

# MARK 11

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## **Mark 11:1–11. Entry into Jerusalem**

*Adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 602–611.*

The reference to the Mount of Olives (which was already implicit in mentioning Bethphage and Bethany in verse 1) may point to prophecies in Zechariah that foretell the Lord's presence on the mountain (Zechariah 14:3–4). The reference to a colt also points to Zechariah 9:9, a prophecy about Israel's future king. The actions taken by the disciples—placing their clothes on the ground, preparing an animal, cutting and spreading branches—create a welcome meant for royalty. “Hosanna,” from the Hebrew *hoshiya-na*, is an imperative addressed to the Lord meaning “save!” Although by this time the word was often no more than an exclamation of joy, its original meaning is quite fitting here. The rest of the crowd's exclamation is taken from Psalm 118. This royal procession ends somewhat abruptly when Jesus enters Jerusalem, looks around, and leaves. Although we might have expected some sort of dramatic conquest, this subversion underscores the fact that Jesus's kingdom does not meet earthly expectations. He spends the night away from the city at Bethany, as He will continue to do throughout the last week of His life.

## **Mark 11:12–26. Cursing a Fig Tree and Cleansing the Temple**

*Adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 611–626.*

The episodes that follow are perhaps the best example of Mark's tendency to sandwich narratives to emphasize a larger point. Here, he has framed the cleansing of the temple by separate episodes about the cursing

of the fig tree, which suggests that the two stories should be interpreted in light of one another. It is thus worth examining them together.

Fig trees are typically in leaf by mid-spring, the time of Passover, but do not bear fruit for several more months. Thus, Jesus's expectation of finding figs and His anger when they are not present do not make sense unless we consider that this episode is meant to teach a symbolic lesson. We may consider Jesus's remark in verse 14 to be directed at the general vice of fruitlessness.

At the time of Passover, the temple was full of pilgrims exchanging their coins and buying animals for sacrifice, and Jesus's disruption put a stop to all activity, for a time, in the temple. This was both a condemnation of the practice and a foreshadowing of the temple's coming destruction. Jesus's words of criticism quote Isaiah 56:47 and Jeremiah 7:11—and the Jeremiah quotation points strongly toward the temple's destruction. The Jerusalem authorities are furious at this action and plot to have Jesus killed. His popularity with the crowds, however, prevents them from arresting Him on the spot.

Only on the next day do the disciples notice that the fig tree has withered away. Jesus uses this moment to teach about faith, prayer, and forgiveness, but several elements of His teaching point to the temple. For one, the reference to prayer recalls the temple's status as a "house of prayer," to which Jesus has just referred in verse 17. Moreover, the definite "this mountain" probably refers to the temple mount, and so any suggestion of its removal would once again hint at the future destruction. The effect of the embedded narrative is clear: Jesus is criticizing the fruitlessness of the Jerusalem authorities and the temple system which they run. He is saying not that they are useless but rather that they serve an important function they have not been fulfilling.

### **Mark 11:27–33. Questioning Jesus's Authority**

*Adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 626–631.*

This latest entry into Jerusalem is fraught with danger since Jesus's last actions there ended with the authorities plotting His death (Mark 11:18). In questioning Jesus's authority, these leaders seem to be searching for a pretext against Him. Jesus is aware of this trap and does not answer their question directly. Rhetorically, His question does two things: first, it connects His authority with that of John the Baptist, which was indeed "from heaven;" second, it lays bare the leaders' motives, showing that they do not actually care about God-given authority but rather about entrapping Jesus and maintaining favor with the crowd. It succeeds on both accounts—note that the leaders' discussion does not center on the truth but on how their answer will be perceived. In the end, Jesus has set the terms of this debate, implicitly demonstrating His own higher authority.

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