

Entering and Judging Jerusalem

Mark 11:1–12:44

11/12 June

The Place of the Passage

As [Mark 11](#) opens, the Gospel of Mark begins hurtling toward its climactic conclusion in the cross of Christ. John the Baptist is dead, having prepared the way for Jesus. Jesus has gathered a following, including twelve disciples, who have been sent out and have returned. Jesus has announced his imminent suffering and death. And now the end has drawn near. As Jesus comes into Jerusalem, the opposition of the religious authorities heightens and Jesus presses home to his disciples some final lessons before going to the cross.

The Big Picture

In [Mark 11:1–12:44](#) Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly, cleanses the temple, and authoritatively teaches both opponents and disciples.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, [Mark 11:1–12:44](#). Then review the following questions concerning this phase of Jesus' life and ministry. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, pages 1917–1922, available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Read [Psalm 118:25–26](#), [Isaiah 9:1–7](#), [Jeremiah 23:5–8](#), and [Zechariah 9:9](#). What were these Old Testament writings looking forward to? How do these passages illuminate what is happening in [Mark 11:1–11](#)? (Note that “Save us, we pray” in [Ps. 118:25](#) is the Hebrew expression that is transliterated into Greek as *hosanna*.)

In [Mark 11](#) Jesus curses a barren fig tree ([Mark 11:12–14](#)), cleanses the temple ([Mark 11:15–19](#)), and explains the cursing of the fig tree ([Mark 11:20–25](#)). The way Mark organizes his material in these passages (fig tree/temple cleansing/fig tree) suggests a connection between the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree. What might that connection be? Read [Jeremiah 8:13](#); [Hosea 9:10](#); [9:16](#); and [Joel 1:7](#) in considering your answer, and be sure to consider each Old Testament reference in light of its context.

“I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” ([Mark 11:24](#)). Some have mistakenly taken these words from Jesus to mean that as long as enough faith is mustered up, God will answer any prayer request. But we must always have the same perspective that Jesus had—that is, confidence in God's power but also submission to his will (see [Mark 14:36](#) for a prayer that even Jesus had turned down). How should we understand Jesus' words, then, in [Mark 11:24](#)? How might other biblical texts such as [James 4:3](#) or [1 John 5:14](#) inform our understanding of what Jesus means?

What do the various elements of the parable that opens [Mark 12](#) signify—the tenants, the vineyard, the servants, the son of the vineyard owner, and the vineyard owner? How do Old Testament passages such as [Isaiah 5:1–7](#) shed light on this parable? How does this parable develop what has already been happening in [Mark 11:12–25](#)?

In [Mark 12:13–37](#) we read of a series of questions that the religious authorities put to Jesus—a political question ([Mark 12:13–17](#)), a theological question ([Mark 12:18–27](#)), and a moral question ([Mark 12:28–34](#)). After these three questions Jesus turns the tables and asks them a question, a question about himself ([Mark 12:35–37](#)). How does Jesus respond to the political questioning?

How does he respond to the theological questioning?

How does he respond to the moral questioning?

Follow Jesus’ logic in his words about [Psalm 110](#) in [Mark 12:36](#). What doctrine does Jesus see this text affirming, and what is the reasoning he uses to get there?

In the final two accounts of [Mark 12](#), Jesus contrasts two different kinds of piety. One kind is seen in [Mark 12:38–40](#) and the other is seen in [Mark 12:41–44](#). What is the difference between the two? What is Jesus teaching his disciples through these contrasting examples?

Read through the following three sections on Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings. Then take time to reflect on the Personal Implications this passage from Mark may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

FROM THE INSIDE OUT. “To love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” ([Mark 12:33](#)). With these words a scribe shows that he is, in Jesus’ words, “not far from the kingdom of God” ([Mark 12:34](#)). This scribe understands that the true intent of the Law of Moses was to generate a culture of love: love to God and love to man. If the people of God lose that ultimate goal amid an elaborate system of sacrifices and offerings, they have missed the whole purpose of the law. It is the heart, not externally managed sacrifices, that is precious to God. This scribe understood that the good news of Jesus restores us from the inside out, not from the outside in.

