

Disagreements in Jerusalem



SABBATH—AUGUST 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 11:1–11; Zechariah 9:9, 10; Mark 11:12–26; Mark 11:27–33; Mark 12:13–27; Mark 12:28–34.

MEMORY VERSE: “And when you stand praying, forgive anyone you have anything against. Then your Father in heaven will forgive your sins” (Mark 11:25, NIV).

MARK records five disagreements between Jesus and the Jewish spiritual leaders in Mark 2 and 3 (read lesson 3). In this week's lesson, Jesus argues six more times with the Jewish leaders when He arrives in Jerusalem. The first five disagreements happen at the beginning of Jesus' work on earth. The last six disagreements happen at the end of Jesus' work on earth. All of the disagreements teach us important lessons about the Christian life.

The Jewish leaders come to argue and fight with Jesus. But they never win. This week, we will study why people fight against God. We also will learn what Christians can do to help remove the feelings and ideas from people's hearts that separate them from God. These feelings and ideas keep people from following Jesus.

In Mark 11, Jesus goes to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast, which happens between the end of March and the beginning of April. Mark 11–16 tells us the story about that time. The first 10 chapters of Mark cover about 3½ years of Jesus' life. But the last 6 chapters cover only a little more than a week! Mark spends so much time writing about this time in Jesus' life because he wants us to understand that this time is very important.



This week, we will study why people fight against God.

LIVING AS JESUS LIVED (Mark 11:1–11)

Read Mark 11:1–11 and Zechariah 9:9, 10. What do these verses talk about?

Half of this story is about how Jesus sends two of His followers to a nearby village to get a donkey for Him to ride into Jerusalem. Why does Mark spend so much time telling this story about the donkey?

The answer has two parts. First, this story shows us that Jesus is a powerful prophet or special messenger. Second, Jesus' coming to Jerusalem is part of God's plan. We can read about this plan in Zechariah 9:9, 10. Zechariah 9:9, 10 talks about the king who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. These verses help us remember the time that Solomon entered Jerusalem on a donkey, too (1 Kings 1:32–48). At that time, Adonijah, Solomon's brother, tried to steal the throne for himself. But David commanded the people to make Solomon the king right away.

"500 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Zechariah told about the coming of the King to Jerusalem. Now this special message was about to happen. For so long, Jesus refused to allow people to honor Him as a king. But now Jesus comes to Jerusalem as the promised King. He is the One who will sit on David's throne."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 569, adapted.

Jerusalem is built on hills that are about 2,400 feet (740 meters) tall. In Jesus' day, about 40,000 to 50,000 people lived in the city. But more people came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast in the spring. The city covered only about 250 acres of land. The temple hill covered 37 of those acres. So, the beautiful temple was the most important part of the city of Jerusalem.

Jesus entered Jerusalem from the east. He rode down from the Mount of Olives. Then He may have entered the Golden Gate and gone up to the temple. Everyone in the city was excited about Jesus' coming. A crowd followed Jesus and shouted, "Hosanna." This word first meant "save now." Later, people used the word to mean "praise to God."

The time for keeping secrets was over. Now Jesus enters Jerusalem in a way that shows everyone that He is their King. Jesus enters the temple and leaves because the time is late. Then Jesus and His Twelve Followers go to Bethany. The exciting day ends with Jesus' leaving the city. But tomorrow will be different.



"Now Jesus comes to Jerusalem as the promised King."

A DEAD TREE AND A CLEAN TEMPLE (Mark 11:12–26)

Read the story in Mark 11:12–26. What happens in this story? What lesson does the dead tree teach us?



Jesus chases away the sellers from the courts so that people may worship in quiet.

