

Mark 11

Jesus now enters Jerusalem, as He prepares for the Passover as well as His death, burial, and resurrection, which He has prophesied three times: 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34. This week is called His “Passion” week, from the Latin word for “suffering.” It is His week of “suffering” (see Acts 1:3). First, He rides into Jerusalem as an humble king (11:1-11). The next morning, He curses a fruitless fig tree (11:12-14), and then drives out corrupt business men from His Father’s house (11:15-19). The next morning, observing the withered fig tree, Jesus gives His apostles a lesson on prayer (11:20-26). In light of His behavior, the religious leaders ask who gave Jesus the authority to do what He did (11:27-33).

The chronology of Jesus’ last week on earth is largely derived from John’s gospel, when Jesus arrives in Bethany six days before Passover, at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and then enters Jerusalem on the next day (John 12:1, 12-15).

The first seven chapters of Mark covered about the first three years of His ministry. Chapters 8-10 covered roughly the six months prior to this fateful week. Now chapters 11-16 (about 40% of the book!) will cover the last week of Christ, His death, burial, and resurrection, and then His ascension, approximately eight days. How fateful those eight days are!

Day of the Week	Events in Mark	Parallels in the Other accounts
Sunday	Entrance into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11)	Matt. 21:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19
Monday	Cursing the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14); Cleansing the temple (11:15-19)	Matt. 21:10-17; Luke 19:45-48
Tuesday (and Wednesday?)	Lesson on faith (Mark 11:20-25); Controversy with the religious leaders (Mark 11:27-12:44); Sermon the destruction of Jerusalem (13:1-37)	Matthew 21:23-24:51; Luke 20:1-21:36
Thursday	Anointing (Mark 14:1-11); Passover and Last Supper (14:12-31); Gethsemane (14:32-42); Arrest and Jewish trial (14:43-72)	Matthew 26:1-75; Luke 22:1-65; John 13:1-18:27
Friday	Roman trial (Mark 15:1-15); Crucifixion (Mark 15:16-32); Burial (15:42-47)	Matt. 27:1-66; Luke 23:1-56; John 18:28-19:42
Saturday	In the grave	Matt. 27:62-66
Sunday	Resurrection (Mark 16:1-20)	Matthew 28:1-20; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:1-29

TRANSLATION - 11:1-11:

1 And when they approach Jerusalem to Bethphage and Bethany toward the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples **2** and says to them, “Depart into the village opposite you, and immediately entering into it you will find a foal having been tied on which no man yet has sat. Untie it and bring [it]. **3** And if any may say to you, “Why are you doing this?” Say, “His Lord has a need.” And immediately him he will send again here.” **4** And they left and found the foal having been tied to a door outside by the street and they untie it. **5** And some of those

standing were saying to them, “What are you doing, untying the foal?” **6** And those said to them even as Jesus said, and they allowed them. **7** And they bring the foal to Jesus and they put on it their cloaks, and He sat on it. **8** And many, their cloaks they scattered in the road, and others leaves after cutting out of the fields. **9** And those going before and those following kept crying out, “Hosanna! Being blessed [is] the one coming in the name of the Lord. **10** Blessed [is] the coming of the Kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” **11** And He entered into Jerusalem, into the temple and after looking around at everyone, evening already it being of the hour, He went out into Bethany with the Twelve.

GREEK WORDS:

“Olives” (ver. 1) is used 15 times in the NT, three times in Mark: 11:1; 13:3; 14:26. The phrase “Mount of Olives” is found nine times, in the three uses of “olives” in Mark. “To send” was used first at 1:2. “Depart” (ver. 2) is used 79 times in the NT, 15 times in Mark, first at 1:44. “Foal” is used 12 times in the NT, only in this context in Mark: 11:2, 4, 5, 7. “To bound or tied” is found 43 times, first in Mark at 3:27. “To loose or untie” is used 42 times, first in Mark 1:7. “To bring” was used earlier at 1:32. “Lord” (ver. 3) is used 717 times in the NT, 18 times in Mark, first at 1:3. “Need” is used 49 times, first in Mark at 2:17. “Street” (ver. 4) is found only here in the NT.

