



The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



The Gospel of Mark

Part 29

Mark 11:1-26

A Living Word Independent Bible Study

Mark 11:1-25

(NIV)

INTRODUCTION

Six out of Mark's sixteen chapters are dedicated to the events that occur after Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem.

These events all take place within one week – the week the church has come to refer to as “Holy Week”.

It begins with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in the scene commemorated by the church on “Palm Sunday”.

This story comes, appropriately, immediately after the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus identifies Jesus as the Son of David (meaning, the King of Israel).

Now, Jesus will enter the royal City of David royally – as a king.

This new section of Mark will emphasize not only controversy with the Pharisees and scribes, but with the Temple establishment.

The entry into Jerusalem, along with Jesus' actions in the Temple, will provoke the religious authorities in Jerusalem.

Mark 11:1-25

(NIV)

INTRODUCTION

The scene is heavily influenced by the prophecy of Zechariah 9:

Zechariah 9:9-10 –

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and having salvation,

gentle and riding on a donkey

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the war-horses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

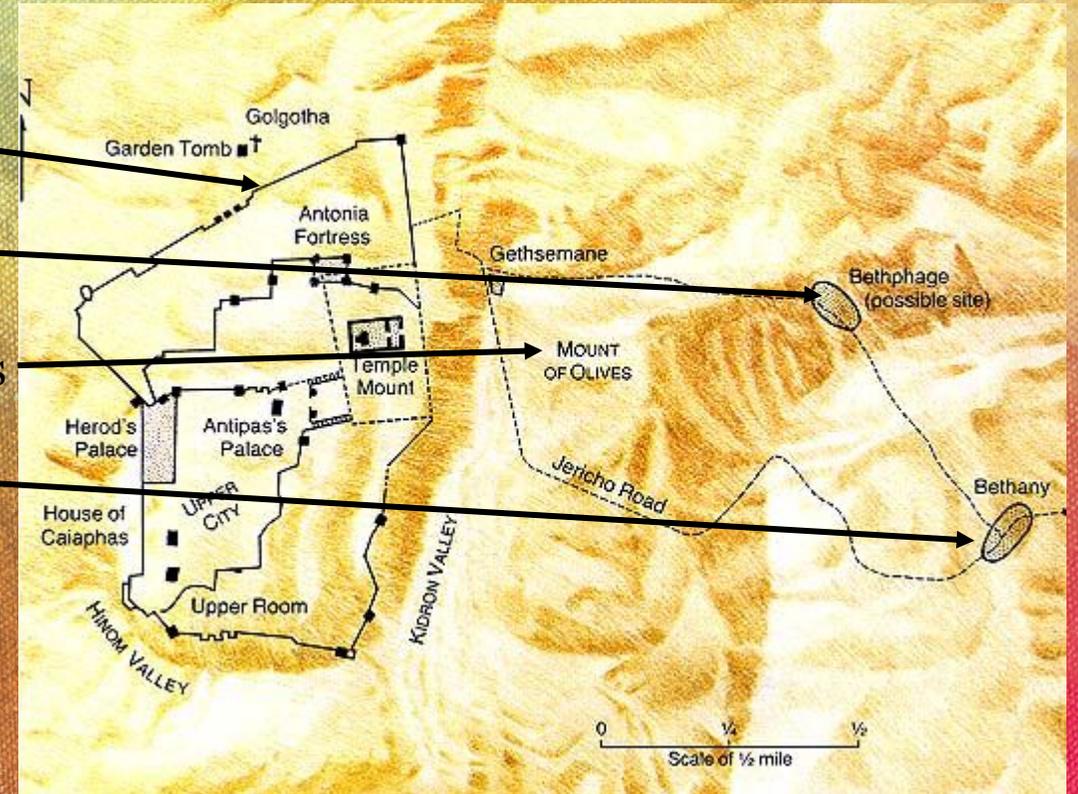
Mark 11:1 (NIV)

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples,

“Jerusalem, Bethphage, Bethany”

Just east of the main city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives lay the two smaller towns of Bethphage and Bethany.

Walled City of Jerusalem
Bethphage
Mount of Olives
Bethany



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“Mount of Olives”

This will be the official starting point for entry into the city.

It overlooks the city and the eastern side of the Temple Mount.

Mark 11:1 (NIV)

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples,

“Mount of Olives”

The Mount of Olives also figures prominently in the prophecy of Zechariah, which proclaims that the LORD will stand on the Mount of Olives at Judgment Day:

Zechariah 14:4 – “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.”

“sent two of his disciples”

They are unnamed, though, so we don't know who this was exactly.

Mark 11:2 (NIV)

saying 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.”

“Go to the village ahead of you”

It’s hard to identify which of the two towns Jesus is referring to, but Bethphage was closer to the Mount of Olives and is the traditional location.

Some scholars, though, argue that it was Bethany, given its prominence in coming passages.

“a colt tied there”

The word Greek word for “colt” here can mean the young foal of ANY animal – it is actually best translated “young animal”.