In the morning, on the way from Bethany to Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry. Bethany was about two miles away from Jerusalem. Jesus saw a fig tree covered with leaves. He went to pick some fruit. Jesus was not stealing. Old Testament law allowed a hungry person to eat food from a neighbor's field or fruit trees (Leviticus 19:9; Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 23:25). But Jesus saw no fruit on the tree. So, He said to the tree, " 'People will never eat fruit from you again' " (Mark 11:14, ERV). We may think that Jesus' actions and words in this story are strange. What happens next is even more surprising.

The next part of the story may have happened in the Court of the Gentiles. Gentiles were non-Jews. The Court was a space connected with the temple where the Gentiles were allowed to enter. People bought and sold animal offerings here. Caiaphas, the top Jewish leader, made buying and selling animals legal in this part of the temple. Jesus chases away the sellers from the courts so that people may worship in quiet. Jesus' action makes the people in charge of the temple very angry. Jesus says the temple is a house of prayer for all people (Isaiah 56:7). All people includes non-Jews. Jesus says that the leaders made the temple the same as a hideout for robbers (Jeremiah 7:11). Then Jesus and His followers leave (Mark 11:19).

The next morning, Jesus goes back to the city with His followers (Mark 11:20–26). On the way there, the followers are surprised to see the fig tree is dead, all the way down to the roots. Jesus explains what happened to the tree. He uses the example of the tree to teach His followers an important lesson about prayer and forgiveness.

In this story, the fig tree is a word picture for the temple. Do you see that Jesus judges the tree but cleans the temple? These two stories about the fig tree and the clean temple are the fourth Sandwich Story (review lesson 3) in the Book of Mark. Now the Jewish leaders make plans to kill Jesus. When Jesus dies on the cross, the animal offerings in the temple will no longer be necessary.

What things in your life do you need Jesus to clean? How does this cleaning happen?

WHO SAID YOU CAN DO THAT? (Mark 11:27–33)

Read the story in Mark 11:27–33. What did the Jewish leaders say to Jesus? How did Jesus answer?

The day after Jesus cleans the temple, the Jewish leaders meet Him outside the temple. They ask Him why He chased away the animal sellers the day before. The leaders don't really want to know the answer. They want to trap Jesus with their question. If Jesus says that God told Him to chase the sellers away, the leaders will say that a carpenter from the country can't be that powerful. If Jesus says that He had His own reasons for sending the sellers away, the leaders will say He is a fool.

Jesus sees their trap. He says that He will answer their question if they will answer His question. Jesus asks the leaders if John the Baptist's baptism came from God or from men. Right away, the leaders see that Jesus has trapped them. If the leaders say that John's baptism came from God, Jesus will say, "Why didn't you believe John?" The leaders are afraid to say that John's work wasn't from God. If they do that, the people will get angry because they loved John. The leaders lie and say they don't know. So, Jesus now can refuse to answer their question.

Read the story in Mark 12:1–12. What did Jesus say to the leaders after He refused to answer their question? What does His picture story mean?

Jesus tells a picture story about a grape garden, an owner, and the workers who rent the field. The story Jesus tells is much the same as the picture story about the grape garden in Isaiah 5. In Isaiah's story, God accuses Israel of not loving and obeying Him. Everyone who heard Jesus' picture story understood what He was saying. Jesus' story is connected to Isaiah's picture story.

In Jesus' picture story, the workers refuse to give any fruits from the field to the owner. The workers beat and kill the owner's servants. Finally, the owner sends his beloved son. The owner expects the workers to respect his son. But they do not. The workers think that if they kill the son, the grape garden will belong to them. This idea is crazy. The workers earn the punishment they get.

Jesus uses this story to warn the Jewish leaders. If they kill Him, then God will punish them.



In Jesus' picture story, the workers refuse to give any fruits from the field to the owner.

WHAT WE OWE TO GOD AND MAN (Mark 12:13–27)

Read the story in Mark 12:13–17. What is happening in this story? What Bible truths does Jesus teach?



Jesus' answer is to give to the king of Rome the things that belong to him and to give to God the things that belong to God.

