

# A Triptych of Judgment

[Mark 11:12-24](#)



**W**e are studying the section of Mark that deals with the final week of Jesus' life. The Messianic secret is over, the gloves are now off and Jesus confronts the Jewish leaders head on. In our last study we saw Him ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. He is now declaring Himself as Israel's Messiah.

On a number of occasions, Mark begins one story and concludes it only after another story is interjected and resolved. This is almost always a literary device designed to tie two incidents together thematically. This intricate story-within-a-story is what is called a "Marcan triptych." In this passage, Jesus' cleansing of the temple is deliberately sandwiched in between two encounters with a fig tree. There is apparently a relationship between the two incidents; there is a common theme, and that theme is judgment. The fig tree upon which Jesus seeks fruit represents an Israel from which her king has come to seek "what belongs to God." The fig tree and the temple were similar. They made a great show for visitors, but inwardly they were fruitless.

**Mark 11:11-12 (NASB)** *And He entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking all around, He departed for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late. <sup>12</sup> And on the next day, when they had departed from Bethany, He became hungry.*

Mark tells us that Jesus enters Jerusalem and comes into the temple. He looks around; He checks it out; He leaves. It's late, and they go back to Bethany in order to spend the night. Verse 12 opens with, "*On the next day*" this links the incident with the previous verse. Such connecting links are rare in Mark, demonstrating its importance as a deliberate link. So Jesus leaves Bethany and heads back to Jerusalem.

*"He became hungry"*—What does this tell us about Jesus? He was a man. God is not hungry, but the humanity of Jesus was hungry. The "He" here refers to the [theanthropic](#) person. Jesus Christ is undiminished Deity and true humanity in one person forever. Jesus Christ is 100% God and 100% man. He is the theanthropic person, one person with two natures.

The reality of Jesus' humanity is emphasized in this verse. He had human experiences-- emotions, feeling, desires and needs. He was hungry, thirsty, and weary. He sorrowed and wept. Our Lord possesses true humanity, which is just as important as His deity. To make atonement, He had to be a Theanthropic person. This also tells us that as a man, Jesus knows what it is to be a man, He understands our experiences.



**Mark 11:13-14 (NASB)** *And seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup> And He answered and said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.*

Jesus cursing this fig tree has caused real perplexity to the church for the past two millennia. [Bertrand Russell](#) thought

that this incident tarnished Jesus' character. The atheist philosopher said, *"I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history."* (Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian*, Clarion Books, 1957 p.19).

T.W. Manson arrogantly judges, *"This is a tale of miraculous power wasted in the service of ill temper (for the supernatural energy employed to blast the unfortunate tree might have been more usefully expended in forcing a crop of figs out of season); as it stands it is simply incredible."* J.B. Phillips writes of Jesus *"venting His feelings of frustration and despair upon the fig-tree."* William Barclay judges Jesus to be guilty of "petulance," which means: *"childishly sulky or bad-tempered."*

Isn't it amazing how people judge Jesus for this cursing of the fig tree? Should we see this action as unusual or out of character for God? As you read of the supernatural activity of God in the Scripture, you will be aware that many of them were miracles of God's judgment; for example: The first ten wonders of Moses were ten plagues; Elisha summoned some wild bears to attack a mob of young men; fire from heaven to consume fifty soldiers, two times; and the handwriting on a wall during a feast in Babylon condemned Belshazzar. The miracles wrought by our Lord and His apostles were different; they were mainly displays of His love, but not exclusively so. I would remind you of what happened to a herd of pigs and to Ananias and Sapphira. But, overwhelmingly, the miracles of our Lord and His apostles were marvels of mercy.

So why did Jesus curse the fig tree? He cursed the tree not because He was angry, but to teach His disciples He was illustrating truth. You see, along with the vine, the fig tree in Scripture is a symbol of Israel:

**Joel 1:6-7 (NASB)** *For a nation has invaded my land, Mighty and without number; Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness. <sup>7</sup> It has made my vine a waste, And my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away; Their branches have become white.*

Often in the Scripture the people of God, Israel, are compared to a fig-tree [Isaiah 34](#), [Jeremiah 29](#), [Hosea 2](#), [Hosea 9](#), and [Micah 7](#).