But USUALLY, the word refers to a horse.

Matthew’s Gospel is explicit in calling it the foal of an ass or donkey:

Matthew 21:2 – “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.”

This aligns better with Zechariah 9, and is the source of our common Palm Sunday imagery:

Zechariah 9:9 – “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Mark, though, is not explicit about it.

Mark 11:2 (NIV)

saying 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.”

“no one has ever ridden”

This implies that it is special, for Jesus’ use.

The tradition was that kings used horses no one else ever had, or ever would, ride.

There is also a possibility that it is implied that the colt is “unbroken”, in which case it might again demonstrate Jesus’ ability to do something others had failed at.

“Untie it and bring it here”

There are two possibilities for this command:

First – Jesus is claiming authority. A widespread practice of authorities called “pressed transportation” allowed political leaders to claim even personally owned assets or animals for their own use, when they were needed for transportation.

Second – Jesus has made prior arrangements with a sympathizer.

Mark 11:3 (NIV)

“If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

“If anyone asks you ...”

The expectation of inquiry and the planned response would point to a pre-planned arrangement.

“the Lord needs it”

Exactly who is meant by “the Lord” is not identified.

We tend to assume it means Jesus ... but Mark NEVER directly calls Jesus “Lord” in his Gospel, otherwise (although biblical quotations using “Lord” are applied to Jesus).

It could mean that GOD needs it for a holy purpose – that it needs to be set aside for God’s use.

It COULD also mean the owner of the colt – the word carries the sense of “master”, and the colt’s master could even have been with Jesus.

Mark 11:4-6 (NIV)

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

“They went and found a colt ...”

Everything is exactly as Jesus has said it would happen. Again ... is all of this preplanned?

Or, does Jesus have the ability to know ahead of time what they will find and how people will respond (just as he knows about his passion in detail)?

Notice that the disciples, here, have enough faith to do as Jesus says, even though it may have sounded ridiculous – or even illegal! – to take off with someone else’s colt!

Mark 11:7 (NIV)

When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.

“threw their cloaks over it”

This would have been in place of a saddle.

“he sat on it”

Jesus then mounts the colt.

Riding the colt is very reminiscent of the Old Testament scene of Solomon’s ride on David’s mule to strengthen his claim to the throne, over Adonijah’s claim:

1 Kings 1:38-48 – “So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoida, the Kerethites and the Pelethites went down and put Solomon on King David’s mule and escorted him to Gihon. Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ And all the people went up after him, playing flutes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound. Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they were finishing their feast. On hearing the sound of the trumpet, Joab asked, ‘What’s the meaning of all the noise in the city?’ Even as he was speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. Adonijah said, ‘Come in. A worthy man like you must be bringing good news.’ ‘Not at all!’ Jonathan answered. ‘Our lord King David has made Solomon king. The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites, and they have put him on the king’s mule, and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon. From there they have gone up cheering, and the city resounds with it. That’s the noise you hear. Moreover, Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne. Also, the royal officials have come to congratulate our lord King David, saying, “May your God make Solomon’s name more famous than yours and his throne greater than yours!” And the king bowed in worship on his bed and said, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has allowed my eyes to see a successor on my throne today.””

Mark 11:8 (NIV)

Many people spread
their cloaks on the road,
while others spread
branches they had cut
in the fields.

