



The Gospel According to Mark

Lesson 6

Lesson 6 Commentary **Mark 11:1 – 13:37**
Lesson 7 Questions **Mark 14:1 – 15:47**

Introduction

When we left off last session, Jesus and the Apostles were headed to Jerusalem. On the way, James and John asked for places of honor and Jesus used this as another opportunity to explain to his disciples what it means to be like Christ. To be first, one must serve the others. While the Apostles knew that Jesus is the Messiah, they do not quite understand what that meant.

We also see the healing of blind Bartimaeus after he addresses Jesus as “Son of David.” Have you noticed all the different names that have been used for Him? Son of Man, Son of God, Son of David, Messiah, Jesus, just to name a few. All of these have some meaning to the Jews of the time and their expectations of deliverance from the iron fist of the Romans.

Have you also noticed that the Apostles are not exactly cast in a positive light thus far? This will not change for the remainder of the Gospel. They continually argue about position, power, and what’s in it for them. Christ keeps telling them that to be a disciple of Christ, you must drink from his cup, you must be baptized as he is baptized, you must serve, you must suffer. Yet, it does not seem to be sinking in.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11, in the NRSVCE, has five sections.

- Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
- Jesus Curses the Fig Tree
- Jesus Cleanses the Temple
- The Lesson from the Withered Fig Tree
- Jesus’ Authority is Questioned

Immediately after Bartimaeus calls Jesus the Son of David, Jesus makes his entry into Jerusalem on a “colt,” according to Mark. Matthew refers to a donkey and a colt, while Luke and John simply refer to a colt, like Mark. If one returns to the Old Testament and looks at the anointing of the actual son of David, Solomon, one can see similarities. 1 Kings 1:36, “So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan..., *went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule*, and led him to Gihon. There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon.” While there are similarities with Solomon, Jesus also appears to be fulfilling a messianic prophecy by Zechariah. Zechariah 9:9 reads, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and *riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*”

The next three events represent another example of the Markan sandwich. First, Jesus curses a fig tree for not having any fruit, when it was not even the season for figs. Then, he cleanses the Temple. Then he returns to the fig tree. Why would Jesus curse an out-of-season fig tree? He is acting out a parable. “The chief lesson of the incident is that those who fail to yield the fruit of good works which Christ seeks will be punished; cf. Lk 13:6–9.”¹ Old Testament examples of these acted-out parables can be found in Jeremiah 19, where Jeremiah buys and breaks a clay bottle, and Ezekiel 4-5, where Ezekiel torches a model of Jerusalem. When asked by Peter about the tree the next morning, Jesus does not explain the reason he cursed the tree but takes the opportunity to teach the Apostles about faith and prayer.

The challenging of Jesus’ authority is the beginning of a block of “controversy” stories, like what we saw in chapters 2 and 3. In this case, Jesus is walking in the Temple and is confronted by the chief priests, scribes and elders, the ones who oversee keeping order in Jerusalem and, more importantly, the Temple area. When asked where his authority or power comes from, he responds with a question. Where did John the Baptist’s authority come from? They are now in a bind. If they say from God, then they must explain why they rejected him. If they say that it is not from God, they will have insulted a very popular prophet. When the Jewish leaders choose to not answer, Jesus refuses to answer also.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12, in the NRSVCE, has seven sections.

- The Parable of the Wicked Tenant
- The Question about Paying Taxes

¹ J. A. O’Flynn, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St Mark,” in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Bernard Orchard and Edmund F. Sutcliffe (Toronto; New York; Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1953), 922.

- The Question about the Resurrection
- The First Commandment
- The Question about David's Son
- Jesus Denounces the Scribes
- The Widow's Offering

In the parable of the wicked tenant, God is the man who planted the vineyard and the vineyard is Israel. The tenants are the Jewish leaders. The servants are the prophets. The son is Jesus. An interesting point is the last part where in verse 12:10 – 11, Jesus shifts gears and quotes Psalm 118:22 – 23, which reads, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.” Jesus may be making a connection based on a Hebrew play on words. The word for “son” in Hebrew is *ben*. The word for “stone” in Hebrew is *'eben*. There is no way of knowing, but it is a viable reason for the change from speaking about a vineyard and speaking about a stone.

The next event related to paying taxes begins with the words, “And they sent.” Since the last group that Jesus addressed was the chief priests, scribes and elders, it stands to reason that it was this group that sent the Pharisees and Herodians. In this case, again, Jesus knows that they are trying to trap Him, and He does not fall for it.

In the question about the resurrection, we encounter the Sadducees for the first (and only) time in Mark. The reason that this argument is only with the Sadducees is that they were the only sect of the Jews that did not believe in any life after death, nor any resurrection. They also believed that only the first five books of the Bible (the Torah or the Pentateuch) was canonical. That is why he turns the tables on them by saying that the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) are, indeed, alive. By the way, the Pharisees and all contemporary Jews, like Christians, do believe in the resurrection of the body and life after death.

