

# Reading the Bible

Advance in Faith Unit 107



## Lesson 3 – Interpreting Scripture – Part 2

## 1/ Exegesis – Deeper Study (continued)

Understanding the context of the scripture being studied is essential.

Remember...

“To read or study the Bible intelligently demands careful reading, and this includes learning to ask the right questions of the text.”<sup>1</sup>

### The Historical Context

This is all about knowing, as much as it can be known, the time and culture surrounding the writing of the book or the passage.

Some important questions to ask are;

- Where is the author writing this book?
- What is the political situation?
- What is the culture of the people to whom he is writing or speaking?
- Perhaps even more important is to ask; what is the occasion and purpose of writing the document?

### The Literary Context

“What’s the point?” “What is the focus of this passage?”  
“What is the story about?”

What is the author saying and why does he or she say it right here?  
What is being said next and why?

### An Example

Mark 11:23 – this verse is often used to speak about our level of faith. Mountains can be removed if we only have enough faith. But if we consider the focus of the whole passage and the theme of the story at this point, is this an acceptable understanding of this passage?

#### *The Theme*

The theme of Mark 11 is the presentation of Jesus to the Jews as King and Messiah. How do we find this out?

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<sup>1</sup> A. Hill and J. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 2009, Grand Rapids), p26

Using <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

1. Do a passage search for Mark 11
2. Look at the footnotes at the bottom of the page. The footnote for verse 9 suggests looking at Ps. 118:25, 26. Open another copy of biblegateway.com and look at these verses. This doesn't tell us much though notice that it does mention the 'house of the Lord. Close this page.
3. Click on the 'Study This' icon at the top of the page to open a menu of resources.
4. Look at the encyclopaedia. There is an entry 'Triumphal Entry'. Look at this.
5. Zech 9:9 is mentioned as a reference to a fulfilled prophecy.
6. Open up Zechariah 9 in a new window.
7. As you read through this passage the theme is obvious. This is the promise of Yahweh to the Jews concerning their salvation by the coming king. This king will bring peace to the land and restore the fortunes of Israel.

The next section of Mark chapter 11, in which we find verse 23, concerns Jesus going into the temple and having an altercation with the money changers. The footnote in Gateway for verse 17 suggests Isaiah 56:7 as having relevance to what Jesus did.

1. Do a passage search for Isaiah 56
2. As you read the passage there is a strong sense that the Temple is God's house, His dwelling place. Not only that, God wishes the temple to be available for all of mankind.
3. Look also at the footnote on the Mark 11 page, that suggests Jeremiah 7
4. Go to Jeremiah 7
5. As you read through this chapter to verse 15 the theme is God warning the Jews to keep the covenant correctly. He makes the point that just because they have the temple does not make them safe.

So now we add to the theme of the promised Messiah the importance of the Jews not trusting in the temple for their safety.

Jesus' action then had far more importance than just throwing out a few money changers; it was about the Jews trusting in the wrong thing for salvation.

But even more than that, Jesus' actions stopped, even though for just a short while, the sacrificial system of the Temple. This has

huge symbolic significance for the Jews as the sacrifices in the Temple were what maintained the covenantal relationship Israel had with Yahweh. Only the High Priest had the authority to do such a thing! Of course Jesus' death and resurrection stopped the whole system permanently.

### *The Story Structure*

But where does verse 23 come in regard to the story structure?

- Day 1
  - Jesus rides into Jerusalem announcing his royalty.
  - He and the disciples retire to Bethany.
- Day 2
  - On the way back into Jerusalem from Bethany the next morning, Jesus searches the fig tree but finds no fruit and 'curses' it.
  - Jesus enters the Temple and 'cleanses' it.
  - The Jewish leaders begin to look for a way to kill Jesus.
- Day 3
  - On the way back into Jerusalem from Bethany the next morning, the disciples are amazed that the fig tree is dying.
  - Jesus makes the statement about faith and a mountain. Verse 23
  - Jesus re-enters Jerusalem and the temple and is asked about his authority to do the action he has been doing.
  - Jesus refuses to acknowledge the authority of the Jewish leaders.

