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Supernatural Power

Stories from Mark’s Gospel

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# Week 11 | Mark 11

### Chapter 11 Summary:

In Mark 11 we’ll see Jesus enter Jerusalem with his crucifixion only days away. In this chapter we not only witness his entry to the shouts of the crowd, but several confrontations with the Jewish religious leaders in the temple courts.

# Day 1

## Read

### Mark 11:1–8 (NIV)

**11** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’ ”

4They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go .7When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.

## Study

* Read [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Zec9.9) and compare to Mark 11:1–8. What do you notice? How is Jesus fulfilling prophecy?
* Read the Faithlife Study Bible [note on Mark 11:5](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Mk11.5) for more insight into this scene.

## Think about

N.T. Wright helps us reflect on this episode:

“You don’t spread cloaks on the road—especially in the dusty, stony Middle East!—for a friend, or even a respected senior member of your family. You do it for royalty. And you don’t cut branches off trees, or foliage from the fields, to wave in the streets just because you feel some-what elated; you do it because you are welcoming a king.

Over the next few chapters, in fact, Mark will show us what Jesus meant when, in chapter 10, he radically redefined kingship. This is not to be the sort of royalty that either Israel or the rest of the world were used to. But the passage already raises questions for us in our own following of Jesus and loyalty to him. Are we ready to put our property at his disposal, to obey his orders even when they puzzle us? Are we ready to go out of our way to honour him, finding in our own lives the equivalents of cloaks to spread on the road before him, and branches to wave to make his coming into a real festival? Or have we so domesticated and trivialized our Christian commitment, our devotion to Jesus himself, that we look on him simply as someone to help us through the various things we want to do anyway, someone to provide us with comforting religious experiences?”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Jesus is our Savior, and he is also our King. It’s to him we owe our complete allegiance. What does it look like to give him that?

## Pray

Pray over your response to King Jesus. Ask the Spirit to reveal what metaphorical cloaks and branches you might spread before him to show your commitment to him.

# Day 2

## Read

### Mark 11:7–11 (NIV)

7When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

10“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

11Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

## Study

* What does “Hosanna” mean? Scholar Morna Hooker explains, “It is the transliteration of a Hebrew phrase meaning ‘save now’; in the first century it would presumably have been understood by Jews as an appeal to God to save his people from foreign domination. Mark, however, seems to understand it as a shout of praise.” [[2]](#footnote-3) Read [Psalm 118:25–26](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ps118.25) to see the verses that inspired the exclamations the crowd uses.
* Some historical background helps us understand the people’s response and their likely expectations of Jesus. In the early second-century BC, Judea was ruled by the Seleucids from Syria. Their rule became especially cruel with the rise to power of Antiochus Epiphanes who defiled the temple as a means of oppressing the people. In 167 BC Mattathias initiated a rebellion by killing Antiochus’s representative. The rebellion was then led by Mattathias’s sons, Judas “Maccabeus” (“the hammer”), and later Simon.

After Judas’ death, Judea gained political independence under Simon, who continued to lead military operations to liberate all of Judea and Jerusalem. He later purified the temple and led a celebratory procession with shouts of praise, palm branches, music, and song because a great enemy had been smashed and driven out of Israel (see 1 Maccabees13:51–52).[[3]](#footnote-4) How does the scene in Mark 11 echo the jubilant procession of the Maccabees? Based on their history, what do you think the crowd was anticipating from Jesus?

Think about

This scene begins a section of Mark’s Gospel that will center around the temple (11:1–12:44). It will become clear in this section that God is doing something new by judging the activities in the temple and declaring Jesus as the new temple, the place on earth where God is encountered.

Gombis helps us see how this scene fits into Mark’s Gospel and explains the strange, anti-climactic end of this seemingly triumphal entry into Jerusalem (verse 11):

“While this episode is often regarded as ‘the triumphal entry,’ Mark hardly portrays it as triumphant. If anything, it is highly subversive and anticlimactic. After making preparations and then entering to joyful acclamation, Jesus merely enters, looks around, and leaves.”

Gombis believes that Jesus is subverting the expectations of the disciples and the crowd. “The heroic deeds of the Hasmoneans recorded in 1 Maccabees shaped the first-century Jewish imagination, as the people were once again under foreign domination, this time by the Romans. They longed for a heroic figure who had the charisma to lead a fighting force to drive out the Romans and liberate the nation, purifying the land from the pollution of foreigners, just as Judas and his brothers did two centuries prior. The disciples’ hopes were also shaped by these legendary figures, as they were anticipating that Jesus would somehow become this heroic figure who would be the agent of God’s spectacular redemption of his people. But Mark’s narrative subverts these hopes at every turn.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

We should ask ourselves, what do we expect of Jesus and are those expectations in line with who our Lord and Savior really is? Are we willing to embrace the way of the cross the way Jesus did?

