

THE ENACTED PARABLE OF MARK 11

The enacted parable of Mark 11 is one of the most fascinating parables in Scripture because it demonstrates the mind of Christ in relation to the salvation of the Gentiles at the very time his own people were rejecting him (John 1:11). The parable actually begins in Mark 10:46 immediately after the words of verse 45 – “For verily the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” The many here clearly includes the Gentiles “for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:15) because he has just mentioned Gentiles in verse 42.

Mark 10:46

“And they came to Jericho” – Jericho is called “the city of palms” in Deut. 34:3; Jud. 1:16; 3:13; 2 Chron. 28:15. The palm tree is a symbol for the nations in Scripture. Proof of that is found in such places as Ex. 15:27 where at Elim (the place of “mighty ones”) Israel encountered 12 (= Israel) wells of water nourishing 70 (number of the nations – Gen. 10) palm trees. This is a vision of the Kingdom Age when Israel becomes the head of the nations and provides the source of spiritual nourishment for the subjected nations (Zech. 8:23; Mic. 4:1-2). A similar proof is Rev. 7:9 where the redeemed from all nations hold palm branches in their hands.

Jericho was the only city of Canaan devoted to utter destruction when Israel entered the land under Joshua. That is because it was the centre of Baal (Nimrod) worship in Canaan. Hence, Achan took illegal possession of “a goodly Babylonish (Heb. Shinar) garment” (Josh. 7:21). The ISV translates “a beautiful mantle from Shinar.” This was a priestly garment, red in colour, originally worn by the inner circle of the priests of Semiramis. Shinar is the Hebrew form of the Akkadian name Sumar-amat or Semiramis in its well known form. Semiramis was the wife of Nimrod and is the source of the symbology of the harlot woman/system of Rev. 17. Little wonder that Jericho was devoted to utter destruction because it was the adoption of Baal worship in Israel by Ahab at the same time Jericho was being rebuilt (1 Kings 16:31-34), and by Manasseh of Judah (2 Kings 21:1-3) that culminated in the captivity of both Israel and Judah.

The connection of Jericho with the Gentiles is immediately established in this enacted parable.

“blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus” – Blindness is a metaphor for spiritual ignorance – Isa. 43:8; 56:10; Matt. 15:14; John 9:39,41. This was the state of the Gentiles whom Bartimaeus represents. Bartimaeus means “the son of the polluted” a clear hint of the way Jews viewed Gentiles. The name is repeated in the phrase. Used twice, it also suggests the condition of moral alienation of the Gentiles from God. Two is the Scriptural number for separation and division – Gen. 1:6-8. While Bartimaeus may well have been a Jew, he is unquestionably the representative of the Gentiles in this enacted parable.

“sat by the highway side begging” – This is a graphic figure of the Gentile condition. Firstly, there is inaction and inertia – “sat”. Sitting in the spiritual sense is not ideal for progress. Secondly, the “highway” (i.e. being outside the house) is used in Christ’s parables for Gentile exclusion from the things belonging to Israel; e.g. Matt. 22:9-10. “Begging” is a miserable state. It bespeaks either powerlessness to provide for oneself or unwillingness to do so. Both amply represent the position occupied by the Gentiles when Christ appeared.

Verse 47 – “when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth” – Faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17). In that same place Paul writes: Rom 10:12-14 – **“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon**

him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Bartimaeus had heard reports of the miracles of Christ opening the eyes of the blind and much else. He had never seen Christ, nor perhaps ever been close to him, but his opportunity now arrived. His 'cry' of faith revealed he had believed the reports (Isa. 53:1).

"Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me" – Crying out "Yahweh's salvation" (the meaning of Jesus) as David's son meant Bartimaeus saw the connection between Jesus Christ and the promises made to David. No one understood the plan of Yahweh to extend salvation to the Gentiles through His promised Son better in Old Testament times than David, evidenced by the Tabernacle of David (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 7:46; 15:15-18).