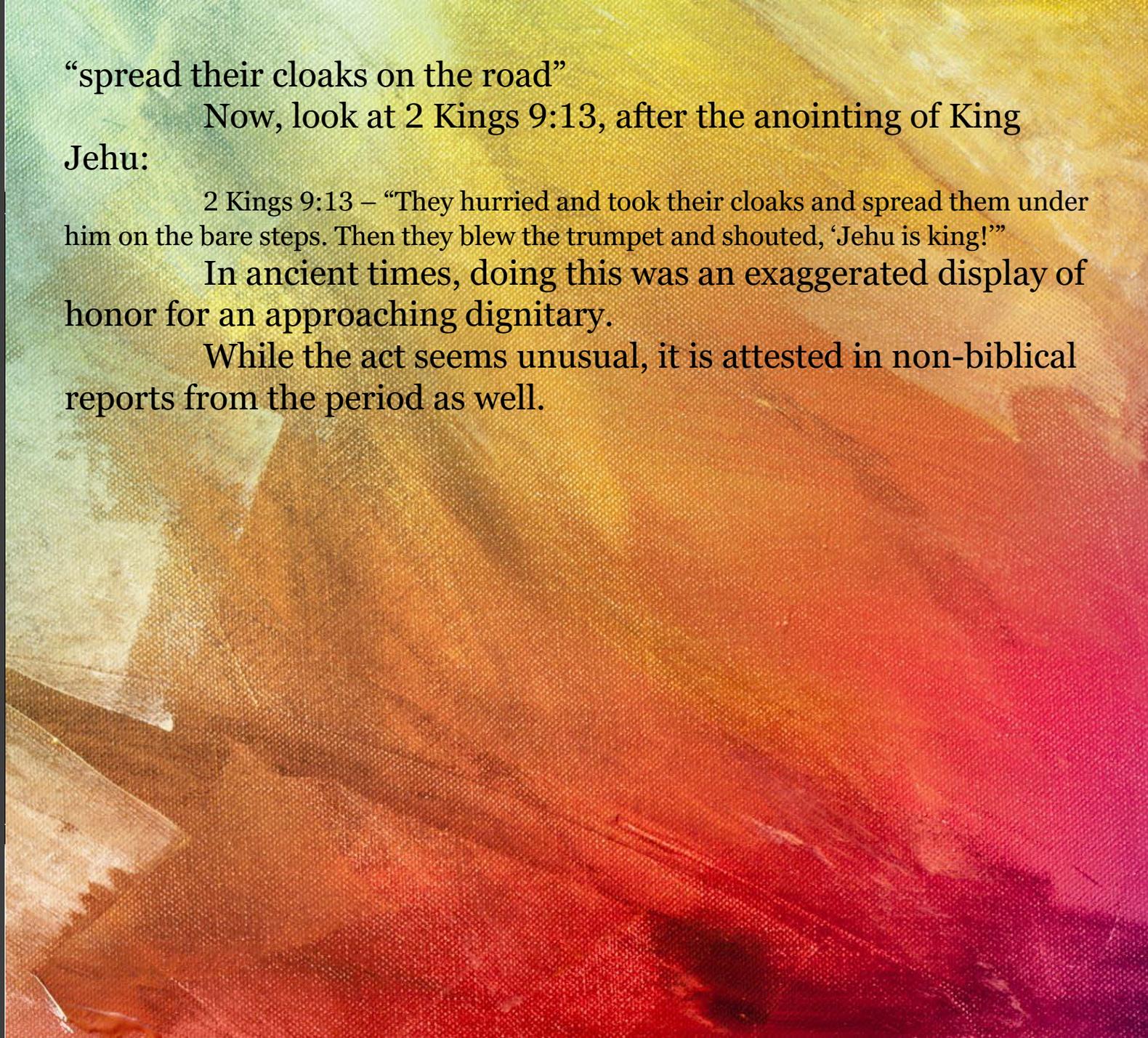
“spread their cloaks on the road”

Now, look at 2 Kings 9:13, after the anointing of King
Jehu:

2 Kings 9:13 – “They hurried and took their cloaks and spread them under
him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, ‘Jehu is king!’”

In ancient times, doing this was an exaggerated display of
honor for an approaching dignitary.

While the act seems unusual, it is attested in non-biblical
reports from the period as well.



Mark 11:9-10

(NIV)

Those who went ahead
and those who followed
shouted, 'Hosanna!'
'Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord!'
'Blessed is the coming
kingdom of our father
David!' 'Hosanna in the
highest!'"

"Those who went ahead and those who followed"

That is, the crowds accompanying Jesus on the journey,
not just locals.

"Hosanna!"

This is a transliteration of the Hebrew for "Save us!"

Psalm 118 shows us its typical use:

Psalm 118:25 – "O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success."

Shouts of "Hosanna!" to Israel's kings are also evident in
Old Testament Scriptures:

2 Samuel 14:4 – "When the woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell
with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she said, 'Help me, O king!'" (In
Hebrew, "Hosanna, O king!")

2 Kings 6:26 – "As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman
cried to him, 'Help me, my lord the king!'" (Again in Hebrew, "Hosanna, my lord the
king!")

Thus, the shout is probably calling upon God to save them
THROUGH Jesus, not to Jesus directly.

"the coming kingdom of our father David"

Jesus has never used this kind of language – but this
reflects the crowd's hopes.

Mark 11:9-10

(NIV)

Those who went ahead
and those who followed
shouted, 'Hosanna!'
'Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord!'
'Blessed is the coming
kingdom of our father
David!' 'Hosanna in the
highest!'"

It appears Jesus has thought through all of this scene to create a clear impression among the people as he enters Jerusalem.

It is an intentional impression of ROYALTY, of Jesus arriving with ROYAL status.

MUCH of Zechariah 9:9-10 contains elements that reflect Jesus' behavior here:

The setting is Jerusalem

There are shouts of joy

A king enters the city

The king arrives humbly, on a colt, not a war-horse

The entry signals a time of coming peace

The king's dominion extends to the whole world.

All of this forms a dramatic announcement:

Jesus IS God's King over Israel, and over the world,
establishing peace.

And Jesus KNOWS and promotes this!

Mark 11:11 (NIV)

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

“went to the temple”

This is immediately after the “Palm Sunday” processional. The fact that Jesus went straight to the temple demonstrates that THIS was Jesus’ ultimate destination. Not simply the city of Jerusalem, but the temple itself.

“looked around at everything”

Note that Jesus is completely ignored, at this point, by any temple authorities.