“To allow” (ver. 6) is used 143 times, first in Mark at 1:18. “To put” (ver. 7) was used earlier at 4:37. “Cloak” was used earlier at 2:21. “To scatter” (ver. 8) is used five times: Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8; 14:15; Luke 22:12; Acts 9:34. “Leaves” is only found here in the NT. “To go before” (ver. 9) was used earlier at 6:45. “To cry out” is used earlier at 3:11. “Hosanna” means “Save, I pray” in Hebrew. The word is used six times in the NT: Matthew 21:9, 15; Mark 11:9-10; John 12:13. “To bless” was used earlier at 6:41. “Name” is used earlier at 3:16-17. “David” is mentioned earlier at 2:25. “Highest” is a method of referring to Jehovah God; it is used 13 times in the NT, only twice in Mark: 5:7; 11:10. “Temple” (ver. 11) is used 72 times, ten times in Mark. It is used in this context: 11:11, 15-16, 27. The “Twelve” was used earlier at 3:14.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Zechariah will predict the Messiah will stand on the Mount of Olives as He judges Jerusalem (14:4; see also Ezekiel 11:23; 43:2). The prediction of Jesus riding on a donkey, not related by Mark, is found in Zechariah 9:9. This event could also be a fulfillment of a prophecy in Genesis 49:9-11. The quotation from Mark 11:9-10 is from Psalm 118:25-26, one of the so-called “Hallel” psalms, so noted because the psalm begins and ends with “Hallelujah” (“Praise Jehovah”).

The Messiah was expected to reestablish the throne of David (2 Sam. 7:14-16; Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-16; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:14-16; Micah 5:6), which Jesus came to do (Luke 1:32-33).

ARCHAEOLOGY:

“Bethphage” (ver. 1) is found in Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; and Luke 19:29. “Bethany” is found more frequently, twelve times: Matthew 21:17; 26:6; Mark 11:1, 11-12; 14:3; Luke 19:29; 24:50; John 1:28; 11:1, 18; 12:1. Bethany was located two miles from Jerusalem, the home of Lazarus and his sisters (John 11:1; Luke 10:38). We do not know exactly where Bethphage was located. The Mount of Olives stands 2,600 feet above sea level, overlooking the mount where the temple was located.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

The Triumphal Entry is also recorded in Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; and John 12:12-19.

COMMENTS:

Arriving in Jerusalem from the direction of Jericho (10:46, 52), Jesus passes near Bethphage and Bethany. These two villages and the Mount of Olives are located on the eastern side of Jerusalem. In that area, Jesus sends two disciples into a village (we do not know which village but we do know one of the disciples - Peter; Luke 22:8), to find a foal on which to ride (ver. 1). This foal would have been unbroken, not having been ridden. Perhaps this was done because what was dedicated to God, under the old law, could not be used for common purposes. This foal had not been (yet) used for common purposes, so it could be dedicated to the Lord's service. They were to untie the foal and bring it to Jesus (ver. 2). Matthew (21:2) informs us that the female donkey was brought with the foal. Jesus anticipated that some would ask why they were taking the foal (and donkey) which did not belong to them (ver. 3), to which they were to reply: "The Lord has need of it." Some question to whom "Lord" refers; Luke tells us it was the owners who asked about its use (19:33), so "Lord" cannot refer to its owner. It then refers to Jesus, or perhaps God. Jesus has predicted exactly what would happen and it happens just as Jesus had foretold (verses 4-6). It is possible that Jesus had communicated to the owner beforehand that He would need the foal.

The apostles brought the foal to Jesus and they laid their cloaks on its back on which Jesus would sit (ver. 7). Others spread their cloaks on the road for Jesus to walk on, fitting a king, and still others cut down branches and scattered "leaves" on the road (ver. 8). John tells us these were branches from the palm trees (12:13).

The entourage of pilgrims, going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover, surround Jesus on the foal. Some are in front of Him and some are behind Him (ver. 9). They were praising God for the coming King: Hosanna! which means "Lord, save us!" They praised Him as the One coming in the "name of Jehovah God." That is, they recognized in Jesus the authority of God, whether they understood all the ramifications of their statements is unlikely. They praised God for the "coming kingdom of our father David!" (ver. 10). Again, they recognize in Jesus the "Son of David" (see 10:47-48; Matt. 21:9) and that Jesus was going to establish His kingdom (Luke 19:38; John 12:13), which He had been preaching His own career (1:15). Of course, claiming Jesus to be "king" would be very dangerous in the Roman Empire!

Entering Jerusalem ("weeping;" see Luke 19:41 and Matthew 23:37), Jesus looked around and observed the activities of this week in the temple, one of the holiest celebrations on the Jewish calendar (ver. 11). Then He left to spend the night in Bethany with the twelve apostles, as He did each night from Sunday until Thursday, when He will be arrested.