Verse 48 – "many charged him that he should hold his peace" – The Jews perennially and vigorously denied access by Gentiles to the things belonging to Israel – e.g. Acts 11:2-3. This element of the parable emerges again in Mark 11:5.

"he cried the more a great deal" – The Gentiles proved hungrier for the teachings and mission of Christ than the Jews. This is the clear message of the 'baskets' of fragments collected after the two miraculous feedings of a multitude. Christ expected understanding of these events. In Mark 8:14-21 he upbraids his disciples for their lack of understanding. Two different Greek words for 'baskets' provides the key. The twelve 'baskets' (*kophinos* – a hand basket) collected after the feeding of the 5,000 plus who were principally Jews suggested they were not particularly hungry for the 'bread from heaven'. The seven 'baskets' (*spuris* – a small lunch hamper) collected after the feeding of the 4,000 principally Gentiles who had followed Christ from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon suggests the Gentiles were much hungrier than the Jews for the 'bread' Christ provided. (Students should not be derailed by the word *spuris* used in Acts 9:25. Reed bags or 'baskets' can be made in various sizes, even large enough for an adult to be lowered down a wall, but the 'baskets' employed by the disciples were the small lunch packs they bound to their waist when travelling).

Verse 49 – "Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called" – Jesus paused in the way to the cross to incorporate Gentiles in his work of redemption. This pointed to the call of the Gentiles after his resurrection and ascension fulfilling Isa. 49:6 – **"I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."**

"Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee" – The word "comfort" is *tharseo* – to have courage (sometimes translated "cheer"), occurs 8 times in the N.T. and is always associated with the reward of faith and/or the need to increase faith. The Gentiles were to experience this cheerfulness and comfort when the Gospel was preached to them after many Jews rejected it – e.g. Acts 13:42-48. Bartimaeus was called upon to "rise" – a spiritual resurrection was necessary to leave behind 'blindness'.

Verse 50 – "And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus" – Like the fig leaf covering of Adam and Eve that had to be discarded, so Bartimaeus forsakes his own 'covering' for an enduring one. Spiritual 'resurrection' is the next step.

Verse 51 – "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" – While the word "wilt" (*ethelo*) has a fairly wide usage, the first and last of its 210 occurrences in the N.T. suggest its meaning here. In Matt. 1:19 Joseph was not "willing" to expose Mary's presumed failure. In Rev. 22:17 Christ appeals to "whomsoever will". Willingness is fundamental to salvation. As Bro. Islip Collyer wrote in Conviction and Conduct page 155 – "There is only one work in which God has any actual need of your assistance, and that is the work of your own

salvation.” The unwilling are unredeemable and sadly too many Jews of Christ’s era were in that state. Many Gentiles proved to be different – Luke 4:25-27; 7:9.

“Lord, that I might receive my sight” – In the parable this request represents a desire for enlightenment. Without seeing the light there is no salvation (Isa. 9:2).

Verse 52 – “Go thy way” – The one Greek word *hupago* used here does not mean to go one’s own way. It means to withdraw or retire (as if sinking out of sight). In other words, it is about taking another ‘way’. The words ‘thy way’ can be safely deleted from this phrase.

“And immediately he received his sight” – Faith leads immediately to sight. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The word of God (correctly understood) enlightens. This was the process foreshadowed for Gentile conversion.

“and followed Jesus in the way” – That ‘way’ was the way of the cross. The word “way” is *hodos* and is previously used in verses 17 and 32 of the way to Jerusalem for the crucifixion. There is a contrast drawn in this chapter between the rich young ruler who came to Jesus just as he entered the ‘way’ to the cross and sought the way to eternal life. Jesus loved him but the love was not reciprocated. The challenge of forsaking present possessions and taking up the cross to “follow” Jesus was too much for him. The word “follow” in verse 21 significantly is *akaloutheo* – to be in the same way with; to accompany. This, the rich young ruler chose not to do. However, previously blind Bartimaeus ‘took up his cross’ (so to speak) and followed Jesus in the way to the cross. To be crucified with Christ by baptism into his death is a key element of salvation – Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 2:20.