The Jewish leaders want to trap Jesus again. They want a reason to blame Him to the Roman governor or to the people. So, the leaders try to start a fight with Jesus. They ask Him a question about paying taxes. In Jesus' day, not paying taxes was a crime against the Roman government.

Jesus' answer is to give to the king of Rome the things that belong to him and to give to God the things that belong to God. This answer saves Jesus from a trap. His answer also teaches an important lesson. We are responsible for paying our taxes and honoring our governments. "Jesus announced that the Jews lived under the protection of the Roman government. So, they should pay what they owed to the government. As long as the government didn't ask them to do anything that broke God's law, the people should support the government. The people should live in peace and obey the laws of the land. At the same time, the people must put God first."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 602, adapted.

In Mark 12:18–27, the Jewish leaders ask Jesus about the resurrection. The resurrection is the time when God will wake people up from the dead at Jesus' Second Coming. The Sadducees were a group of Jewish spiritual leaders who didn't believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees tell Jesus a story about seven brothers and one woman. The law of Moses said that if a man died with no sons, his brother must marry the widow. Any children who were born would belong to the dead man (Deuteronomy 25:5–10). Then the children could own the dead man's land.

The Sadducees ask Jesus whose wife the woman will be in the resurrection. Jesus answers their question in two parts. First, He talks about God's power to wake up the dead. Then Jesus says we will not marry in heaven. Next, Jesus teaches that the resurrection will happen. Jesus supports this teaching with Exodus 3:1–22. In these verses, God says that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus suggests that this verse means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will wake up from the dead. They can't stay dead if God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are, for now, dead.

THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT
(Mark 12:28–34)

Read Mark 12:28–34. What important question does the friendly lawyer ask? What answer does Jesus give?

In the Book of Mark, most of the Jewish spiritual leaders argue with Jesus and don't support Him. So, we are surprised when one of the leaders really listens to the answers Jesus gives and likes what he hears. This man has courage to talk with Jesus in front of the other leaders who hate Him. For sure, it would be easy for the lawyer to stay quiet and not let anyone else know that he agrees with Jesus on anything. But this man doesn't do that.

The lawyer asks Jesus which commandment is the most important. Jesus' answer is clear and honest: He says the verses from Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. The most important commandment is to love God with all your heart, spirit, mind, and strength. Jesus also tells the lawyer the second most important commandment: this time, Jesus says a verse from Leviticus, which says to love your neighbor the same as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

Sometimes people wonder how God can command us to love. When we understand the time in which Moses wrote, we can better understand the commands in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In Old Testament times, people made or wrote contracts or agreements with other people. The word "love" in those days meant that everyone in the contract must keep the contract and do everything they agreed to do. So, the word "love" means that we show our loyalty to God with our actions and our behavior.

The lawyer was honest. He understood what Jesus taught, and he said so. We can imagine in our minds the frowns on the faces of the other Jewish leaders when one of their own agreed with Jesus! No one else was willing or brave enough to do that. Jesus told the lawyer that he was not far from the kingdom of God. But first the lawyer needed to understand who Jesus was and follow Him.

How do we learn to love God and love our neighbors the same as we love ourselves? How does the Cross help us to love God and our neighbors?



The lawyer tells Jesus that the most important commandment is to love God with all your heart, spirit, mind, and strength.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “A Doomed People,” “The Temple Cleansed Again,” and “Controversy,” in *The Desire of Ages*, pages 580–609.



“The selfish ones who live for self are the same as the fig tree that had no fruit.”