He, though, takes full stock of the spiritual and religious conditions of Jerusalem and the temple.

It is, essentially, surveillance, to a great extent.

“he went out to Bethany”

This verse is why we presume that the disciples got the colt in Bethany, not Bethphage – they return the colt and stay in that town.

Mark 11:12 (NIV)

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.

“The next day”

This next day, on the way to Jerusalem, we have a deeply symbolic occurrence.

We will not get the conclusion of this scene until AFTER the temple cleaning to come.

Matthew’s Gospel does NOT break the story up in this way, nor does Jesus leave the city and come back the next day in Matthew’s telling of the story.

Luke’s Gospel does not even HAVE the story of the fig tree that we are beginning here, but he, like Matthew, does not have Jesus leave the city after his initial survey of the city and temple.

The awkwardness of Mark’s telling of these events suggests that it IS the original version of the story, as the other versions seem to have “tidied up” the storytelling.

To begin, we need to understand that the fig tree story to come is the interpretive background for Jesus’ actions in the temple – it gives meaning to those actions.

At the same time, the temple story helps to interpret the fig tree event – which seems harsh and out of character for Jesus unless we connect it to the temple scene.

Mark 11:12 (NIV)

The next day as they
were leaving Bethany,
Jesus was hungry.

“The next day” (continued)

By tradition, the royal entry was on a Sunday.

Therefore, these events (the fig tree and the temple cleansing) are occurring on Monday.

Looking ahead to 11:20, we see another new day arrive:

Mark 11:20 – “In the morning, as they went along, ...”

So that would be a Tuesday.

The remainder of chapters 11, 12, and 13, then, all seem to occur on this Tuesday, because in 14:1, the Passover (what will become known as Maundy Thursday) is still two days away:

Mark 14:1 – “Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away

“Jesus was hungry”

This provides the motivation to search for figs on a tree that, by all appearances, has them available.

However, we need to look at some of the symbolic meaning here right away to understand what is happening:

The fig tree will symbolize the temple!

Mark 11:13 (NIV)

Seeing 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.

“fig tree in leaf”

Just as the temple, Jesus had seen, was busy with all kinds of “religious” activity.

Fig trees are deciduous – they sprout leaves in March and shed leaves in late fall.

It has two crop seasons – one from May to June, and another from August into October.

“find out if it had any fruit”

He wonders, might there be an early crop in?

“nothing but leaves”

The fig tree has no fruit, just as the temple is not bearing SPIRITUAL fruit.

“not the season for figs”

This explains why Jesus did not find the hoped-for fruit on the tree.

But also, in the symbolism, it suggests that it is no longer “the season of the temple”.

Mark 11:14 (NIV)

Then he said to the tree,
“May no one ever eat
fruit from you again.”
And his disciples heard
him say it.

“May no one ever eat ...”

Jesus curses the tree’s lack of productivity, causing it to never produce fruit again.

The prophet Jeremiah had used a fruitless fig tree as a sign of God’s judgment:

Jeremiah 8:13 – “I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them.”

This lack of fruitfulness of the tree means the tree stands in danger of judgment ... clearly implying, given what is about to happen in the temple, that the temple also stands in danger of judgment.

Even Jesus’ hunger, then, on searching for fruit on the fig tree, in spite of it not being the season for figs, symbolically exhibits the hope or desire to find a fruitful temple, one that provides spiritual nourishment, even though he knows its season is past.

“disciples heard him say it”

This is important for leading in to Peter’s response the next day, in verse 20 ahead.

Mark 11:15 (NIV)

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area 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,

For such a famous story, it is surprising that this only occupies three verses in Mark's Gospel!

It is equally short in Matthew and Luke, but gets a bit more detail in John.

The story's impact is huge, though, and marks another turning point in Mark's Gospel.

With these actions, an escalating series of accusations and charges against Jesus begins.

Mark 11:15 (NIV)

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area 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,

“entered the temple area”