APPLICATION:

Once again, Jesus predicted certain events that would happen and they occurred just as He had foretold, which shows us He was a prophet, at a minimum. The crowd treats Jesus as a king, as they understand that He came to establish the kingdom prophesied by Daniel (2:44-45; 7:13-14). However, they did not understand the *nature* of that kingdom. It would not and will not be an earthly kingdom of a physical nature. It is a spiritual kingdom. The crowd, however imperfectly, understand the "Son of Man" and "Son of David" both refer to Jesus, who is the "Messiah" (or "Christ" in Greek). Jesus came to establish His kingdom and He did establish that kingdom; see comments at 9:1.

TRANSLATION - 11:12-14:

12 And the next day after their departing from Bethany He hungered. **13** And after seeing a fig tree from a distance, having leaves He came, if anything He will find on it, and after coming to it nothing He found except leaves. For the time was not for figs. **14** And after answering He said to it, "No longer forever from you no one fruit will eat." And His disciples were listening.

GREEK WORDS:

“To hunger” (ver. 12) is used 23 times in the NT, twice in Mark: 2:25; 11:12. “Fig tree” (ver. 13) is used 16 times, four times in Mark: 11:13, 20-21; 13:28. “Leaves” is used six times in the NT, in Mark at 11:13; 13:28. “Figs” is used four times in the NT, only here in Mark. “Fruit” (ver. 14) was used earlier at 4:7-8.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The fig tree or vine was often used by prophets to denote Israel: Isaiah 28:4; Jeremiah 8:13; 24:1-10; 29:17; Hosea 2:12; 9:10, 16-17; Micah 7:1. The most well-known was the song of Isaiah in Isaiah 5:1-7.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The fig tree (*ficus carica*) grows up to 19' (6 m) tall. An initial crop of green figs comes in the spring, with the leaves appearing later, in March or April. The later crop of figs appears in May or June. So, the fig tree has “early figs” (see Isa. 28:4; Jer. 24:2; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1) or “early fruit” (Song of Solomon 2:13) and later figs.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This curse is found also in Matthew 21:18-19.

COMMENTS:

The fact that Jesus was hungry illustrates the point that He truly was human (ver. 12). Note also: Mark 1:41; 3:5; 4:38; 6:34; 10:21; 14:33-34. Jesus saw a fig tree by the road with leaves on it. As we note above under “Archaeology,” the green (but edible) figs would appear first before the leaves. The time for the mature figs would come later. Since Jesus saw the leaves, He would presume that the tree had the green figs on it. It is ridiculous that critics want to mock Jesus for hurting an “innocent” tree! The tree is not a sentient being and since Jesus is the Creator, He could destroy a fig tree if He so chooses!

Thus in contrast to His other miracles, Jesus cursed the fig tree (ver. 14) so that figs would no longer grow on it. The disciples were listening and, the next morning, will ask Jesus about the significance of the cursed tree. Since this event occurs in connection with the cleansing of the temple (11:15-19), it is certainly probable that the fruitless fig tree was a visible lesson in the fruitlessness of the nation of Israel, embodied in its desecrated temple.

APPLICATION:

In the next chapter (12:1-12), Jesus will use a parable to depict the religious leaders as tenant farmers who were not faithful to their stewardship (12:13-40).

Jesus insists, just as He did for Israel, that His followers produce fruit. He gives a sermon on producing fruit in John 15. Some of that fruit will be identified as “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23. In short, it is the fruit of obedience to His commands.

TRANSLATION - 11:15-19:

15 And they come into Jerusalem and after entering into the temple, He began to cast out those selling and those buying in the temple, and the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling the doves, He overturned. **16** And He did not allow that any may carry a vessel through the temple. **17** And He was teaching and saying to them, “Has it not been written that ‘My house a house of prayer will be called for all the nations; but you yourselves have made it a cave for robbers.’” **18** And the chief priests and the scribes heard and were seeking how Him they might destroy; for they were being afraid of Him for all the crowd were astounded at His teaching. **19** And whenever evening came, they were going out of the city.