“Jesus announced that the tree will die. Jesus’ own power made that tree. This announcement is a warning to all churches and Christians. No one can live the law of God without serving other people. But many people are selfish. They do not show mercy. Some people think they are excellent Christians. But they don’t understand what it means to serve God. They plan and study to please self. They act only to make self happy. They use their time to get what they can only for self. Everything they do in life is for self. They don’t help anyone else. God made them to help and bless other people in every possible way. But self is so big they can’t see anything else. They don’t care about other people at all. The selfish ones who live for self are the same as the fig tree that had no fruit. They are false Christians. They go to church. But they don’t confess their sins or have real faith in God. They don’t obey Him. They say they are Christians, but they don’t serve Him. When Jesus judged the fig tree, He showed that He hated fake Christians. Jesus announces that the worst sinner is less guilty than the Christian who says he serves God but who does not obey Him or honor Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 584, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about how Jesus cleaned the temple and what that action meant. What does this cleaning mean for the church? How will Jesus clean His church today?
- ② Again and again, Jesus says that God will keep His promises in the Bible. How important is the Bible to our faith? Why must we reject anyone or anything that teaches that the Bible isn’t important to our faith, to our belief in who God is, and how He acts?
- ③ As Christians, what do we owe our leaders and our governments? What do we owe God? How does Jesus’ teaching in Mark 12:13–17 help answer this question?
- ④ Study Bible verses on the resurrection or waking up from the dead. Why is this teaching so important to our faith as Christians?

PART 6: FATHER'S SPECIAL DREAM

Anush prayed for years for Father to come to God. After Father allowed Anush and Mother to start attending church again on Sabbaths, Anush asked God to show Himself to Father. Anush prayed, "Please talk to Father in dreams and visions. Or use his friends. I just want You to save him."

Anush trusted God to solve her problem. She prayed, "This problem is between You and my father."

Then Father had a dream. In it, he saw fire falling on a city near their town in Armenia. Father saw some people running and screaming. Other people were calm and peaceful. They sang. Father was surprised. He told Anush and Mother about the dream.

About the same time, Anush watched an online sermon about the Holy Spirit. Anush told Father, "The preacher said the fire of the Holy Spirit protects us from the fire of hell. When you get the fire of the Holy Spirit, you won't be afraid of the fire at the end of earth's history."

Anush's words helped Father understand something about his dream. The scared people in his dream didn't have the Holy Spirit. They were afraid of hellfire. The peaceful people weren't afraid because they accepted the fire from the Holy Spirit. Father remembered reading that the Holy Spirit filled Jesus when He was baptized (Matthew 3:16).

Father said, "I need to get baptized."

But the words sounded strange to Father as he said them. Armenians are filled with pride because they were the first country to become Christian, in 301 A.D. Many Armenians feel it is their duty to be Christian. They were baptized as babies, not as adults. Now, Father wasn't sure what to do.

Anush said, "You have the Bible. Read it. Let the Bible answer your questions and lead you to the right church."

Father read the Bible even more carefully. A friend asked him why he read the Bible so much. The friend asked, "Is that something to brag about? If Jesus came tomorrow, would you say, 'I have read the Bible?' Is that enough to be saved?"

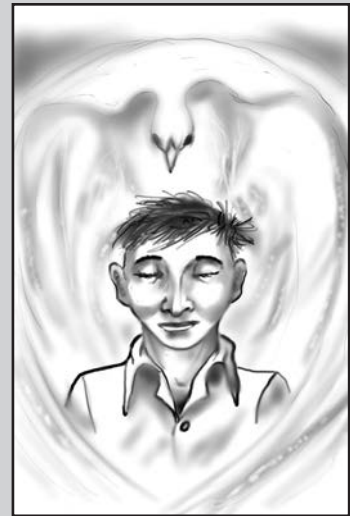
The questions surprised Father. His whole body shook. A short time later, when he left the friend's house and was alone in his car, he told God about his fears. He prayed, "If Jesus came tomorrow, what would I say to Him?"

Father went home and told Mother. "I'll go to church with you next Sabbath."

But Father didn't want to go to the town's house church, which had only seven members who were all women. He said, "Let's go to the church in the next town." After that Sabbath, Father started to worship every week in church.

INSIDE
Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



"When you get the fire of the Holy Spirit, you won't be afraid of the fire at the end of earth's history."