Mark 11:1 – “And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives” – Three trees are referred to in this opening phrase of Mark 11 and speak eloquently to the unfolding parable of Gentile inclusion in the approaching redemptive work of Christ.

Bethphage means “house of unripe figs” and is a symbol for Israel – the fig tree being one of the botanical symbols in Scripture for God’s nation – Joel 1:7,12; Hos. 9:10; Jer. 24:1-3. In the time of Christ Bethphage was the gateway to Jerusalem. It served as the entry point of the municipality of Jerusalem.

“Bethany” means “house of dates”. The date is a product of the date palm tree. As noted in the comments made above on Jericho, the palm is one Biblical symbol for the nations.

The Mount of Olives was and still is known for its olive trees. The olive does service in Scripture for both Jew and Gentile. This is clear from Rom. 11:17-25 where the Apostle describes Israel as the cultivated olive and the Gentiles as the wild olive. These are brought together in Zech. 4:3 in the vision of the Kingdom Age when Jew and Gentile will contribute oil to the golden lampstand. It is fitting that Christ should first come to Bethphage and from there send two disciples to collect the ass and the colt from Bethany. The Divine principle has always been – to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.

“he sendeth forth two of his disciples” – As both the ass representing Israel and the colt representing the Gentiles were to be brought from Bethany it was necessary to send two disciples. In the parable this indicates that the work of Christ was for both Jew and Gentile.

Verse 2 – “Go your way into the village over against you” – i.e. Bethany – the “house of date palms.” The apostles, after the ascension of Christ were to preach the Gospel in Samaria (Acts 1:8) and ultimately throughout the Roman world (“the uttermost part of the earth”).

“and as soon as ye be entered into it” – In the parable this represents the immediate response of the Gentiles to the preaching of the Gospel. This was the experience of the apostles – Acts 13:44-48.

“ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat” – The companion account of Matt. 21:2 records that the disciples would find “an ass tied, and a colt with her.” This is consistent with Zech. 9:9 which Matthew says was fulfilled (in a primary sense) in these events – Matt. 21:4-5. Luke has the same record as Mark with only the colt mentioned. John too mentions only “a young ass.” What is the reason for this?

The Gospel accounts each have a different focus based on the four faces of the Cherubim.

Matthew the lion face focuses on Jesus Christ as the one who would fulfil the O.T. prophecies concerning the first advent of Messiah. He sees Christ as “the lion of the tribe of Judah” coming to ensure that the promises made to the fathers would be fulfilled and ultimately to sit on David’s throne as King of Israel. His audience was primarily Jews and then by extension, in time, Gentiles. This is why in Matthew’s record there are two ‘Legions’ (so to speak) – Matt. 8:28-29; and two blind men – Matt. 9:27-28. The two in each case represent both Jew and Gentile.

Mark is the ox face of the Cherubim and his key message concerns Jesus Christ as Yahweh’s true ‘servant’ of the Servant Songs of Isaiah. Mark wrote primarily for Romans. Therefore, Mark focuses on the place of Gentiles in the purpose of God.

Luke writes for Greeks and focuses on the perfect man – the man represented in the face of the Cherubim. He too concentrates on the relationship of Gentiles to the Gospel while portraying Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of O.T. prophecy and especially the promises made to the fathers.

John’s lofty gospel is characterised by the soaring of the Spirit like the eagle face of the Cherubim. It is from John that most false doctrine has arisen because he wrote for the spiritual who had the key to become sons of God (John 1:11-13).

Inherent proof that the above is so is found in Pilate’s inscriptions on the cross of Christ. Both Matthew and John use the Hebrew form of Pilate’s words while Mark uses the Latin form and Luke the Greek.

