

In tonight's lesson, Jesus and the disciples complete their journey to Jerusalem. He enters Jerusalem triumphantly, but is not received in the temple triumphantly, and the opposition He encounters will eventually lead to His condemnation and death. We will consider tonight's material in three main sections: the triumphal entry (11:1-11), the barren temple (11:12-25), and the conflict with the Sanhedrin (11: 27-12:12).

Read Mark 11:1-11.

STUDY NOTE: Verse 1 tells us that Jesus and the disciples "drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives". Bethany is located southeast of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. The exact location of Bethphage is not known, but is believed to have been situated northwest of Bethany, closer to Jerusalem. Mark mentions Bethany in order to identify the place where Jesus will spend nights while He is in Jerusalem. Additionally, the Mount of Olives, which runs north to south on the eastern side of Jerusalem, figures prominently in OT thought -- as a place of worship (2 Samuel 15:32), in Ezekiel's vision at the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (Ezekiel 11:23), as the site of the final judgment (Zechariah 14:4), and in rabbinic tradition which associated it with the coming of the Messiah. Some commentators suggest that Mark's specific mention of the Mount of Olives (rather than just the village names alone) is intended to associate its messianic significance with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

1. Jesus sends two of His disciples into Bethphage to procure a young donkey for His use (v. 2, also Matthew 21:2, Luke 19:30), one "on which no one has ever sat." Why is the fact that the colt is "unused" significant?

2. Verses 2-6 detail the instructions the two disciples were given and what actually happened when they went on the Lord's errand. What do you find interesting or significant in these verses?

3. Read the parallel accounts in Matthew 21:1-11 and Luke 19:28-40. As is typical for Mark, his description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is more "muted" than the other two accounts. What differences do you see between Mark's account and Matthew's/Luke's accounts?

In his account, Matthew (who is writing to a primarily Jewish audience) notes that Jesus' use of the donkey to enter Jerusalem is the fulfillment of a prophecy (vv. 4-5). Find the OT passage from which Matthew quotes.

4. What is the significance of Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem? (other than the fact that it fulfilled prophecy)

Read Revelation 19:11-16. How will things be different at His second coming?

5. All three Synoptic Gospels note that the crowd that accompanied Jesus laid their cloaks on the road in front of Him. The exact origin of this custom is not precisely known, but it had been practiced in Israel previously. Read 2 Kings 9:1-13. Verse 13 tells us of the laying of garments on the ground before Jehu. What did this action symbolize?

6. All four Gospels note the acclamations of the crowd during the triumphal entry. The crowds were citing the words of Psalm 118:25-26. Psalm 118 is one of the Hallel Psalms (Pss 113-118) which were used for corporate worship during Passover, the feast that commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Psalm 118 is a psalm of thanksgiving where the psalmist recounts his deep distress, his prayer to the LORD, and his rejoicing and praise when the LORD rescues him. "Hosanna" is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "Save, now" or "Save, we pray." Given the popular notion of the Messiah in Jesus' day, what were the people looking for and hoping for in relation to Jesus' entry to Jerusalem?

Mark's account doesn't give much detail in regard to the motivation of the crowd, but the other Gospels give us some clues. What sorts of things were the people thinking about Jesus, and what were some of the reasons they were drawn to Him? (Matthew 21:10-11, Luke 19:37, John 12:17-18)

How did the Pharisees react to what was going on? (Luke 19:39, John 12:19)

STUDY NOTE: Mark's account of the triumphal entry ends in a seemingly uneventful way. Though it seems anticlimactic, it is noteworthy for what does *not* happen. The crowds do not accompany Jesus into the temple. Their enthusiasm seems short-lived, and they disperse just as mysteriously as they came. Jesus enters the temple alone, sizes it up, then leaves for Bethany with the Twelve. Mark does not depict Jesus as the typical pilgrim in the temple, but rather as the Lord of the Temple who inspects its premises to determine whether the purpose intended by God is being fulfilled. This sets the scene for the events of the next day (11:12-25).

7. Luke alone records the touching detail of Jesus' weeping lament over Jerusalem. Read Luke 19:41-44. What does Jesus say will happen to the city, and why? From what we know of first century history, when was this prediction fulfilled?

Read Mark 11:12-25.

8. Look at how this passage is structured. In just a few words, write down what happens in each of the following sections:

Verses 12-14:

Verses 15-19:

Verses 20-25:

This structuring of the passage is another example of what literary device unique to this Gospel?

STUDY NOTE: As we have discussed with previous examples, Mark's use of the sandwich device serves his theological purposes. In structuring the current passage in this way, Mark is highlighting its symbolic import -- the cursing of the fig tree points to the fate of Jerusalem and God's judgment upon the temple.

9. Verse 12 tells us that the next day, during their return from Bethany to Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry. What does this indicate about Him?