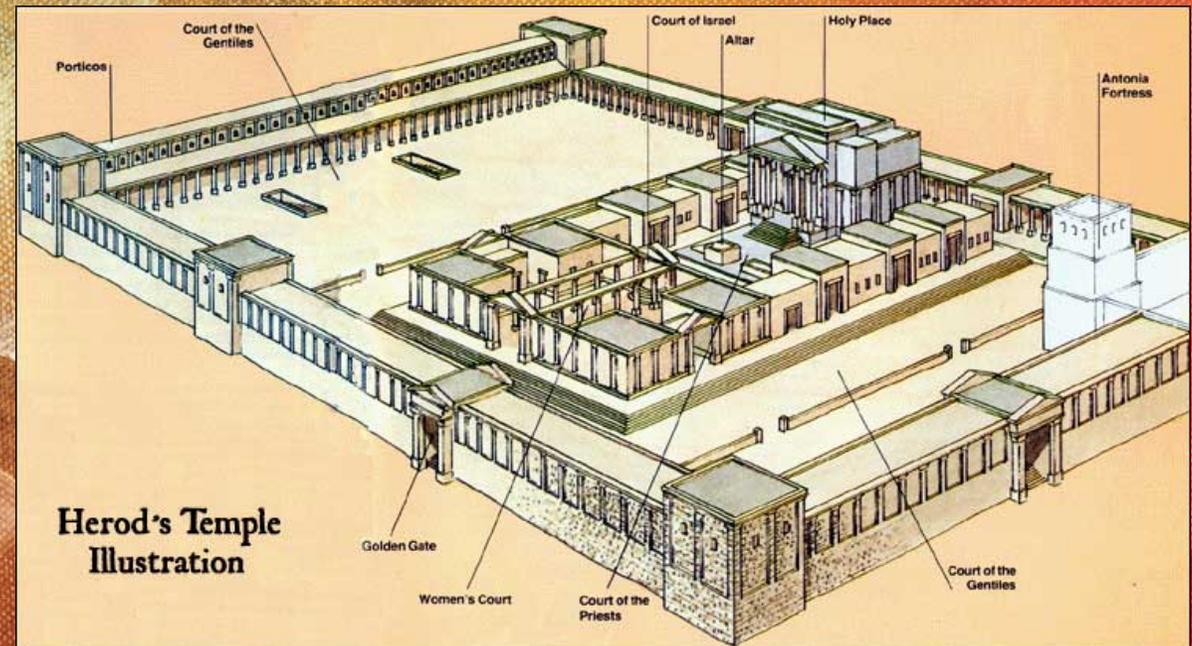
Jesus does NOT enter the building or sanctuary itself, but the much larger “temple precincts”.

Probably, the area that is meant is its outer courts, the “Courts of the Gentiles”.

This was an immense area, about 1500 x 1000 feet – about 35 acres!

It could be entered from any of its four sides.

The inner courts (“Court of Israel”) and the sanctuary itself were near the center, surrounded by walls and gates.



Mark 11:15 (NIV)

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area 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,

“buying and selling there”

This would have primarily been trade for animals needed for the required temple sacrifices.

“tables of the money changers”

These are basically currency exchanges.

The temple would only accept the temple currency, not the Roman coinage.

“those selling doves”

The poor could offer less expensive doves and/or pigeons, and purchase them on site.

Mark 11:16 (NIV)

and would not allow
anyone to carry
merchandise through
the temple courts.

“not allow anyone to carry merchandise”

The removal of merchants from the temple had been prophesied in “the day of the LORD”, by Zechariah:

Zechariah 14:21 – “Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a merchant in the house of the LORD Almighty.”

We need also to understand that in ALL of this activity in the temple courts, extortion and cheating were rampant.

Because the sacrifices were mandatory, people were taken advantage of regularly.

Mark 11:17 (NIV)

And 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.’”

“a house of prayer for all nations”

Jesus is quoting Isaiah 56:7

Isaiah 56:7 – “These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

“den of robbers”

Now, Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:11

Jeremiah 7:11 – “Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.”

Mark 11:17 (NIV)

And 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.’”

These texts imply Jesus’ deep criticism of the temple establishment.

The temple is desecrated, and cannot be repaired.

See 1 Kings, where Solomon (son of David and builder of the temple) talks about the temple’s purpose:

1 Kings 8:41-43 – “As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name – for men will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm – when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.”

Jesus seems to share Solomon’s understanding of the temple’s purpose.

Mark 11:17 (NIV)

And 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.’”

So why DID Jesus go to the temple?

Recognize that in the ancient world, temples had a particular relationship to kings:

Kings built temples to their gods

Kings consecrated temples

Kings protected and defended temples at all costs

Kings remodeled temples

Kings rebuilt temples destroyed by enemies

Temples usually bore kings' names (“Solomon’s Temple”, “Herod’s Temple”)

The king’s palace was usually physically attached to the temple.

So ... if Jesus enters Jerusalem as God’s King, he has the right to enter the temple and take charge of its health and well-being!

Mark 11:17 (NIV)

And 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.’”

Sometimes we read this as if Jesus “lost his temper” in a fit of spontaneous anger and rage.

But remember that here, in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus had surveyed the entire scene the night before.

Nothing he saw this day would have surprised him.

He also would have visited the temple at last once a year as a faithful Jew, so he would have been very familiar with its practices.

Meaning, of course, that ALL of this was preplanned, not spontaneous – he went to the temple with the INTENT to assert authority over it.

It is the same mindset he had in cursing the fig tree – he knew what he was going there to do, and the fig tree incident was a prophetic enactment of the same act of judgment.

Mark 11:17 (NIV)

And 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.’”

So, what did Jesus actually accomplish here?

We call it “cleansing the temple”, but that suggests “fixing” it, or “making it right” – but that did NOT happen here!

The huge size of the temple complex could hold thousands of people at once.

Jesus acted in one small area of the temple complex – even the language says Jesus “began” to drive the people out, not that he completed the action.