NO PREREQUISITES REQUIRED. Followers of Jesus Christ are not required to qualify with any self-generated prerequisites. Indeed, self-conscious reflection on personal virtue can be positively detrimental. We see this in the back-to-back accounts of Jesus’ warning about the scribes’ glamour ([Mark 12:38–40](#)) and the widow’s offering ([Mark 12:41–44](#)). The scribes were respected and admired. They knew the Scripture well. They had “the best seats in the synagogues” ([Mark 12:39](#)). And they, Jesus says, on account of their poor treatment of widows, “will receive the greater condemnation” ([Mark 12:40](#)). The widow, on the other hand, had nothing in herself to commend her to God, and she knew it. In God’s sight, however, her tiny gift was greater than the showy generosity of “many rich people” ([Mark 12:41](#)). No ostentation. No parading. Just simple, quiet, sacrificial giving. Once more, God sees what man does not see.

Whole-Bible Connections

DAVID’S KINGDOM. “Hosanna!” the people shout as Jesus rides into Jerusalem. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” ([Mark 11:9–10](#)). Way back in [2 Samuel 7](#), God had promised to David a kingdom that would never end ([2 Sam. 7:16](#)), and rest from all Israel’s enemies ([2 Sam. 7:11](#)). When

the people shout “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” at Jesus’ entry, they are picking up on this promise to David as it is reiterated in [Psalm 118:25–26](#), which is a prayer of blessing for the coming messianic kingdom. The people see Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem as the fulfillment of these ancient promises. Even more ancient than the echoes of the Davidic promise are the echoes of the exodus from Egypt: the Triumphal Entry takes place at the beginning of Passover week, which recalls the Jewish people’s liberation from Egyptian slavery. Jesus is indeed the long-awaited son of David, the king, who leads his people to true freedom—freedom not from Rome but from sin and death.

TEMPLE. God first dwelt with his people in Eden. Here, uninterrupted, the divine and the human intersected. The eternal and the temporal met. Eden was, in other words, the first temple. When Adam and Eve fell, that fellowship was fractured, and in the centuries following, God’s presence with his people was restricted to a tabernacle and then a man-made temple. When Jesus overturned the tables in the temple in [Mark 11](#), he was reminding the people that the temple is not for financial transaction between people and other people, but for spiritual transaction between people and God. A few chapters later Jesus is crucified, “and the curtain of the temple was torn in two” ([Mark 15:38](#)), thus opening the way back into God’s presence. Jesus hereby accomplished the purpose of the temple: he restored fellowship between people and God.

FRUITFUL TREES. Israel was called to be a fruitful tree but failed: “When I would gather them, declares the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered” ([Jer. 8:13](#); see also [Hos. 9:10, 16](#); [Joel 1:7](#)). When Jesus sandwiches his cleansing of the temple in between the two halves of the cursing of the barren fig tree, this symbolizes more than a hungry and frustrated Messiah. This cursing signifies judgment over Israel’s fruitlessness (note also the parable that opens [Mark 12](#), which describes Israel in terms of a “vineyard”). Jesus himself, however, went to the cross—was judged and treated as “fruitless”—so that fallen people like us can become the fruitful trees we were meant to be ([John 15:1–8](#)).

Theological Soundings

RESURRECTION. The Sadducees, who reject the doctrine of a future bodily resurrection, try to catch Jesus in a theological trap. They ask which of seven brothers will have as his wife in heaven the one woman they were all legally married to at different times on earth. In responding, Jesus affirms the resurrection that is to come, saying that believers will then be “like angels in heaven” ([Mark 12:25](#)). The angels of heaven do not marry; neither will believers. Jesus seems to be saying that the existence experienced by those in the next life is on another plane than that of our present existence on earth. Marriage is left behind for the matchless experience of being in the presence of

some ways—Jesus, after all, is the “firstfruits” ([1 Cor. 15:20](#)), the first instance of the resurrected body all believers will one day have, and Jesus’ resurrection body was thoroughly physical. Yet the next life will also be very different from life now ([1 Cor. 15:40](#)).

CHRISTOLOGY. The people have already declared that Jesus is the coming king, the Messiah, the long-anticipated son of David ([Mark 11:10](#)). In [Mark 12](#), however, Jesus teaches that the Messiah is not only David’s son but also, according to [Psalm 110](#), David’s Lord. How can the Messiah be both? Here Jesus is anticipating being exalted to the right

hand of God as God's own Son. Jesus is not only the son of David, he is the Son of God—and thus he is included in the divine identity. The Messiah, Jesus is teaching, is no mere mortal.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of [Mark 11:1–12:44](#) for your own life today. Note the personal implications for your walk with the Lord in light of (1) the Gospel Glimpses, (2) the Whole-Bible Connections, (3) the Theological Soundings, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses
2. Whole-Bible Connections
3. Theological Soundings
4. [Mark 11:1–12:44](#)

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Mark. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and to take note of these things to review again in the future.