THE SYMBOL OF THE ASS IN SCRIPTURE

Among beasts of burden the male ass is the primary Biblical symbol for the nation of Israel. The Hebrew word for the male ass is *chamor*.

The female ass is a symbol for the multitude of Israel. The Hebrew word *athon* occurs 34 times in the O.T. and signifies a female ass (from its docility) – see first occurrence in Gen. 12:16.

Balaam’s ass is well known. It was a female ass and the word *athon* is employed 14 times in Num. 22 between verses 21 and 33 where the ass is referred to as ‘she’, ‘her’, ‘herself’ seven times in those verses. Seven is the covenant number, inter-alia, and 14 is the number of the certainty of covenant (doubling seven – hinted at in 7 fat and 7 lean kine =14, and 7 fat and 7 lean ears of corn in Pharaoh’s dream – Gen. 41:32 explains that doubling makes the thing sure and certain). Balaam foolishly pursued a reward by cooperating with Balak king of Moab who instructed him to “Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.” Balak sought to curse the multitude of Israel who are represented by the female ass – *athon*.

In Zech. 9:9 the phrase “riding upon an ass (*chamor*), and upon a colt (*ayir*), the foal of an ass (*athon* – final occurrence)” contains all the Hebrew words used for the ass. We can conclude from this testimony that the ass brought to Jesus was a male ass – the symbol of Israel.

The unbroken colt represents the Gentiles in the parable. This will become obvious as almost every phrase that follows drives home that point. Here was a young ass that no man had ever ridden just as the Gentiles had never come under the control of God.

But why bring the ass as well as the colt if the Lord intended only to ride the colt? Zechariah 9:9 says the King of Israel would come “riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” How was this possible? No one can ride two animals at once. The record of Matthew similarly does not say which of the two Christ would ride, while Mark, Luke and John all say he rode the colt alone and do not mention the ass, although it was there. It was necessary that both ass and colt be brought to Christ for he came to save both Jew and Gentile, but his rejection by his own people (John 1:11) saw the ass of Israel by-passed for the time being. His selection of the unbroken colt is clearly designed to indicate that he would now go to the Gentiles.

But how did Christ know that he would choose the colt? It was prophesied that he would do so in the prophecy of Jacob – Gen. 49:10-11. Here was the Shiloh that would ultimately bring all peoples to himself in the Kingdom Age – Gen. 49:10 – RV – “And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.” Shiloh would “bind his foal unto the vine (of Israel – Ps. 80:8), and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine (the Israel of God – John 15:1-2). Christ knew from Jacob’s prophecy exactly what he would do that day – he would fulfil it.

“loose him, and bring him” – The Gentiles were imprisoned in ignorance and servitude to sin. They needed to be “loosed” and brought to Jesus Christ and this was soon to happen during the period of the Acts of the Apostles.

Verse 3 – “And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this?” – The Lord anticipated Jewish objection to the call of the Gentiles exactly as it came to pass – Acts 22:21-22.

“say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither” – Some Jews would finally agree that God had called the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3; 15:14). Because the Jewish nation had largely rejected him it was necessary to turn to the Gentiles – Acts 13:46-47; Rom. 11:11-12,25,28-32.

Verse 4 – “and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him” – The unbroken colt representing the Gentiles was found outside the house (i.e. the Gentiles were not ‘inside’ the ‘house’ of Israel). They were tied up in ignorance and sin. However, both the ass and the colt were in the same place. That place was where “two ways met”. The apostate ‘way’ of the Jews at that time was matched by the ignorant and ungoverned ‘way’ of the Gentiles. Both were brought to Christ for he came to save them all, but his own people were not ready for him. Hence, Jesus would by-pass the ass representing the nation of Israel and choose the colt just as Paul outlines in Rom. 11.

Verse 5 – “And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt?” – As the Lord had said. These Jews too seem to have been outside the house. The state of many in Israel was in fact ‘outside the house’.