The action here is symbolic in and of itself – Jesus was saying something in this action just as he was saying something in the fig tree action.

Jesus looks at the fig tree / temple

Jesus is disappointed in what he sees

Jesus delivers words of judgment

The outcome is destruction – for the fig tree, in actuality (as we will soon see), but for the temple, a destruction yet to come (and which Jesus will predict more fully soon in the narrative).

Mark 11:18 (NIV)

The 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.

“chief priests”

This was a term that included many people – “ruling priests” may be a better translation.

It included the current high priest, the “second in command” priest (someone identified to immediately fill the high priest’s role if he could not), all retired high priests, a “captain of the temple” (in charge of the facility itself), and a treasurer.

The only other times they have been specifically mentioned to this point in Mark’s Gospel has been in the passion predictions of Jesus.

They all live in Jerusalem as Temple officials, so we have not encountered them before in the narrative.

“teachers of the law”

These were more widespread, thus, we HAVE seen them earlier as adversaries, along with Pharisees.

Mark 11:18 (NIV)

The 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.

“looking for a way to kill him”

This may seem like a severe reaction!

However, Jesus’ action in the temple was harsh criticism of these temple authorities!

The commercial activity there occurred under the authority of these ruling priests.

Jesus had thus, in attacking the moneylenders and merchants, attacked the very priesthood.

“for they feared him”

Jesus has often evoked fear in Mark’s Gospel.

Calming the storm at sea, exorcising demoniacs, walking on the sea, and predicting his passion have all evoked a response identified as “fear”.

Now, Jesus’ presumption of authority in the temple and his popularity upon entering the city evoke fear in the ruling priests.

“crowd was amazed”

Still, the crowds have their typical response to Jesus – amazement.

Mark 11:19 (NIV)

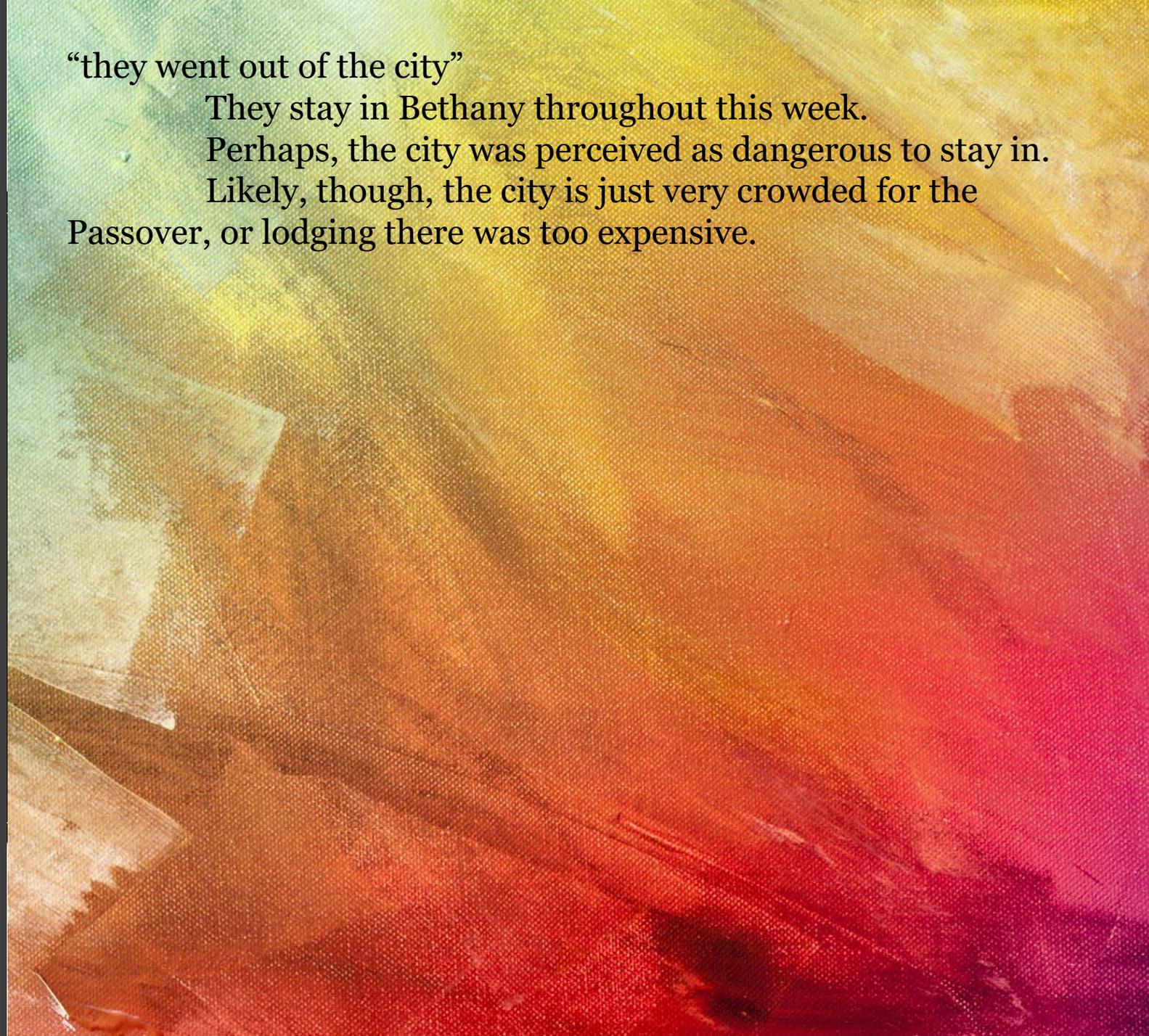
When evening came,
they went out of the
city.

