, that Jesus went to the temple. This had to be an unusual sight, Jesus going along on the little colt with a large group shouting, "Hosanna" and covering the way for the colt to walk with their clothes and branches. All twelve disciples were with Jesus at this time.

Verses 12-26: A fig tree is cursed and the temple is cleansed.

Mark 11:12 "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:"

“On the morrow”: Matthew 21:18 says this was “in the morning,” probably before 6:00 a.m. The incident occurred on Monday.

“Bethany” (see the note on verse 1).

This was undoubtedly the Monday after Palm Sunday. Jesus was about to teach us a very important lesson here, and set the circumstance up for us. We know that Jesus ate while He was here on the earth and it would not be unusual for Him to be hungry. This fig tree with leaves would make you think that it also, had figs.

Mark 11:13 "And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not [yet]."

“Fig tree afar off having leaves”: Fig trees were common as a source of food. Three years were required from planting until fruit bearing. After that, a tree could be harvested twice a year, usually yielding much fruit. The figs normally grew with the leaves. This tree had leaves but, strangely, no fruit.

That this tree was along the side of the road (Matt. 21:19), implies it was public property. It was also apparently in good soil because its foliage was ahead of season and ahead of the surrounding fig trees. The abundance of leaves held out promise that the tree might also be ahead of schedule with its fruit.

“For the time of figs was not yet”: The next normal fig season was in June, more than a month away. This phrase, unique to Mark, emphasizes the unusual nature of this fig tree.

If it was not time for figs, why did Jesus look for them? The fig tree is a well-known Old Testament symbol for Israel. He is going to use this unproductive tree as a teaching aid. Looking for figs when there should have been none anyway would serve to heighten the disciples’ curiosity and sharpen their memory of the incident.

Here we see a disappointment, a tree with no fruit. There are several symbols we must see here. This "fig tree" symbolizes the physical house of Israel. It was religious (the green leaves), but was not a fruit bearer (had not accepted Jesus). This tree was to wither up until the time of the Gentiles was fulfilled.

The physical house of Israel would appear to be dead. We also can see in this fig tree our own lives. Are we Christians in lip service, or in reality? Do we appear to be a fruitful tree, and have no fruit to show? Can we bear closer examination? When Jesus comes and inspects our tree, will there be any fruit? In Matthew, we are told that the tree withered immediately.

Mark 11:14 "And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard [it]."

“No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever”: Jesus’ direct address to the tree personified it and condemned it for not providing what its appearance promised. This incident was not the acting out of the parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), which was a warning against spiritual fruitlessness. Here, Jesus cursed the tree for its misleading appearance that suggested great productivity without providing it.

It should have been full of fruit, but was barren. The fig tree was frequently an Old Testament type of the Jewish nation (Hos. 9:10; Nahum 3:12; Zech. 3:10), and in this instance Jesus used the tree by the road as a divine object lesson concerning Israel’s spiritual hypocrisy and fruitlessness (see note on Matt. 21:19; Isa. 5:1-7).

This showed the disciples the supreme power that Jesus has over even plants. Jesus did not have to die on the cross. He chose to die on the cross. Jesus is supreme Ruler over everything.

Verses 15-19 (see note on Matt. 21:12). Although Jesus had cleansed the temple 3 years earlier (John 2:14-16), it had become more corrupt and profane than ever and thus He was compelled to again offer clear testimony to God's holiness and to His judgment against spiritual desecration and false religion.

Even as God sent His prophets repeatedly throughout the Old Testament to warn His people of their sin and idolatry, Christ never stopped declaring God's will to a rebellious people, no matter how often they rejected it. With this temple cleansing, Jesus showed vividly that He was on a divine mission as the Son of God.

Mark 11:15 "And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves;"

"Temple" (see note on verse 11). The large Court of the Gentiles was the setting for the events that followed.

"Sold and bought": Animals were needed by the Jews for their sacrificial temple offerings, and it was more convenient for the worshipers to buy them there rather than bring the animals from a distance and risk that they would not pass the High-Priests inspection. The sellers either belonged to the High-Priestly hierarchy or paid a large fee to temple authorities for the privilege of selling. Whichever was the case, the High-Priest's family benefitted monetarily.

"Moneychangers" They were in the court to exchange Greek and Roman coins for Jewish or Tyrian coins which pilgrims (every Jewish male 20 years and older), had to use for the annual half-shekel payment for temple religious services (see note on Matt. 21:12). A fee as high as 10 or 12 percent was assessed for this exchange service.