Verse 7 – “And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him” – No mention is made of the ass as Mark is focusing on Gentile inclusion in the mission of Christ. The disciples cast their garments on the colt and gave him a covering just as it was the apostles who were to provide a covering for the Gentiles by preaching the Gospel.

Verse 8 – “And many spread their garments in the way” – Many of the Jews gathering around Christ cast their own covering “in the way”; i.e. the way to the cross, but sadly many did not follow through in the time ahead, many thinking perhaps that this was the time of the Kingdom and not the preparation for the Kingdom.

“others cut down branches off the trees” – These were palm branches – see John 12:13. As noted above (see note Mark 10:46), the palm is a symbol for the nations. The colt represented the Gentiles and the palm branches the nations, so it is clear what the Lord is endeavouring to demonstrate in this enacted parable.

Verse 9 – “And they that went before, and they that followed” – This is suggestive of the Jews (i.e. those related to Messiah before he came) and the Gentiles (i.e. those who were next to hear of Israel’s Messiah). This was the 10th day of Abib – the day that the Passover lamb was corralled and inspected by each family in Israel. The multitude of Israel had their opportunity to inspect the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. They were to find no blemish in him over the next five days.

“Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” – The words of verses 9 and 10 are cited from Ps. 118:25-26 for the multitude believed Christ’s riding into Jerusalem was a fulfilment of that prophecy. Hosanna is the Anglicised Greek form of the two Hebrew words translated “Save now” in Ps. 118:25 – *yasha na*.

Ps. 118 sits in the middle of the Bible. It is said Ps. 118:8 are the central words of Scripture – “It is better to trust in Yahweh than to put confidence in man (*adam*).” Within a couple of days the Lord was to use the words of Ps. 118:26 himself at the end of his condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees in Matt. 23:39. He placed no trust in man and knew that the singing by the people of this passage from Ps. 118 would soon be forgotten in the tumultuous events of his trials and crucifixion. However, the real meaning of Ps. 118 would be guaranteed by his triumph over sin and death, though rejected by his own people and their leaders as prophesied in the psalm – **“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner”** (V.22). But Yahweh became his salvation (V.21) – **“This is Yahweh’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”** And as consequence the future was guaranteed – the Millennial Day would come – **“This is the day which Yahweh hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it”** (V.24). It is significant that the next words in the text are *yasha na* (“hosanna”). Ps. 118 looks to Armageddon as the means to accomplish the final result. So verses 10 to 16 speak of Christ overpowering and destroying his enemies. The language is drawn from the Song of Moses in Ex. 15 (one of the contexts from which the song of the redeemed is drawn – Rev. 15:3). Verse 14 is drawn from Ex. 15:2 and verses 15 and 16 are drawn from Ex. 15:6-12.

Verse 10 – “Blessed be the kingdom of our father David” – In the Kingdom Christ will sit on David’s throne in the House of Prayer for all nations and it will also be known as “the tabernacle of David” (Isa. 16:5). David’s tent to house the Ark was so that Gentiles (many uncircumcised) could worship Yahweh in truth without the restrictions of the Law.

Verse 11 – “And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things” – This was the third inspection by the priest of the leprous house that the second temple had become. Jeremiah as a priest had conducted the first two inspections and the steps prescribed by the law of Lev. 14:33-45 had been taken. The time had now come for the temple to be condemned as Luke 19:41-46 records (this entire section is built upon Jeremiah’s prophecy). What the Lord found in his inspection did not please him.

“and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve” – The ‘eventide’ of Judah’s Commonwealth was only 40 years away when the events of AD 70 would see the temple dismantled stone by stone. The Lord returned to Bethany (representing the nations) as a sign that he would now implement the promise inherent in his citation of Isa. 42:1-3 in Matt. 12:18-20. He would become “a light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 49:6).

Verse 12 – “And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry”

– This was the 11th of Abib and on the surface this situation seems strange. The Lord regularly took refuge in Bethany in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus who went out of their way to succour him and his disciples. Why then was the Lord hungry? Was it because he had been out all night on the mountain in prayer? Or might an early start have seen a repeat of Mark 3:20 when a multitude prevented breakfast being taken? The record is silent but the parable is eloquent.