GREEK WORDS:

“To sell” (ver. 15) was first used at Mark 10:21. “To buy” was used earlier at 6:36. “Tables” was used earlier at 7:28. “Money changers” is used three times, in Matthew 21:12;

Mark 11:15; John 2:15. “Doves” was used earlier at 1:10. “To overturn” is used twice: Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15. “To carry through” (ver. 16) is used only here in Mark, out of 13 uses. “Vessel” was used earlier at 3:27. “To teach” (ver. 17) was used earlier at 1:21. “To write” was used earlier at 1:2. “Prayer” is used twice in Mark: 9:29; 11:17. “To call” is found four times in Mark: 1:20; 2:17; 3:31; 11:17. “Nations” refers to non-Jewish peoples; it is used 162 times, six times in Mark: 10:33, 42; 11:17; 13:8, 10. “Cave” is used six times, only here in Mark. “Robbers” is used 15 times, three times in Mark: 11:17; 14:48; 15:27. “To destroy” (ver. 18) was used earlier at 1:24. “To fear” was used earlier at 4:41. “To be astounded” was used at 1:22. “Teaching” was used at 1:22.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Jesus combines two OT quotations here (11:17-19): Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Isaiah anticipates that God would extend salvation to the Gentiles. Jeremiah criticizes the “temple” (a figure of speech for the Jews) for their idolatry and anticipates the coming destruction of the temple by the Babylonians.

There is also an anticipation among the prophets that the Messiah would purify the temple and its worship: Ezekiel 37:26-28; Malachi 3:1-4.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The temple in Jerusalem, the third one (the first was built by Solomon, then rebuilt under Ezra and Zerubbabel) began construction in 19-20 BC and was finished in the mid-60s, just before it was destroyed by the Roman armies in AD 70. It was built on a raised foundation, 1,600 feet (500 meters) from north to south and 984 feet (300 meters) east to west. The Court of the Gentiles, where these events take place, was 500 yards (meters) long by 325 yards (meters) wide. It had a portico around the outside, supported by columns. There is a separate word used in 14:58 and 15:29, 38 (*naos*) to denote the holy temple itself, in contrast to the temple grounds or the temple complex.

The half-shekel of the sanctuary had to be converted into the Tyrian shekel, also known as the silver drachma, to be given to the temple (Exo. 30:13-16). This was the Law for all males 20 years old and up. Doves were a sacrifice God allowed for the benefit of the poor (Lev. 5:7, 11; 12:8; see also Luke 2:24).

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This event is found also in Matthew 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48; and earlier in Jesus’ ministry in John 2:13-22. While many scholars think that John relocates this event to the first part of Jesus’ ministry, it is more likely that He cleansed the temple twice. Among the two accounts, there are only five words that are similar. The texts cited from the OT are different; John has Psalm 69:9.

COMMENTS:

Having cursed the fig tree for its fruitlessness, Jesus returns to Jerusalem (ver. 15). He enters the “temple,” which here refers to the temple grounds, specifically the so-called “Court of the Gentiles.” This was the place where non-Jews could come to pray. However, the religious leaders, specifically the Sadducees who were the priests, had allowed businessmen to sell animals for sacrifices, likely approved by these very Sadducees (at a price). Just as Jesus had done early in His ministry (John 2:13-22), He again drives out the businessmen and overturned the tables of those who were exchanging the money (likely earning an exorbitant fee) and the chairs of those who were selling doves (taking advantage of the poor). Jesus has clashed repeatedly with the religious leaders throughout Mark: 2:6, 16; 3:22; 7:1, 5; 9:14.

Verse 16 states that Jesus would not allow people to carry “vessels” through the temple grounds. This probably refers to more merchandise to sell, turning the temple of God into a bazaar for making money. In fact, in verse 17, Jesus quotes two prophets of the OT, Isaiah and Jeremiah. From Isaiah, Jesus says, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the

nations” (from Isaiah 56:7). By allowing this business to be conducted in the Court of the Gentiles, the religious leaders were turning people away from worship to Jehovah God, not drawing them to worship God. The second passage comes from Jeremiah, in a famous sermon in which he also predicted the destruction of Jerusalem (7:11): “You have made the temple a robbers’ den.” In Jeremiah’s day, the Jews would engage in all types of sinful and ungodly behavior and then seek refuge in the temple of God, acting as if they were holy and pious. They were turning the temple into a “robbers’ den.” The same attitude was true of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They believed that simply having the temple in their presence meant that they also had Jehovah God among them. Jesus was going to show them that this was not reality.

When the members of the Sanhedrin, the priests, elders, and scribes, heard Him, they decided now was the time to “destroy” (“kill”) Jesus (ver. 18). However, Jesus was still popular among the common people, it was a Jewish holiday, and Jerusalem would have been filled with Jewish pilgrims. They would have to wait for an opportune time (see 14:1-2, 10-11).

Verse 19 notes that it was Jesus’ practice to leave Jerusalem in the evening during the week, at least until Thursday when He would go to Gethsemane to pray.