"Them that sold doves": These birds were so often used for sacrifice that Mark makes separate mention of their sellers. Doves were the normal offering of the poor (Lev. 5:7), and were also required for other purposes (Lev. 12:6; 14:22; 15:14, 29).

There were already laws against such misuse of the temple precincts, but no one was enforcing them.

This temple was for one purpose only. This temple was a place for man to meet with God. The temple was never intended to be a house of merchandise. The temple was to be holy, set aside for this purpose. Jesus cast these people out with great authority.

This selling of sacrificial animals (many times not even healthy animals), to be offered in the temple was against all of God's teachings.

Church should not be a money making venture. Church is for God and man to communicate with each other. Man must reverence God and His temple.

Mark 11:16 "And would not suffer that any man should carry [any] vessel through the temple."

“Carry any vessel through:” In addition to normal business traffic, some may have used the temple court as a shortcut.

Jesus did not want people to continue the practice of using the court as a shortcut through which to carry utensils and containers with merchandise to other parts of Jerusalem because such a practice revealed great irreverence for the temple, and ultimately for God Himself.

The really sad thing about most of this trade that went on in the temple; was that the priests and their families were taking advantage of the needs of the people for doves etc., and were fleecing the people. Not only were they charging too much, but were furnishing impure animals; and they were not even supposed to sell at all in the temple.

The temple is holy. Other activities, other than worship, should not be conducted inside the sanctuary. All transactions should be made outside the sanctuary. The Lord even now will overthrow the money changers and the men and women merchandising in the sanctuary.

Mark 11:17 "And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves."

Jesus defended Himself by appealing to Scripture (see note on Matt. 21:13), after His actions had caused a crowd to gather.

“All nations the house of prayer”: The true purpose for God’s temple. Only Mark includes “for all the nations” from Isaiah’s text (56:7), probably because he was mainly addressing Gentiles. The Court of the Gentiles was the only part of the temple they were permitted to use for prayer and worship of God, and the Jews had frustrated that worship by turning it into a place of greedy business.

“Den of thieves”: Using Jeremiah’s phrase (Jer. 7:11), Jesus described the religious leaders as robbers who found refuge in the temple, comparable to how highwaymen took refuge in caves with other robbers. The temple had become a place where God’s people, instead of being able to worship undisturbed, were extorted and their extortioners were protected.

“Of all nations:” The money-changers had their tables in the Court of the Gentiles. It was as close to the inner confines of temple worship as a Gentile could enter. But it was decidedly profaned, despite God’s Old Testament intent for His house to be a haven of worship for all. The word for “thieves” here suggest plunder, taking by violent means. Jesus did not mince words (see Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11).

God is the God of the whole world. He is the God of every nation. The court of the Gentiles is still part of the meeting place of God and man. Here again, Jesus condemns the selling of merchandise in the sanctuary. I believe personally that this goes even into the holiness we should have toward our God in our sanctuary today.

Eating and drinking, for instance, should be done in another room of the church, and all other gatherings that are not classified as worship (such as fund raisers). God loves us and wants to save us, but He also wants us to love and worship Him. We take God and His sanctuary far too lightly.

Mark Chapter 11 Questions

1. What two towns were near Jerusalem?
2. Where did Jesus tell two of His disciples to go?
3. What would they find there?
4. Approximately how far is it from Jericho to Jerusalem?
5. What city does the Mount of Olives overlook?
6. Why did Jesus need the colt of an ass?
7. What answer were the disciples to give to anyone who asked them what they were doing?
8. What Prophetic book in the Old Testament tells of the colt?
9. Where did they find the colt?
10. What did they use like a saddle blanket for the colt?
11. What did they spread down before the colt to walk on?
12. What does "Hosanna" mean?
13. What day did Jesus' triumphant arrival in Jerusalem happen on?
14. Where did Jesus go in Jerusalem?
15. When Jesus came from Bethany on Monday, He was _____.
16. Why did He think the fig tree had fruit?
17. What had Jesus done, here, to teach us a very important lesson?

18. What is the fig tree symbolic of?
19. What can we see in our lives, if we are Christians, in this fig tree?
20. When Jesus went to the temple, what did He find that displeased Him?
21. What is the only purpose of the temple then and now?
22. How did Jesus cast them out?
23. What was the saddest thing about this trafficking that was going on?
24. What shall the house of God be called?
25. Who does this extend to?