Israel had become barren like this fig tree, fruitless in her vain attempts at the worship of God. They had forgotten what true religion was all about, that it was a relationship with a living God. They were not like the peoples surrounding them. They did not worship gods of wood and stone and gold. They worshiped a living God, but they had forgotten that their worship was more than an outward ceremony. Now, that's all it was.

Our Lord is stating divine truth in an unforgettable way. If Jesus had just said something like this to His disciples: "Our nation is ungodly and barren, producing no fruit in the service of God, and we are in an exceedingly dangerous state because the Lord is angry with us," then the disciples would have struggled to remember what He'd said. But this vivid illustration of the smiting of the barren fig tree stuck with them and taught them that the nation of Israel at the time of our Lord had a pathetic formal religion; it was basically ungodly and barren.

**Mark 11:13 (NASB)** *And seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.*

When Jesus looked at this tree, He saw that it was barren. There were no figs at all nothing but leaves. It was fruitless. It only looked good. It held a promise for figs, but the promise was unfulfilled. It appeared to be something it wasn't.

*"It was not the season for figs"* was simply an explanation to Mark's readers who did not know Palestine. Passover, which was in March or April, wasn't the fig season; the early crop came in May and June, and the later crop in August or even September. It was too soon for edible fruit to be on the tree, and too late for any of the previous year's fruit to be still hanging from the branches. All this was known to Jesus. He'd lived in the land for over thirty years. But when He found no fruit from His inspection of the fig tree, it seemingly brought home to Him what He had discovered about Israel. That they too made a great outward show of godliness, but were really totally fruitless.

The point Mark is trying to make is that Jesus was hungry, and the tree gave the appearance of fruit. It gave the appearance of health, of life; just like the temple gave the appearance of health and life. But when the tree was inspected closer, it was evident there was no fruit. Jesus' conclusion is: "If a fruit tree bears no fruit, what's the point? What good is it? It might as well be eliminated." That's what happens here, and the disciples are listening to that--in a sense, just filing it away.

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus talked about judgment on a fig tree:

**Luke 13:6-9 (NASB)** *And He began telling this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any." <sup>7</sup> "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' <sup>8</sup> "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; <sup>9</sup> and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"*

The three years, which the owner is mentioned as coming to the plant to get fruit from, can be identified with the three years of Jesus' visits as Messiah to the city of Jerusalem. Jesus speaks of God's righteous judgment against those who should be expected to bear fruit, but yield none; but also of His patience in allowing sufficient extra time for it to be produced. It's difficult to read the parable and *not* see in it a picture of the nation of Israel, and of how God longed to find some fruit within it that was useful to Him.

In our text in Mark Jesus wanted to portray, in picture form, the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (chapter 13).

**Mark 11:14 (NASB)** *And He answered and said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.*

*"May no one ever eat fruit from you again"* temple worship would never rise again. It was finished. Since [August, A.D. 70](#) physical Israel has never had a priest or offered a sacrifice, and never will.

When Mark says the disciples were listening, it's Mark's way of saying that Jesus was teaching them something.

After the gentle picture of Jesus riding on a donkey's colt in the Triumphal Entry, we find Him, the next day, taking charge in the temple.

**Mark 11:15 (NASB)** *And they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves;*

As we read through the Gospels, we find that the Synoptic (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) Gospels tell the story of Jesus cleansing the temple after the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Though each

writer gives a few different details of the story, they all concur on the general time frame of when it occurred. John, however, tells about another cleansing of the temple this one at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry ([John 2:13-22](#)). The fact that this first cleansing is not mentioned by the Synoptics is not surprising. They ignore the whole of Jesus' original ministry in Judea. In John's account, Jesus used a scourge of cords to drive out sheep, oxen, doves, and their sellers from the temple.