It is impossible to hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6) rightly sought without seeking it for others also. The Lord was hungry for ‘fruits fit for repentance’ from his people. The period for the inspection of the unblemished Passover lamb had begun. Perhaps some would closely observe him and change their ways.

Verse 13 – “And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.” – The fig tree is one botanical symbol for the nation of Israel - Joel 1:7,12; Hos. 9:10; Jer. 24:1-3; Luke 13:6; 21:29-30. The fig tree is unique among fruit trees. In early spring the barren branches produce a bud that later grows into leaves and fruit (see box below). The tiny fruit bud appears first before the emergence of leaves. Hence, if leaves are seen on a fig tree it is evidence that there is a small bud of fruit as well. This bud of fruit continues to grow until harvest some several months later (a harvest foreshadowed in the phrase “for the time of figs was not yet”). Though bitter in taste and course in texture, the fruit is quite nutritious and the poor could supplement their meagre diet with it. Jesus had the reasonable expectation that a fig tree with a covering of leaves would also have some early fruit. Similarly, it was reasonable for him to expect that when he came to his own he would find some fruits meet for repentance – Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20. He found none.



Extracts below are from ‘The Fig: Botany, Horticulture and Breeding’. Moshe A. Flaishman, Department of Fruit Tree Sciences, Agricultural Research Organization, Volcani Center, Bet Dagan, Israel

“The fig is an unusual tree as it may produce multiple crops of fruits each year.”

“The breba crop*...is borne laterally on the growth of the previous season from buds produced in leaf axils. These buds develop in the following spring, and the fruit matures between June and July. The main crop of figs is produced laterally in the axils of leaves on shoots of the current season.”

*A **breba** is a fig that develops on a common fig tree in the spring on the previous year's shoot growth.

Verse 14 – “And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.”

– The absence of fruit fit for repentance in Israel was to see the Gospel go directly to the Gentiles though “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). Hence, no man would eat fruit of Israel until the Kingdom Age when Israel becomes the head of the nations – Deut. 28:13; Zech. 8:20-23. That is why the Lord uses a term referring to the long period prior to that day – “hereafter for ever” – Greek *mekiti eis aion* – “no further unto the age”. The age is clearly the Millennial Age. So it has come to pass.

“And his disciples heard it.” – This is another curious statement. Of course, they would have heard what Jesus said. Why then does the record state it? The disciples of Christ

were just that – learners, as the word means. They had much to learn about the future of their own people and about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the purpose of God. The exclusivity of the Jewish nation was deeply ingrained in them and they found it very difficult (as events were later to prove) to accept that the Gentiles might be embraced in the purpose of God notwithstanding the fullness and eloquence of this theme throughout the O.T. and its incorporation into the promises made unto the fathers.

Verse 15 – “Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves” – On the 11th of Abib activity increased in the temple compound as folk arriving from near and far together with the locals prepared for Passover. A good deal of that activity occurred in the Court of the Gentiles which the merchants and moneychangers had taken over as their commercial hub. The temple and its services had become big business. Worshippers were forbidden to bring their own animals to the temple for sacrifice, and only the temple coinage could be used to purchase sacrifices. The temple had become a den of thieves – Jer. 7:11; Matt. 21:13; Luke 19:46. Not only so, for the space provided for Gentile proselyte congregation was taken up with Judaistic trading leaving no room for visiting Gentiles to access the temple.

Jesus systematically removes the offending business stalls and scatters their wares. What in fact is he doing? His next actions explain.