APPLICATION:

Jesus will soon predict the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (chapter 13). This prediction will be used against Him in His trial (14:58), by which He will also be mocked while on the cross (15:29).

The church, like the temple, is designed to be focused on worship. In fact, the Greek word translated “church” (*ekklesia*) means an “assembly.” The “assembly of Christ” is designed to worship God together as a body, as a family. If the church ever allows itself to get distracted from worshipping God, then it stands in the same spiritual condition as the temple in Jerusalem did in the days of Jesus. It will be destined for destruction.

TRANSLATION - 11:20-25:

20 And passing by early in the morning, He saw the fig tree having withered from the roots. **21** And after remembering Peter says to Him, “Rabbi, behold the fig tree which You cursed has withered.” **22** And after answering Jesus says to them, “Have faith in God. **23** Truly I say to you that whoever may say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and he does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says - is happening, it will be to him. **24** On account of this I say to you, all for which you pray and ask, believe that you will receive [it], and it will happen for you. **25** And whenever you stand praying, forgive if any has anything against any, that also your Father in heaven may forgive you your transgressions.”

GREEK WORDS:

“Early in the morning” (ver. 20) was used earlier at 1:35. “To wither” was used earlier at 3:1. “Roots” was used earlier at 4:6. “To remember” (ver. 21) is used twice by Mark, out of six times. “Behold” is found 29 times in the NT, first in Mark at 2:24. “To curse” is used only here, out of five times. “Faith” is used 243 times in the NT, first in Mark at 2:5. “To doubt” (ver. 23) is used 19 times, only here in Mark. “Heart” is used earlier at 2:6. “To believe” was used earlier at 1:15. “To pray” (ver. 24) was used at 1:35. “To ask” was used at 6:22-24. “To forgive” (ver. 25) is used 143 times, first in 1:18. “Transgressions” denotes the idea of doing something beyond what God has authorized. The noun is used as a synonym for “sin” and is used 19 times in the NT, only here in Mark.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Verse 26 is not found in the early Greek manuscripts, across all types, so scholars are confident that it was added by a Christian scribe under the influence of Matthew 6:15.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This paragraph is found also in Matthew 21:20-22.

COMMENTS:

The next morning, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus and the apostles passed by the fig tree which had been cursed. Peter notices that it “had been withered” (ver. 20). This verb translates a perfect tense verb, which shows that the tree had been cursed the day before and withered immediately, as Matthew states (21:18-19). Noticing the withered tree, Peter draws Jesus’ attention to it.

In His response, Jesus gives His disciples a lesson on faith and prayer (11:22-26). With Jesus predicting the destruction of God’s temple in Jerusalem (which He will do extensively in chapter 13), the apostles would need trust in God’s wisdom in the subsequent series of events. He begins by stating the principle (ver. 22): Have faith in God.

Secondly, Jesus uses a common figure of speech to illustrate the power of a strong faith in God (ver. 23). The focus of this statement is to show that His disciples should not “doubt” when they ask God for something. If one says to a mountain to be uprooted and cast into the sea, “and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says is going to happen,” it will happen. Observe the verb in verse 23 is present tense: “is happening.” God will answer prayers of His followers.

Thirdly, Jesus emphasizes the importance of praying with confidence (ver. 24). When a disciple prays and asks, he ought to “believe that he has received them” (notice the verb is past tense). A disciple should pray with confidence that he has *already received* what he would ask. God will answer His followers’ prayers.

Fourthly, when a disciple prays, Jesus reminds them that they ought to pray with a forgiving heart. Jesus is about to be crucified, but He is still encouraging others to forgive! The disciples’ forgiveness by God is dependent, to some extent, on their willingness to forgive others. Verse 26, as noted above under “Archaeology,” was added under the influence of Matthew 6:15. It certainly teaches the truth; it just probably was not originally said here. This is the only reference in Mark to God as “heavenly Father.”

APPLICATION:

Jesus teaches His followers that they need to pray with faith: Matt. 7:7; 18:19; Luke 11:9; John 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24. Prayers also have to be prayed selflessly (James 4:1-4) and according to the will of God (James 4:15). But John also reminds us that God intends to honor His children’s requests, if the requests are in the best interest of His children: 1 John 5:14-15.