## Pray

Garland gives us an insight that can help guide our prayers today, “If we hail Jesus, we must hail him as the one who comes to die for our sins, not as the one who comes to bring us glory. We must hail him as one who gives his life for the kingdom of God, not as the one who sets up the kingdom of David.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

# Day 3

## Read

### Mark 11:12–19 (NIV)

12The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.

15On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

18The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

19When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

## Study

* Although we’re breaking this passage into parts, notice that [Mark 11:12–25](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk11.12-25) is yet another intercalation or “sandwich,” with the story of Jesus cursing a fig tree (verses12–14, 20–25) wrapped around his shutting down temple activity (verses 15–19). You can’t interpret either action without the other. Gombis makes this connection, “In the previous episode, Jesus had visited the temple, looked around briefly, and departed (verse 11). In the same way that the God of Israel visits his people to inspect their fruit before passing judgment (see [Isaiah 5:2](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Is5.2)), Jesus examines the temple and discovers that it has become a place of corruption, and he renders his judgment on it.”[[6]](#footnote-7)
* Although the story of the fig tree appears also in Matthew’s Gospel, only Mark notes that while the tree was full of leaves, “it was not the season for figs.” Why would Jesus expect to find fruit on the tree if it was not the season for it? Here is Gombis’ take: “Mark is most likely pointing to the temple’s condition—it looks good on the outside, but there is no fruit. Further, Mark’s statements about time and seasons in this passage are significant. In verse 11, Jesus left the temple because ‘it was already late,’ pointing to the reality that God’s judgment has already been rendered—it is now too late. Here, it is not the season for figs, but it does not matter because God can show up whenever he desires to determine the condition of his people. The Lord has come to his temple, and it is not ready.”[[7]](#footnote-8)
* [Read Isaiah 56:1–8.](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Is56.1-8) Garland helps us understand why Jesus might have quoted Isaiah 56:7, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (verse 17). “God did not plan for the temple to become a national shrine for Israel. Isaiah 56:1–8 contains God’ promise of blessing for all who might think they are excluded from God’s salvation: the foreigner who has joined himself to the people (56:3), the eunuch (56:4, who was not allowed to enter the temple, according to the regulations of Deut. 23:1), and the outcasts of Israel (Isa. 56:8). Most assumed that Isaiah 56 spoke of some distant future, but Jesus expects it to be fulfilled now!”[[8]](#footnote-9)

## Think about

Over the centuries, this scene has been called “Jesus cleansing the temple.” Both Gombis and Garland wonder whether that is the best way to characterize his actions. Is Jesus really trying to purify or reform something here?

“A key question to ask is why Jesus would attempt to reform or purify something that he predicts, without any great anguish, will soon be destroyed (13:2)? The best answer is that *he does not intend to reform the temple*. Jesus has been acclaimed as a prophet. Prophets do not simply make announcements; they also *engage in prophetic actions to communicate*. Jesus appears in the temple as a charismatic prophet and graphically acts out God’s rejection of the temple cult and its coming destruction. While actions may speak louder than words, they are not always as clear.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

“Jesus is not ‘reforming’ or ‘cleansing’ the temple but rather halting its operation. This is a *performed parable*, symbolizing God’s judgment on the temple…The temple was no longer playing the role for which God had designed it, but had become corrupt. It was not the place on earth where people encountered God. Jesus is the new temple, and people know and encounter God through him and by belonging to communities of his followers.”[[10]](#footnote-11)

## Pray

Praise God for what he accomplished through Jesus! “In Jesus’ day the temple had become a nationalistic symbol that served only to divide Israel from the nations. If it were to become what God intended, “a house of prayer for all nations,” walls would have to crumble. Indeed, walls will soon collapse and barriers will be breached. When Jesus dies, the temple veil is split from top to bottom, and a Gentile confesses that he is the Son of God (15:38–39).[[11]](#footnote-12)

# Day 4

Hear more insights that can help you understand and apply Mark 11 on the Pastors Pregame Podcast. New episodes every Thursday at [*CFhome.org/pregame*](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/+hg732gk) or through [*Apple Podcasts*](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pastors-pregame/id1582563644).