10. Jesus uses His hunger as an opportunity to instruct His disciples. From a distance, He sees a fig tree in full foliage. To appreciate the significance of this detail, we have to know a little bit about the cycle of a fig tree. During the winter months, fig trees have small buds that remain undeveloped. In early spring (mid to late March), these small buds, known in Hebrew as *paggim*, begin to swell into small fruit, followed shortly thereafter by the appearance of leaves on the same branches, usually in April. Thus the fig tree produces the *paggim* before it produces leaves. Once a fig tree is in full foliage one would expect to find *paggim* in various states of maturation (which will eventually be ready for the first harvest, or "season for figs", in June). When Jesus examines this tree in person, what does He find? (v. 13b; see also Matthew 21:19)

Finding only leaves and no *paggim*, what does He do?

The OT prophets frequently spoke of the fig tree in referring to Israel's condition before God (Jeremiah 8:13, 29:17; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1-6). Jesus uses this particular tree to vividly illustrate a point. How does the "leafy yet fruitless" condition of this tree mirror the condition of Israel, and more specifically, the temple?

Read Mark 11:15-19.

11. Jesus and His disciples then continue on to the city and enter the temple. After coming through one of the gates of the temple complex Jesus would have been in the Court of the Gentiles (see diagram). According to the text, there were three activities going on that were the focus of Jesus' holy indignation: buying and selling, the exchanging of money, and the carrying of merchandise through the temple. What was the buying and selling that was going on?

What was the purpose of the money changers?

STUDY NOTE: Verse 16 states that Jesus "would not allow anyone to carry anything from the temple." Commentators vary somewhat in their interpretation of this verse. Many suggest that the temple courtyard was being used as a shortcut for travelers entering and exiting the city, i.e. rather than going around the temple on their way in and out of the city, they were going through the temple courtyard carrying all sorts of goods and merchandise just to save themselves travel time. Others suggest that, based upon the usage of the word for "merchandise" (Gk. *skeous*) in the Septuagint, Jesus actually halted the flow of sacrifices in the temple because of all the disturbance and desecration going on in the Court of the Gentiles. In either case, one can certainly appreciate Jesus' righteous anger over the flagrant disregard for the sanctity of the temple.

Some commentators note that according to the Talmud, on the Mount of Olives (which was considered part of the temple precincts for ritual purposes) there were four markets where pilgrims could purchase doves and other ritually pure objects of sacrifice for temple offerings. These markets were not under the jurisdiction of the High Priest, but of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council). There is some evidence from rabbinic writings that seems to indicate that the establishment of markets inside the temple courtyard may have been a relatively recent innovation introduced by Caiaphas, who wished to compete with the traditional markets on the Mount of Olives. If this is indeed the case, it makes the commercialism inside the temple all the more egregious.

12. What was Jesus' reaction to what was happening in the temple? (vv. 15-16) How does what we read in Mark 11:11 shed light on Jesus' response?

13. Interestingly, verse 17 states, "And he was teaching them" What do you learn about Jesus here?

14. Jesus responds by citing two OT Scriptures. The first is drawn from Isaiah 56, and specifically verse 7. Read Isaiah 56:1-8. What is God revealing in this passage in regard to His salvation?

Consider the impact of Jesus' physical actions and what He teaches in this moment. And remember where specifically He is in the temple while He is doing all this. For whom is Jesus clearing this courtyard? And why?

Jesus' second OT quote is drawn from Jeremiah 7:1-15, and specifically verse 11. Through Jeremiah, the LORD was decrying the state of the Israelites' idolatrous hearts and the fact that they were trusting in the presence of the temple building, rather than trusting and obeying the LORD Himself. In applying this passage to His own day, what message is Jesus teaching about Israel's religious activity, and in particular of the religious leaders responsible for the temple?

STUDY NOTE: The imagery of a "den of robbers" is significant. It certainly does point to the commercialism and financial misappropriation inherent in the temple cult. But the image of the *den* -- the place where robbers go to hide out *after* they have committed their crimes, to count and divide their spoils -- localizes Jesus' castigation specifically to the temple and particularly against the religious authorities who superintended it. As verse 18 indicates, the chief priests and scribes clearly understood that Jesus' accusations were leveled at them, and they were intent on destroying Him.

Read Mark 11:20-25.

15. The next day on their way to the city, Jesus and the disciples pass by the cursed fig tree, and Peter points out in astonishment that the tree is completely withered. He understands that this is a supernatural act, for a tree would not naturally wither completely to the root in just one day. The cursed fig tree serves as an object lesson of the barrenness of the temple, with its showy outward appearance but inward void of true worship. Against this backdrop, Jesus calls the disciples to "have faith in God" and His promises (rather than the earthly temple), and He reminds them of the power of prayer and the necessity of forgiveness. What is Jesus teaching here about prayer? Does He mean we can just "name it and claim it"?

Beginning with 11:27 and extending through the end of chapter 12, Mark outlines a total of seven confrontations between Jesus and the Sanhedrin. The opposition to Jesus is intensifying. We will look at the first two of these conflicts in this lesson. Read Mark 11:27-12:12.