Verse 16 – “And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.” – This was Passover time, one of the busiest times in the temple services. Levites and priests were scurrying around in the confines of the temple courts carrying water, animals, vessels and other paraphernalia of temple worship. Jesus interrupts this activity by commanding that everyone cease what he is doing. Imagine the shock and the horror not only of the ministers scurrying about, but of the temple captain and his cohort at this unprecedented intervention. Christ is making a statement. Soon the activity will resume when the Lord moves on and the stunned multitude recover their composure. But he had actually stopped the Mosaic Order from operating for a short while and this pointed to the time 40 years later when it would be dissolved in the events of AD 70 and no one would carry any vessel through the temple courts any more.

Verse 17 – “And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.” – Now comes deliberate teaching while Jesus has the attention of the quieted multitude in the Court of the Gentiles. He cites Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11. As in Isa. 56:7 this should be translated “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (RV). This was the Lord’s message – Gentiles would be included in the purpose of God.

The context of Isa. 56:7 is illuminating in the light of these events. There it is the eunuchs (i.e. those prevented by the Law from serving or worshipping in the temple) and the strangers (i.e. Gentiles who have no inheritance in Israel) who are promised that their faith in choosing the things that belong to Yahweh would lead them to a place in His House – **“Unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters”** (V.5), and **“even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer”** (V.7). Interestingly, the eunuch cut off by law is encouraged not to say “I am a dry tree” (V.3). Jesus had just cursed the barren fig tree and by the end of this day it had dried up from the roots. Similarly, the stranger was not to say “Yahweh hath utterly separated me from his people.”

Verse 18 – “And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, for all the multitude was astonished at his

teaching.” – The events of the 11th of Abib sealed the fate of Jesus of Nazareth in the minds of the Jewish authorities. They had sought to undermine him in various ways in the past but his intervention in the temple services and its effect not only on their authority, but also on their profits confirmed the validity of the counsel of Caiaphas agreed upon a few weeks earlier – John 11:49-53. That counsel based upon the fear of the Sanhedrin that “the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” had forced the Lord to leave Jerusalem for a while and do a circuit in the wilderness to the north east of Jerusalem. The events of this day were the last straw for the leadership of the nation.

Verse 19 – “And when even was come, he went out of the city.” – To Bethany (the town representing the Gentiles in the parable).

Verse 20 – “And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.” – The 12th of Abib arrived with the startling scene on the slopes of the Mt of Olives of the cursed fig tree shrivelled up from the roots. This foreshadowed the dawning of a new era beyond AD 70 when the Commonwealth of Judah would be eclipsed. The root of the fig tree of Israel was the covenant made to the fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abrahamic faith was absent in the Judaistic nation to whom Christ came. The nation had a fig leaf covering but was dead from the stock downwards.

Verse 21 – “Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away” – Peter’s retort suggests some incredulity that the fig tree had so rapidly withered away. Similarly, it was to take some time for the apostles and many others to reconcile themselves to the fact that the nation would go in to a long period of utter fruitlessness.

Verse 22 – “And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.” – Jesus defines why the ‘fig tree’ died – a lack of faith in God. Law cannot save, so the Mosaic system would be barren. The Lord lays down the constitution of the new order – the Abrahamic Covenant which has at its root faith in God. That faith is focused on the establishment of the Kingdom of God at the Second Advent of Christ. It is to that theme the Lord now turns.

Verse 23 – “For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea” – ‘Whosoever’ includes all men – Jew and Gentile. The mountain referred to is the Mount of Olives – “this mountain”. Its future is detailed in Zech. 14. It is to be split by the great earthquake at Armageddon. Half of the mountain goes to the north and half to the south and the mountains of Israel levelled to a plateau. The effect of this reshaping of the Land will be to raise the Dead Sea to above sea level. Hence, it can be said that the Mt of Olives will have been removed and cast into the sea.

“and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.” – Steadfast faith in the promises of God is the key to involvement in their fulfilment. Confidence that Christ will come again and “turn away ungodliness from Jacob” by the events of Armageddon and beyond will motivate the faithful to dedicated service and unmovable conviction in God’s promises.

Verse 24 – “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” – What greater assurance could we want?