## Read

### Mark 11:19–25 (NIV)

19When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

20In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

22“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. 23“Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. 24Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

## Study

* Jesus returns to the fig tree and it is completely withered in only one day. When Peter makes note of it, Jesus’ reply is somewhat puzzling if you remove them from the context. Jesus has disrupted the activities at the temple and in Mark 13 we’ll hear him predict its destruction. That prediction will come to pass just a few decades later. Garland explains Jesus’ remarks as announcing a new order. “The new order is based on faith in God (11:22) that overcomes insurmountable odds (11:23), is sustained by grace (11:24), and is characterized by forgiveness (11:25).”[[12]](#footnote-13)
* “The connection between the withered fig tree and the discussion of prayer in vv. 22–25 may not be immediately clear to readers of Mark. When we think of the temple’s function, however, the relation comes into focus. The disciples may be wondering how they can pray if the temple is dead on the inside and under God’s judgment. The temple was indeed supposed to be a place of prayer for all the nations, the place where heaven and earth came together, and where they could encounter God. If it is really no better than a lifeless pile of rubble, then what?”[[13]](#footnote-14)

## Think about

We often hear Mark 11:22 –24 lifted out of context. We are told that if we just had faith, we could move mountains. How many of us have prayed for “mountains” to move (whatever that means to us) and then wondered why they didn’t. Perhaps it’s we’re treating these verses like pixie dust in Disney’s *Peter Pan*. We sprinkle Jesus’ words in with happy thoughts about what we want and believe that wishing hard enough will be the difference between flying and falling. Reading Jesus’ words in context helps us understand.

First of all, we can rejoice because God hears and answers the prayers of his people who pray in genuine faith. It does not matter whether prayers are being offered from within the temple. In Christ, we can boldly approach the Father with our requests whenever and wherever. Yet the mountain in this context does not represent just any prayer. So, what does it represent?

Gombis thinks that the mountain in v. 23 refers to the temple mount. As we’ve seen in this passage, it is a become a place of injustice and oppression of God’s people. “If God’s people pray for the burden of injustice to be removed, they will be heard, and God will act on their behalf.” [[14]](#footnote-15) God’s will is for his reign to spread into all the earth. When we pray for that, and for forces that rise up against the knowledge of him to be thrown into the sea, he will respond.

## Pray

Pray for God’s will to be done in your life, your community, and the world. Pray for the gospel to go forth and for people to come to know Jesus. Pray that the forces of injustice and oppression will be torn down and that any impediment to people coming into God’s presence will be thrown into the sea.

# Day 5

## Read

### Mark 11:27–33 (NIV)

27They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. 28“By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”

29Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”

31They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ 32But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ …” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

33So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

## Study

* Notice how Jesus answers the religious leaders in verse 29. In Mark, those who approach Jesus with hostility never receive direct answers or incontrovertible proofs from him. As is his custom, Jesus here fends off his adversaries with his own question.”[[15]](#footnote-16)
* The religious leaders saw themselves as licensed by heaven to rule over God’s temple and now fear losing control of the crowds. “Jesus, an outsider, is usurping their power. But they must hold off carrying out their plan against him because of his popularity. They are a savvy lot who do not kick people while they are up. To rid themselves of this threat and to debunk his messianic pretensions, they will enlist the help of the Roman governor to sentence him to death—death by crucifixion.”[[16]](#footnote-17)

## Think about

Jesus is not evading their original question but rather forcing them to face up to the answer that is staring them in the face by setting the whole case before them. He is leading them to think through the divine logic that is unfolding according to Scripture, beginning with Elijah the forerunner—identified with John the Baptist in 9:12–13—who called God’s people to repent and prepare themselves for the coming one. He puts the onus on them to reckon with events and discern what God is doing.[[17]](#footnote-18)

To have the kind of faith that Jesus seeks, you must discern from Jesus’ words and actions the source of his authority. By this point in his ministry, if it’s not clear who sent Jesus, spiritual blindness, not a lack of clarity from Jesus, is the cause.

## Pray

Jesus upsets religious systems that exalt those in charge over God. You cannot follow Jesus without humbling yourself before him. Pray for greater humility in your walk with Jesus.

Go back and reflect on all of Mark 11. What is the Spirit saying to you through Mark’s Gospel?

1. Tom Wright, [*Mark for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry62mk?ref=Bible.Mk11.1-11&off=6144&ctx=lt+in+his+own+city.%0a~Over+the+next+few+ch) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Morna D. Hooker, [*The Gospel according to Saint Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/black62mk?ref=Bible.Mk11.9-10&off=0&ctx=ure+of+Palm+Sunday.%0a~9%E2%80%9310+Hosanna!+is+the), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1991), 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Timothy G. Gombis, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/strygdcm62mk?ref=Bible.Mk11.1-11&off=2528&ctx=+and+the+Seleucids.+~In+the+early+second-), ed. Scot McKnight and Tremper Longman III, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Gombis, 381–382. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. David E. Garland, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac62mk?ref=Bible.Mk11.1-11&off=11205&ctx=deafening+applause.+~If+we+hail+Jesus%2c+we), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Gombis, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Gombis, 392. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Garland, 437. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Garland, 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Gombis, 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Garland, 438. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Garland, 441. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Gombis, 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Gombis, 394–395. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Garland, 443. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Garland, 442–443. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Gombis, 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)