We are told that John's account took place a few days after His first miracle when He turned water into wine ([John 2:12](#)), and that He went to the temple from Capernaum. We are told that it occurred before His second miracle ([John 4:54](#)). We are told that John the Baptist was still alive ([John 3:22ff](#)), and that he knew the details about the beginnings of Jesus' ministry, because he could tell his disciples, "[Behold, the Lamb of God.](#)"

So we conclude that there were two cleansings of the temple. The first cleansing, at the beginning of His ministry, was a sign given to the people of Jerusalem that Jesus was the Son of the Father; this is "*my Father's house,*" ([Jn.2:16](#)) He tells them.

**The Temple**—When Solomon dedicated the temple, almost one thousand years prior to this account, God's glory fell in power upon that place. Upon the dedication of the temple, as the people prayed, the Shekinah glory of God descended in such awesome majesty that no one could even enter that holy temple. God claimed that place for Himself. He received it as His house, and it would be forever a place where He would meet with His people. Now there was a new temple. But it was still God's house.

We tend to think of the temple as a single building, but it was much more than that. The Jerusalem temple's most sacred spot was the **Holy of holies**, where only the high priest could enter. Next was the **sanctuary** limited to the priests; then the **Court of Israel** where the laymen could gather. Following this was the **Court of Women**, limited to Jewish women; then the **Court of the Gentiles**. The Court of the Gentiles was a huge area, about three football fields long and about three football fields wide. It was meant to be a very sacred place--where Gentiles from any nation could come into this court and could pursue the God of the Hebrews and enter into some sort of an experience with God. But the Gentile worshipers could not go beyond this; the signs on the wall expressed that to do so would be at the peril of life.

This outer court was described by Josephus in his [War of the Jews](#), which reads ([5.5.2](#)):

*...there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits: its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that "no foreigner should go within that sanctuary" for that second (court of the) temple was called "the Sanctuary" and was ascended to by fourteen steps from the first court.*

Josephus' quote of this warning is somewhat condensed, and the full version is seen from the discovery of one of these rocks in 1871, Zondervan reads: "*No Gentile may enter within the railing around the sanctuary and within the enclosure. Whosoever should be caught will render himself liable to the death penalty which will inevitably follow.*"

The disdain for Gentiles and failure to understand the nature of worshiping the Lord was found in the way the Court of the Gentiles became host to what was called, "[The Bazaars of Annas](#)." The well-known high priest granted permission to family members to begin what looked like a flea market in the area reserved for Gentiles to seek the Lord and worship Him. Noisy animals, bargain hunters, and crass merchants crowded the area that should have provided dignity and quiet

contemplation for worshipers. Kickbacks and fees for the priestly family kept the bazaar in full swing to the total neglect of why the temple existed at all. Their religion maintained outward form, but offered no sense of holiness and the glory of God.

**"Money changers"**—Jews couldn't use Roman coins to give as an offering, so they changed their Roman coins for Tyrian coinage for the half-shekel temple tax, and the money-changers made a profit on each sale.

**"Those selling doves"**—the sacrifices to be offered in the temple needed to be certified as "without blemish" by a priest. Many pilgrims would purchase a sacrifice in the temple rather than herd it for several days on their way to the Holy City for Passover. It was a convenience to purchase sacrifices at the temple, but the price gouging was often terrible. Later in the First Century, Rabbi Simeon (son of Paul's teacher Gamaliel) crusades to lower the price of a pair of doves from two gold dinars to one silver [dinar](#), 1% of the original price.

That was Israel, even at the climax of its religious year, at Passover time, great crowds, excitement, hustle and bustle in the temple so that a stranger would think, "This is a deeply believing, loving people." No! It was an offer of religious reality, but Israel was all leaves and no fruit.

**Mark 11:15 (NASB) *And they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves;***

Jesus' action was angry and violent. Have you ever had someone in your home overthrowing a table on which all the food has been set out? Have you seen this being done in a restaurant as a guest explodes in fury with the way he has been served or with the quality of the food? You have now! It was a violent action to move from table to table maybe twenty or forty such tables, sand, sent money going everywhere.

He "cast out" the money-changers and those selling "temple-approved" sacrifices. The Greek word for "cast out" is [ekballo](#), which means: *"force to leave, drive out, expel."* The same word is often used to describe Jesus driving out demons from the afflicted.