TRANSLATION - 11:27-33:

27 And they come again into Jerusalem. And in the temple, while He was walking around, the chief priests and scribes and elders come to Him **28** and they were asking Him, “By what authority these things do You do? Or who gave You this authority that these things You may do?” **29** And Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one word, and answer Me and I will say to you by what authority these things I do. **30** The immersion of John, was it from heaven or from man? Answer Me.” **31** And they were discussing among themselves saying, “If we might say, “From heaven,” He will say, “Why [therefore] did you not believe him?” **32** But might we say, ‘From men?’” They were fearing the crowd. For all were holding John being that he was a prophet. **33** And after answering Jesus, they say, “We do not know.” And Jesus says to them, “Neither I Myself am saying to you by what authority these things I am doing.”

GREEK WORDS:

“Authority” (ver. 28) is used 102 times in the NT, 10 times in Mark, first at 1:22. “To answer” (ver. 29) is used 231 times, first at 3:33 in Mark. “Immersion” (ver. 30) is used earlier at 1:4. “To discuss” (ver. 31) was used earlier at 2:6, 8. “To believe” was used earlier at 1:15. “To fear” was used earlier at 4:41. “Prophet” was used earlier at 1:2.

GREEK GRAMMAR:ARCHAEOLOGY:

The priests, scribes, and elders composed the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews, composed of 71 members. Through various way, they have opposed Jesus: forgiving sins (2:5), eating with sinners (2:15), associating with tax collectors (2:13), “violating” the Sabbath (2:28), eating without washing hands (7:1-13), and cleansing the temple (11:12-20).

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See Matthew’s account (21:23-27) and Luke’s account (20:1-8) for similarities and differences.

COMMENTS:

Verse 27 begins with the phrase “they came again to Jerusalem.” That might suggest a different day than verse 20. In that case, it would now be Wednesday. It could also be a continuation of the same day, Tuesday. Jesus is “walking” in the temple grounds, in the Court of the Gentiles. Matthew tells us that Jesus does do some healing during this time: 21:14. The chief priests, scribes, and elders, who compose the Sanhedrin, approach Him (ver. 27), challenging the authority by which He believed He could do what He was doing, probably they refer to Him cleansing the temple. It is a legitimate question: by what authority did Jesus do what He did? This is the first in a series of antagonistic questions which the leaders put to Jesus in the next chapter: 12:15, 23, 28.

Jesus responds by asking the leaders a question (ver. 29). If they answer His question, He will answer theirs. Of course, Jesus knows they are not sincerely asking such a question and Solomon warned not to answer a fool according to his folly (Prov. 26:4). His question is in verse 30: “Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men?” If John was a true prophet of God, then what John had to say about Jesus had to be true (1:7-9). John was certainly the one who prepared the Jews’ hearts for the coming of Jesus: 1:2-8; Matt. 3:11-12; Luke 3:15-18; John 1:15, 24-31, 35-36; Acts 1:5; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24-25. If they were to acknowledge that John’s baptism was authorized by “heaven” (a figure of speech for God), then they would have to admit that Jesus was sent by God and that His authority was from God.

Mark tells us in verse 31 that they began reasoning among themselves how they could respond, without condemning themselves. If they were to answer “from heaven,” they knew Jesus would respond: “Then why didn’t you believe him?” The Pharisees refused to be baptized by John (Luke 7:29-30). In Matthew 21:28-32, Jesus gives the “Parable of the Two Sons,” in which He states that the tax collectors and prostitutes were repenting at the preaching of John so that they were entering the Kingdom rather than the Pharisees. The Pharisees were stubborn and would not admit they were in error. They could not answer “from heaven”

The other alternative is to answer “from men” (ver. 32). But if they answered that, they would lose favor of the people because the crowd all accepted John as a prophet. So, they did the only thing a hard heart could do: they refused to answer (ver. 33). At this response, Jesus refused to answer their question. In fact, they had implicitly acknowledged that John’s baptism was from God and therefore Jesus also had authority from God. To their hard-heartedness, Jesus responds with a parable in chapter 12.

APPLICATION:

This is the seventh, out of eight, time that the religious leaders have tried to trap Jesus: 2:7-11, 18-22, 24-28; 3:22-30; 8:11-13; 10:2-12; 11:27-33; 12:18-27.

The question “by what authority” is an appropriate question. It is the authority of Jesus which mankind must admit and submit (Mark 9:7). Jesus sent His apostles to further guide Christians into all truth so that Christians must submit to the teachings of the apostles (Matthew, John, Paul, Peter) and the Christian prophets who also wrote part of the NT (Mark, Luke, James, Jude). Man has no authority in Christianity. What man decides has no value against the desires of the flesh (Colossians 2:23). It is the authority of Jesus which stands.