In the next event, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 – 5 and Leviticus 19:18. These read in the RSVCE as follows, respectively:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

“You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

I find it interesting that the greatest two commandments are not in “The Ten Commandments.” Read Exodus 20:1 – 17 and Deuteronomy 5:1 – 22. They are not there. However, if you read closely, the first half of the Ten Commandments deal with loving God and the second half deal with loving your neighbor. These two are a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first one,

Deuteronomy 6:4 – 5, is referred to as the “*Shema*.” *Shema* is Hebrew for “hear,” the first word of the voice. Every devout Jew, even today, recites the *Shema* three or four times daily.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13, in the NRSVCE, has six sections.

- The Destruction of the Temple Foretold
- Persecution Foretold
- The Desolating Sacrilege
- The Coming of the Son of Man
- The Lesson of the Fig Tree
- The Necessity of Watchfulness

This entire chapter is generally referred to under two names – The Olivet Discourse or The Little Apocalypse. The equivalent verses in the other two synoptic Gospels are Matthew 24:9 – 14 and Luke 21:12 – 19. The setting of the discourse is the Mount of Olives (hence, the “Olivet” discourse), which is interesting in a few ways. First, in Zechariah 14:1 – 4, we read:

“See, a day is coming for the LORD, when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses looted and the women raped; half the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. *On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward.*”

Zechariah prophesied that on the “day of the LORD” YHWH would stand on the Mount of Olives. In addition, the Mount of Olives, in the words of Mark, are “opposite the Temple.” Even today, standing on the Mount of Olives provides a spectacular view of the Temple Mount where the Temple stood.

The following is a good summary of the chapter:

“In the first part of the discourse (13:5–13) Jesus describes impersonators of him (“I am he”) as well as wars, earthquakes, and famines as only “the beginning of the birthpangs” (vv. 5–8), and goes on to warn that Jesus’ followers can expect persecutions and family divisions (vv. 9–13). In the second part (13:14–23) Jesus deals with the “great tribulation” that is triggered by the “abomination of

desolation” (vv. 14–20) and warns against being led astray by the appearance of false messiahs and false prophets (vv. 21–23). In the third part (13:24–27) Jesus describes the cosmic portents that will lead up to the triumphant manifestation of the glorious Son of Man and the vindication of the “elect.” The final unit (13:28–37) is an exhortation consisting of parables and sayings, with mixed messages but urging total confidence in the plan of God and constant vigilance as this plan unfolds and reaches its climax.”²

Usually when one talks of “apocalypse,” the thought of “end times” comes to mind. If that is the case, how does one reconcile this with Mark 13:30, which reads, “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.” A generation in the Bible was generally considered thirty or forty years. Was Jesus expecting that the end of time was imminent at the time of his Olivet Discourse? Was Jesus mistaken?

To address this question, let’s look at the role of the Temple. “Like many religions in the Near East, the Israelites regarded their Temple as a miniature replica or microcosm of the world; it was an architectural model of the universe fashioned by God.”³ While Jesus speaks as if the end of the universe is near, a better interpretation could be that He was predicting the destruction of the Temple. This makes sense given that just before he sits on the Mount of Olives one reads in Mark 13:1 – 2, “As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” Hearing this, the disciples would have heard echoes of Micah 3:12 and Jeremiah 26:18 when they were prophesying about the fall of the first Temple, which happened in 586 B.C.

- Micah 3:12 – “Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.”
- Jeremiah 26:18 – “Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, said to all the people of Judah: ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.’”

“Interpreting Jesus’ words in this way does more adequate justice to the symbolism of his language and the testimony of history. Ancient sources confirm his prophecy: the Romans

² John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 2, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 378.

³ Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 50.

destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70.”⁴ In fact, this prophecy fulfilled within the generation of Jesus’s listeners.

⁴ Hahn and Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*, 50.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7
Mark 14:1 – 15:47

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read Mark 14. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 3 – Read Mark 15. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 4 – Reread Mark 14:53 – 65.

Reread the lesson 3 notes related to Jesus healing the paralytic and to Jesus calming the storm on the sea. Reread the lesson 4 notes related to Jesus walking on water. Reread the lesson 6 notes related to the first commandment. What are the types of items that all of these have in common? Is there a particular doctrine that seems to be supported by the cumulative evaluation of these events?

Day 5 – Reread Mark 15:33 – 37.

Read Psalm 22. What types of similarities do you see between this Psalm and the Passion of Christ? What do you think Jesus was feeling in Mark 15:34?

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Read Leviticus 3:1 – 17. Read Leviticus 7:11 – 36. Read Exodus 12:8 – 10. Just before entering into His passion, what festival was Jesus celebrating. What type of sacrifice is that festival they were celebrating?

Day 6 – Pray for understanding.