STUDY NOTE: In verse 27, Mark notes that Jesus is confronted by "the chief priests and the scribes and the elders". This was a delegation from the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling council in ancient Israel. The Sanhedrin served as a buffer between Rome and the Jewish nation; they held near complete freedom in religious matters and had some restricted powers in political matters. The Sanhedrin was comprised of the high priest plus seventy other members drawn from three groups: those who had previously been high priests and some members of their families; scribes who studied, interpreted, and taught the law (many of whom were of the sect of the Pharisees); and elders/representatives from the tribal divisions in Israel. It is interesting to note that at times these three groups were at odds with one another, yet here we find them banding together in common opposition to Jesus.

In Jesus' day the Sanhedrin exercised not only civil jurisdiction according to Jewish law, but also, to some degree, criminal jurisdiction. It could deal with all those judicial matters that could not be competently handled by lower courts, or which the Roman procurator had not

particularly reserved for himself. Thus, the Sanhedrin was the final court of appeal for all questions connected with Mosaic law, and it could order arrests by its own officers of justice.

16. Jesus and the disciples arrive again to the temple, and Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus was teaching daily there (Luke 19:47). Verses 27-28 tell us that the delegation from the Sanhedrin confronts Jesus. What is the central focus of their questioning? What does "these things" refer to in their question?

17. Jesus responds with a counter-question. This was a common practice among rabbis, particularly in the context of debate. Why does Jesus direct them to the ministry of John the Baptist?

The religious leaders confer with one another about how to answer Jesus (vv. 31-32). What two possible responses did they consider, and why did they decide to not give an answer (v. 33)? What does this indicate about their true character and intentions?

18. Why does Jesus then refuse to give an answer to their question?

Read Mark 12:1-12 again.

19. Jesus then continued His teaching in the presence of these religious leaders. It is important to note that previously Jesus taught in parables in order to keep certain truths veiled. This is not the case here. Jesus tells this parable with the full intention and knowledge that its meaning will be understood by the religious leaders. The various details of the parable are significant. What is being referred to by: (See also Isaiah 5:1-7 for the backdrop)

the vineyard --

the landowner --

the wicked tenants --

the servants sent by the landowner --

the son of the owner --

20. The parable comes to a climax in verses 9-11. What judgment does Jesus say will befall the wicked tenants? What is the main message to the religious leaders?

21. How did the religious leaders respond?

Synopsis of Events of Passion Week in Mark's Gospel

Sunday	Mark 11:1-11	Triumphal entry into Jerusalem Return to Bethany
Monday	Mark 11:12-19	Cursing of the fig tree Cleansing of the temple Return to Bethany
Tuesday	Mark 11:20-14:2	Lesson of the fig tree A day of teaching and conflict with the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees
Wednesday		Nothing recorded, but undoubtedly a day that found religious leaders plotting against Jesus. It is possible that Judas' agreement with the chief priests may have occurred on this day, but that is not known with certainty.
Thursday	Mark 14:3-72	Preparation for Passover The Last Supper Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus' arrest Jesus before the Sanhedrin Peter's denial
Friday	Mark 15	Jesus' trial before Pilate and subsequent humiliation Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial
Saturday		The Sabbath -- Jesus in the tomb
Sunday	Mark 16:1-8	The resurrection

The Temple in Jesus' Day

The temple in Jerusalem in Jesus' day was known as Herod's temple, built by Herod the Great (who died long before its completion). It was Israel's third temple (following the temples built by Solomon and Zerubbabel), with construction beginning in 20 BC and completed in 66 AD (ironically, only four years before it was destroyed in 70 AD). The temple consisted of four divisions and was of grandiose proportions. The first and largest division was the Court of Gentiles, a large open-air quadrangle that was enclosed by a portico supported by rows of columns. According to the historian Josephus, these columns were thirty feet high and so massive that it took three persons with hands joined together to surround one of them at the base. In the area enclosed by this massive perimeter of porticoes merchants sold sheep and doves for sacrifice and exchanged foreign currencies into the Tyrian shekel, which was the closest available currency (of pure metal, and with no image) to the Hebrew shekel commanded in Exodus 30:13-16. Both Jews and Gentiles were welcome in this area, but the latter were not permitted to proceed into any further areas of the temple. Thus the Court of Gentiles was the only area where non-Jews could come for worship and prayer.

The other three divisions of the temple -- the Court of The Women, the Court of Israel (only for circumcised Jewish males), and the Holy of Holies -- belonged within the sanctuary, a freestanding edifice that commanded the center of the Court of Gentiles and faced east. The sanctuary was separated from the Court of Gentiles by a wall on which the following warning was posted at intervals in Greek, Latin, and Aramaic: "No foreigner may enter within the railing and enclosure that surround the Temple. Anyone apprehended shall have himself to blame for his consequent death."

Adjacent to the temple in the northwest corner stood another of Herod's landmarks, the Antonia Fortress, whom he named after his friend Marc Antony. Here was stationed a garrison of 600 Roman soldiers who were always on alert for disturbances within the temple compound.