“they went out of the city”

They stay in Bethany throughout this week.

Perhaps, the city was perceived as dangerous to stay in.

Likely, though, the city is just very crowded for the
Passover, or lodging there was too expensive.



Mark 11:20 (NIV)

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

“In the morning”

We are now on the third day of the week in the events of Holy Week.

There are no more date markers in the text until 14:1 about the Passover being two days away.

But again, by tradition, the intervening events from now until then all happen on this day, even though the text is not explicit about the lapse of time.

At the same time, no intervening Sabbaths are mentioned before the day after Jesus' crucifixion, either.

“withered from the roots”

The curse and destruction of the fig tree have been accomplished, from the roots up.

Mark 11:21 (NIV)

Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

“Peter remembered”

This is a reference back to 11:14.

“the fig tree you cursed has withered”

This comment provides the interpretive confidence that the condemnation of the temple will ALSO come to its fruition, resulting in its destruction as well.

But this comment also provides a segue for Jesus into a teaching moment about faith and prayer.

This seems like a somewhat odd subject to lead into, but it implies that Peter is still surprised by the sudden impact of Jesus’ words – the immediate impact of a proclamation and appeal to God.

Mark 11:22 (NIV)

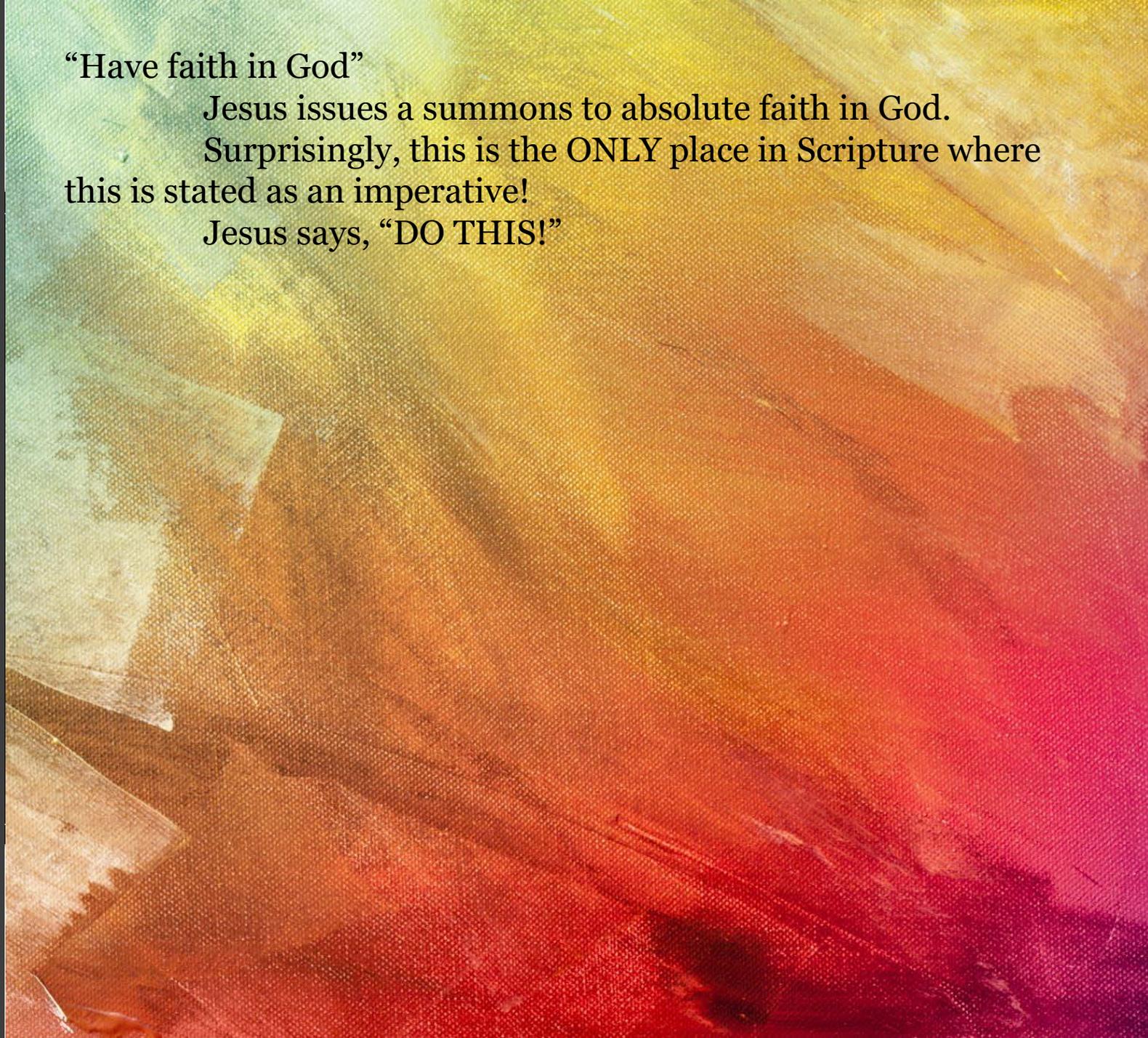
“Have faith in God,”
Jesus answered.

