

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Mark 11:12-19

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, April 6, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 6, 2014**, is from **Mark 11:12-19**. Please Note: Some churches will only study **Mark 11:15-19**. This commentary is the third part of a three part Bible Lesson that includes Isaiah 56:6-8 and Jeremiah 7:1-12. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Mark 11:12-19

(Mark 11:12) On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

Jesus' actions in Mark 11:12-14 have been difficult to understand, coming between His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and His cleansing of the temple. His actions regarding the fig tree seem to be symbolic or as some commentators have said, "a parable." If so, Jesus was showing that people are spiritually hungry in Judea and Jerusalem, and the consequences from God's perspective when the religious leaders are self-serving instead of God-serving and people-serving. Jesus is about to do something destructive, which may indicate that even though He has consistently proclaimed a gospel of grace and peace there will come a time when He must judge the unrepentant (which the *Book of Revelation* describes Jesus doing as the returning King of the universe).

(Mark 11:13) Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

Mark states this fact: "it was not the season for figs;" which makes some think that Jesus was treating the tree unjustly. However, if Jesus wanted to act out a parable in order to teach a spiritual lesson before He entered the temple to cleanse it, the lesson may be that the temple leaders appeared to be giving moral and spiritual nourishment and guidance to the people (they had leaves), but upon closer inspection they were not bearing fruit as God intended. When Jesus went to the temple that professed to be God's house, He did not find any

nourishing spiritual life there. In the *Book of Jonah*, God makes a gourd or bush grow and bear leaves to cool Jonah and then sends a worm to kill the gourd or bush the next day to show Jonah that people are more important than plants (Jonah 4:5-11). The warning that Jesus wanted to give through the destruction of the fig tree that produced no fruit shows that Jesus considered people and their right relationship with God as more important than a tree. God can easily make a new tree grow anywhere. In Paul's *Second Letter to Timothy*, he wrote that Christians need to be ready to do the Lord's work no matter what the season: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2-KJV) — "Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2-NRSV). No matter what the season, God expects religious leaders to be engaged in meeting the spiritual needs of those He has called them to serve.

(Mark 11:14) He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

Jesus condemned the tree for not providing food that the leaves might draw people to with the expectation of finding fruit, just as people were drawn to the temple expecting to find God's work being done and God's spiritual food being served. Because the scribes, Pharisees, and priests would not repent, no one would ever eat spiritual food from them again. They would be replaced by

Jesus' apostles and true followers, who filled with the Holy Spirit would bear much fruit. Indeed, just as the tree was destroyed and never bore fruit again, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. and has never produced fruit again (though Jesus cleansed the temple, it quickly reverted back to a house of robbers).

(Mark 11:15) Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves;

The fact that Jesus entered Jerusalem and cleansed the temple immediately after the incident of the fig tree indicates He intended to teach a moral and spiritual lesson through both of these actions. If those who managed the temple did not repent, then because they stole from the people with their false appearance of feeding the people when robbing them, then the temple would be destroyed as happened to the first temple in the time of Jeremiah the prophet in 586 B.C., when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried many Jews into exile.

(Mark 11:16) and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.

Jesus cleansed the outer courts and those places in the temple where the priests were stealing from the people. He also prevented people from disrespecting the temple and

using any part of the temple for conducting any unholy business. The temple had become a commercial center for making money, and Jesus wanted to prevent this in every way.

(Mark 11:17) He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

From reading the *Gospel of John*, it seems that Jesus had cleansed the temple at least once before during a Passover at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13-17). The fact that He cleansed it again in the week of His last Passover shows how stubborn the religious leaders were: they were intent on robbing the people (especially the pilgrims who travelled great distances to get to Jerusalem for Passover) instead of keeping His house “a house of prayer for all the nations.” Jesus did not want any immoral activity in a house that His Father intended as a place to commune with Him and find forgiveness for sins. We should not be surprised that the temple quickly became a place of commerce again soon after these religious leaders crucified Jesus; therefore, God had to destroy the temple in 70 A.D. as Jesus symbolic actions with the fig tree foretold.

(Mark 11:18) And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.

Obviously, the priests did not want their supreme authority questioned or their profit making ventures revealed to the people or disrupted. Jesus made His point: He would fearlessly promote the cause of God no matter how much opposition He faced; therefore, they feared Him and they knew they had to kill Him to stop Him before He influenced too many people.

(Mark 11:19) And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Jesus spent the day doing many things; healing the people and teaching for examples. The people were spellbound by His teaching, and if Jesus was not stopped the people might demand that the priests keep the temple clean for the proper worship of God. When evening came, Jesus left the city with His disciples, probably taught His disciples more as they ate their evening meal, and then finally, Jesus probably went up on the Mount of Olives to pray, as was His custom.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

Since this is the third of a three part lesson series, only 2 of the 5 Study Questions will be asked below.

1. Why do you think the priests allowed the money changers and those who sold doves for sacrifices keep

cheating the people, both before and after Jesus cleansed the temple?

2. Why do you think Jesus quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament prophets) after He cleansed the temple?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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