What was Jesus saying? No more temple shekels; no more half-shekels. All that was coming to an end. The people could protest, "But we need the money in order to survive as Levites and priests." "No!" says Jesus, It's all over. No more priests and Levites. The whole tribal system of Israel has had its day. There is going to be a new High Priest, and He is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. He serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by men:

**Hebrews 8:1-2 (NASB) *Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,<sup>2</sup> a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.***

Remember that the temple, for the Hebrew people, represented the very dwelling place of God Himself--that God dwelt in their midst in the temple. So not only did the temple house the presence of God, but the furniture, the activities; everything in the temple was meant to point to the Messiah. It was really a reminder of the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, in [Genesis 15](#), that God Himself would become flesh and shed His blood to atone for their sins. Everything in the temple was supposed to point to that. The Passover was the big season for the temple. The Passover season

was to the temple what Christmas is to the mall. It was the time when everybody converged and packed this place.

The result of all this was that those who came into the Court of the Gentiles of the house of God, instead of being filled with awe and a realization of the presence of God, found themselves in a busy marketplace, with buyers and sellers arguing and disputing loudly and furiously, prospective sacrificial animals and birds adding their own particular protests, and moneychangers calling out their rates. But they were only Gentiles, and so it did not matter.

Jesus' actions in the Temple represented the cursing of the heart of this nation, because it had nothing but leaves. It appeared to have life, but in reality did not. It appeared to offer hope to men and women of the nations of earth. From all over the earth people were coming to the temple at Jerusalem hoping to find an answer to the emptiness and the burden of their heart, but finding no help there at all. So Jesus cursed the nation.

**Mark 11:16 (NASB) *and He would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple.***

The temple courts were also being used as a thoroughfare to provide short cuts for those moving about that part of the city. The later Rabbis cite a provision that a man *"may not enter into the Temple Mount with his staff, or his sandal, or his wallet, or with the dust on his feet, nor may he make of it a short by-path."*

**Mark 11:17 (NASB) *And He began to teach and say to them, 'Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN.'***

The quotation is a combination of two Scriptures made up of Isaiah 56:7, *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"* and Jeremiah 7:11, *"Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight?"*

The context from [Isaiah 56:7](#) shows the Lord welcoming all people into His presence. He calls for Jews and Gentiles alike to approach Him in humility, trust, and obedience. *"For all the nations"* was particularly relevant, because it took place in the Court of the Gentiles. That was where the God-fearers, non-circumcised Gentile believers could come to pray.



Our Lord was also quoting from Jeremiah's temple gate sermon ([Jeremiah 7:11](#)). It focused on a people that trusted in the temple of the Lord rather than in obeying the Lord and humbling themselves before Him. If you read the first half of the chapter, then you will understand the concern of Christ. As the sermon explained, there was no repentance, no justice on behalf of the oppressed and aliens, no right relationships, no service of the Lord. Instead, the people engaged in idolatry, trusting deceptive words of false prophets that made them feel good about themselves and their behavior. They trifled with the Lord by breaking His commandments and thinking nothing of it. The false prophets had assured them that as long as they had the temple, then all would be well for them. God was obligated to protect them and keep them up with His bountiful provisions. And so we find Jeremiah's sarcastic remark:

**Jeremiah 7:4 (NASB) *"Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'***

It had become a cute little chorus that they repeated among themselves, all smug and secure with their errant religion. It was the Lord who was to be trusted and not the temple. It was the Lord and

not their sacrifices that they were to look to for mercy. But the whole nation was characterized by their failure to listen to the warnings.

***"But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN"***. "Robbers" is more than petty stealing, but conveys something of robbing to create anarchy and upset the balance of society. What took place in the temple not only ripped off the worshipers, but also confused them about the worship of the Lord. It was an act of spiritual anarchy. The Greek word "robbers" is *lestes*, which means: *"robber, highwayman, bandit, brigand."* What is a den of robbers? It is the robber's hideout. It is their place of security and refuge. The temple of God has become the safe hiding place for crooks. He compares the temple, which should be holy, with a cave used as a robbers' hideout.