“Have faith in God”

Jesus issues a summons to absolute faith in God.

Surprisingly, this is the ONLY place in Scripture where this is stated as an imperative!

Jesus says, “DO THIS!”



Mark 11:23 (NIV)

“I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”

“says to this mountain”

This saying is present in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as it being referenced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:2.

1 Corinthians 13:2 – “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

While moving mountains is a big deal to us, ancient Jews thought that mountains were outcroppings of the very foundations of the earth, anchoring them in place, making this proclamation even more startling to them!

“This” mountain seems to indicate a PARTICULAR mountain.

Perhaps, the Mount of Olives, or more likely, the Temple Mount itself.

In any case, it represents a monumental challenge.

“throw yourself into the sea”

This image is eschatological in nature.

Many passages show such physical, cosmic transformation of the planet in the end times.

Mark 11:23 (NIV)

“I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”

“does not doubt in his heart”

This implies ABSOLUTE confidence.

“it will be done for him”

That is, “you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, which amazed you, but far greater things as well”.

The point is God’s ability to make the impossible possible.

We want to think ahead to the resurrection here!

Mark 11:24 (NIV)

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

“whatever you ask for”

This saying also appears in all four Gospels.

It takes the amazing mountain moving statement even further.

Prayer, for Mark, is the natural follow-on to faith in God. Faith is a relationship with God that allows God to accomplish His redemptive work through our prayers and actions.

But is this statement of Jesus equivalent to a blank check?

Jesus guarantees it personally when he says “I tell you the truth”.

But God can **ONLY** act consistent with God’s nature.

So “whatever you ask” **MUST** conform to God’s love, truth, purpose, gospel, and holiness – God cannot act otherwise.

And remember – Jesus has **JUST** turned down the request of James and John, in 10:35, to sit at his right and left.

God does not answer prayers/requests flowing out of greed, or out of the desire for power or prestige.

Effective prayer requires a pure heart.

Furthermore, the next verse involves a **CONDITION** for answered prayer!

Mark 11:25 (NIV)

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

“when you stand praying”

Standing was a common posture for prayer:

Jeremiah 18:20 – “Remember that I stood before you and spoke in their behalf to turn your wrath away from them.”

Matthew 6:5 – “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.”

“forgive”

This is Mark’s only teaching about the need to forgive.

The statement is in parallel to the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:

Matthew 6:14 – “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

Forgiveness of others grows out of a sense of our OWN forgiveness by God.

To be forgiven by God, and NOT to forgive others, is to fail to truly experience God’s grace, and makes the prayer relationship to God false. Therefore, prayer becomes ineffective.

Jesus preaches forgiveness after his grand promise of answered prayer specifically because the effectiveness of prayer depends on the nature of our relationship to others, which is the true reflection of our TRUE relationship with God.

Mark 11:26 (NIV)

["But if you do not
forgive, neither will
your Father who is in
heaven forgive your
sins"]

This verse is only included in older translations of the Bible.

It is only footnoted in newer translations, because it is now perceived as a later addition.

It is not found in the oldest existing manuscripts of Mark's Gospel.

It IS, however, found in Matthew 6:15.

Mark 11:1-26

(NIV)

SUMMARY

God DOES remove personal and physical mountains that stand in the way of God's promised salvation – when lives are yielded, in faith, to God and God's purposes.

But you can't "be right with God" and against those you have not forgiven.

The TEMPLE, in Jesus' day, was to be the epitome of this – a "house of prayer for all nations"!

But the temple was no longer this place, and Jesus' teaching suggests that it (the entire Temple Mount) may well be thrown into the sea!

Coincidentally, at this time in history, personal prayer was more and more being elevated in importance, as temples were beginning to be devalued in general.

Prayer was beginning to be understood as being able to be offered anywhere, in any place, by anyone, and not limited to places or locations, such as temples.

For Jews, this understanding had already begun to take root during the Babylonian exile, when temple worship was not possible, and synagogue prayer had replaced it.



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