The temple was the heart of Israel. In the temple heaven and earth came together. If there was going to be anything of the Gospel in Israel, it was going to be found in the temple. If there was a message of grace and mercy, then you would find it in the temple. If there were [remnant in Israel](#) waiting for their consolation and the coming of the Messiah, then you would find them in the temple. But Jesus found none of that fruit there, only leaves.

Perhaps there is no greater problem in our own churches than misplaced trust. You can talk about church and activities in church all day long without anyone batting an eye. But begin to talk about the Gospel, the price for our sin, the judgment of God, and the necessity of the cross-truths that are central to the whole teaching of Christianity and watch the conversation quickly shift and fidgeting begin. We can adapt Jeremiah's little chorus, "This is the Bible Church, the Bible Church, the Bible Church!" Or some might say, "Well, I attend a Bible believing, inerrancy affirming, Bible Church!" Put whatever words come to mind for the chorus; if our trust is not in Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead, in the sufficiency of Christ and the gospel, then our religion errs.

**Mark 11:18 (NASB)** *And the chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for all the multitude was astonished at His teaching.*

The chief priests, who ran the Temple and controlled its ministries were angry, because He had hit at their pockets and at their reputation. ***"They were afraid of Him,"*** because He was undermining their authority and revealing the inadequacy of much of their teaching.

***"The multitude,"*** we're told, ***"was astonished."*** That doesn't mean they agreed; that doesn't mean they disagreed. It means they stood there with their mouths hanging open.

**Mark 11:19 (NASB)** *And whenever evening came, they would go out of the city.*

Each night He returned with His disciples to where He was staying in Bethany. Each day they again headed back up to Jerusalem, and as they did, they passed the fig tree:

**Mark 11:20-21 (NASB)** *And as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. <sup>21</sup> And being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which You cursed has withered."*

The point is that they saw it when they were re-entering the city whose end it portrayed. Just as the cleansing of the Temple was a symbolic denunciation by the Messiah of the worship of the old Israel, so the withering of the fig tree was a symbolic denunciation by Him of the Jewish nation as the privileged people of God.

Mark refers to this in Peter's words as Jesus having "cursed" the fig tree. The word expresses an alienation or separation from blessing. Israel could experience God's blessing, which implied fruitfulness and divine provision, as they obeyed the Lord. Or they could face His cursing, which called for loss, destruction, and fruitlessness, by their disobedience and unbelief ([Deut. 28](#)). Jesus' curse of the fig tree was both actual and parabolic.

The next day, as they were passing the fig tree, the disciples saw that it had withered from the roots up. Peter commented about the withered fig tree. I'm sure he thought it had withered fairly quickly. To Peter's comment, Jesus gave a very surprising answer:

**Mark 11:22 (NASB)** *And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God.*

It seems to me that Jesus would have said something about the fig tree. Instead of commenting on the fig tree, He made a point about faith. He said:

**Mark 11:22b-23 (NASB)** *...Have faith in God. <sup>23</sup> "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him.*

What is Jesus getting at here? It seems as if, in response to Peter's comment, Jesus is giving a formula for moving mountains and cursing fig trees.

Adrian Plass, in his classic "[Sacred Diary](#)," records his attempts at trying to make a paper clip move as a result of reading a book which spoke about: *"...how Christians should be able to move mountains by faith, if they are really tuned into God. Very inspiring. Waited til there was no-one around, then practiced with a paper clip. Put it on my desk and stared at it, willing it to move. Nothing! Tried commanding it in a loud voice..."* In paralleling [Matthew 21:21](#) and [Matthew 17:20](#), Plass comments, *"If you only need faith the size of a mustard seed to move a mountain, what hope is there for me when I can't even get a paper clip to do what it's told!"*

What is Jesus saying? If we have enough faith we can go into the earth moving business? What is the point of moving mountains? Please notice that Jesus did not say, "Whoever says to 'A' mountain." He said "Whoever says to '**THIS**' mountain."

It is my opinion that Jesus was speaking specifically about the temple mount! I think He is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple the Old Covenant system that was associated with a mountain:



**Hebrews 12:18-24 (NASB)** *For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, <sup>19</sup> and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. <sup>20</sup> For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." <sup>21</sup> And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR AND TREMBLING." <sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, <sup>23</sup> to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, <sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.*

Was the religious system in Jerusalem causing people to stumble? Absolutely! Do you remember what Jesus said about causing little ones to stumble?

**Mark 9:42 (NASB)** *"And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea."*

So being cast into the sea was a symbol of judgment (compare [Exodus 15:4](#); [Jonah 1:15](#); [2:3](#)). As with the fig tree, He did not press it home. He waited for His message to sink in later.

The temple system with the Priests and Pharisees was a huge obstacle to faith in God. Jesus was telling His disciples to trust God, and He will remove this mountain for them. His promise included the fact that their Father could deal with all difficulties that they met, if their faith was strong. Jesus may well have had in mind Zechariah 4:

**Zechariah 4:7 (NASB)** *"What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"*

This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Zerubbabel was the civic leader of Jerusalem and had the responsibility to finish the work of rebuilding the temple. The work had stalled, and Zerubbabel needed encouragement to carry on the work. The work of rebuilding the temple was so massive it seemed like a great mountain. Here God promises that by His Spirit that **great mountain** will be leveled into a **plain**.

The concept of the mountain being rooted up and cast into the sea is purely a figure of speech meant to show the disciples that even the totally impossible in their eyes is made possible when they trust God. The idea was of difficulties removed. There may be some truth in the comparison often made with Jewish writings where a great teacher who explained difficulties in Scripture was called a *"mountain remover."* They would become "mountain removers" if they would trust God.

What's happening in this text is Jesus is identifying the religious activity in the life of the Hebrew people—and specifically in the temple—to be like the fig tree. It appears to be thriving; it appears to be growing; everything appears to be great. But upon closer inspection, there is no fruit that can satisfy a spiritual hunger. If the fruit tree bears no fruit, then what good is it? It needs to be eliminated. So when Peter sees the fig tree shriveled up, that's a picture of what's coming for the temple—that Jesus is about to replace it. He is the fulfillment of everything that they had been looking for.

It is worth noting that everything in the temple was meant to point to the Messiah, and yet it had actually become a replacement for the Messiah—to the extent that when Jesus stood in their midst, they did not recognize Him.

So the question is raised, "Then what's the alternative? Jesus, if you're going to do away with all this religious stuff, then what is the alternative?" And Jesus tells them, "Men, have faith in God—that God can do the impossible." This has been a theme for Jesus in many, many chapters in the Gospel of Mark: you have to believe; you have to have faith that God can do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Go back to chapter 9. You remember when the disciples were trying to cast a demon out and they couldn't. And Jesus came along in verse 23 and said, "All things are possible to him who believes."

**Mark 11:24 (NASB)** *"Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you."*

***"Believe that you have received them"*** Believe is the Greek word [\*pisteuo\*](#). It is from the same root as the word used for faith in verse 22, which is the Greek word [\*pistis\*](#). Jesus is saying it again, **"Have faith in God."** That's where it all begins. And really, that's where it all ends. In the final analysis, Jesus is really all we need, and He is exactly what we need. He is the answer to every question, the solution to every problem. In Him is life, and He imparts that life to us by faith. By faith, He enables us to live and to bear fruit, much fruit, fruit that remains.

Where are you in your relationship with God right now? Do you see the emptiness of religion without a vital faith relationship with Jesus? Is there more than an appearance of Christianity about you? Is there real substance to your walk with God? Is there real fruitfulness? Are you just going through the motions? Have you left your first love? If you've lost that fire, by God's grace He can rekindle it right now. While God judges faithless religion, He receives with open arms those who trust in Him:

**Hebrews 11:6 (NASB) *And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.***

The writer uses the aorist tense in the infinitive "to please." The idea is: "without faith it is impossible to please Him at all." The statement is universal in its application, and timeless. In order to draw near to God in worship, we must believe He is who He says He is. In order to do this, we must learn of Him through spending time in His Word.

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