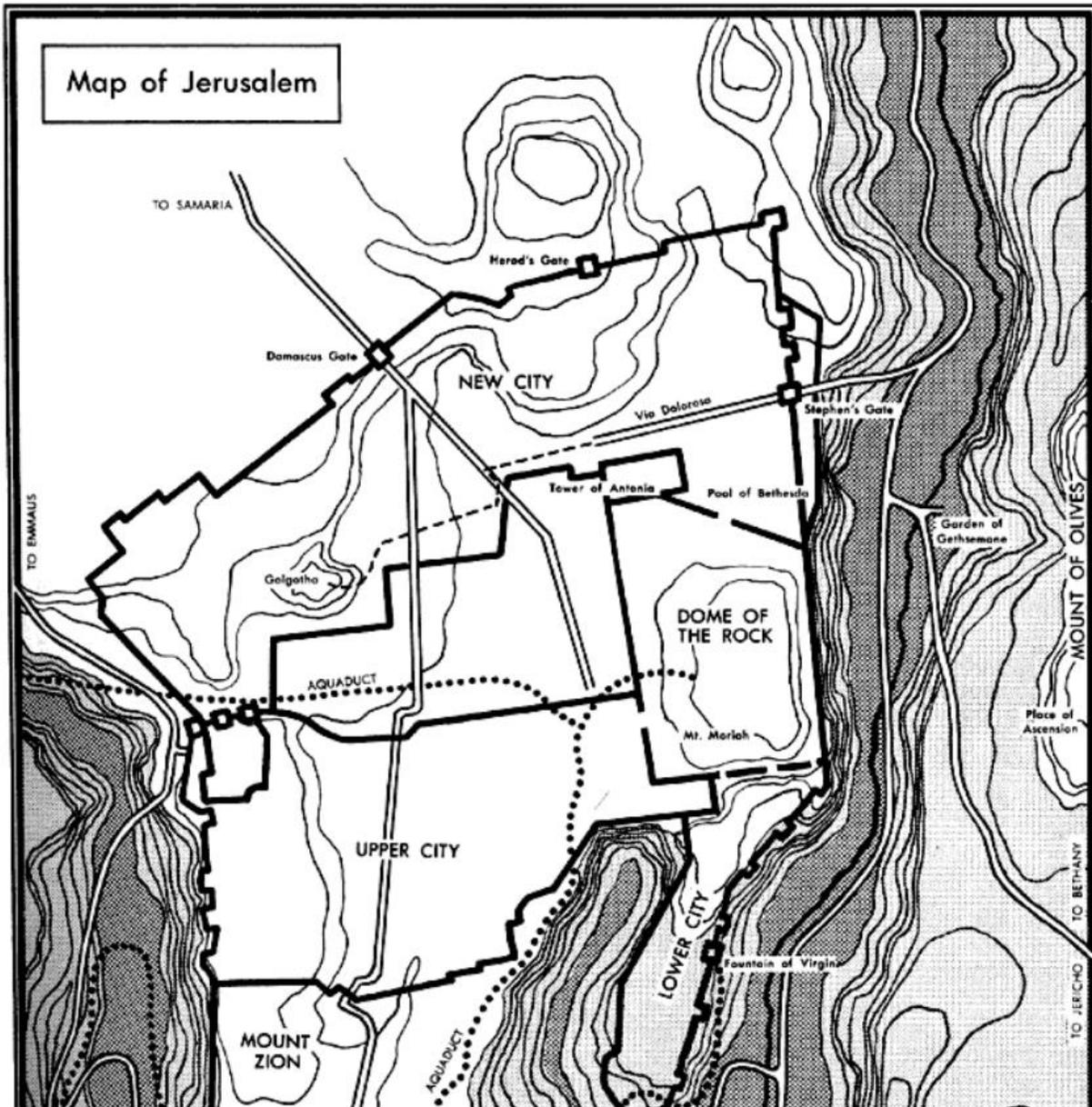
### *The Geographical Context*

What do we know about the geography of Jerusalem and the surrounding area?

If we Google for a map of 'Jerusalem in the time of Jesus then the following comes up;

[http://www.bible-history.com/geography/maps/map\\_jerusalem.html](http://www.bible-history.com/geography/maps/map_jerusalem.html) or  
<http://www.historicjesus.com/maps/newtest.html>

# Map of Jerusalem



This shows that the temple was built on Mount Moriah, called the Temple Mount.

The map also shows that if Jesus and the disciples are coming into Jerusalem from Bethany then they would be coming through the Kidron Valley and so would be looking up at the Temple Mount when verse 23 is said.

<sup>23</sup> I tell you the truth, you can say to ***this*** mountain.<sup>2</sup>

The use of ***this*** as a pronoun for the word *mountain* tells us that Jesus is speaking of a specific mountain, not just any mountain and not a figurative mountain.

#### *Sub - Chapter Theme*

Mark places this saying very much within the theme of the Temple, the Jews attitude towards the Temple and the Messiah.

However, there is a smaller section that verse 23 falls into.

- Have faith in God (v.22)
- Believe, and expect to receive what we pray for (v.23 and 24).
- Forgiveness is critical to receiving (v.25).

Jesus pronouncement in verse 23 then is to do with the Temple Mount, not just any mountain or any ‘mountain type challenge’ that we might face in life.

#### *Summarizing What We Know*

- This whole chapter is about the arrival of the Messiah
- Jesus is claiming to be both King and High Priest
- Making these claims leads to Jesus death
- Jesus’ actions showed a whole new way of understanding what the role of the Messiah was really about
- His comments regarding prayer and mountains are in the context of Messiah and kingdom

#### *The Immediate Audience*

The disciples had been observing all of the actions described in chapter 11. They were Jews who believed very much in the importance of the Temple. What might they have been thinking?

*Are we going to lose even this temple? Is God going to abandon us even further? If the fig tree died because it did not produce any fruit are we in the same danger?*

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<sup>2</sup> Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), Mk 11:23.

To the disciples Jesus' comment is to have faith that God will bring justice and his kingdom and covenant relationship; that the Messiah will bring the kingdom of God. Jesus was asking them to trust in God not in the ways of mankind, even when those ways are about worshiping God, i.e. the Temple.

*To the Document's Audience*

The people to whom Mark is writing were suffering under the persecution of Nero. They were also asking questions about whether God would abandon them or not.

*Conclusion – what did it say for them?*

Chapter 11 describes Jesus coming to be the true king and the true temple. Amongst the upheaval that this brings keep faith in God, He will come through.

Both the immediate context and the chapter context then lead us to the following ideas for the immediate audience:

- Jesus is who he claimed to be Messiah, King and High Priest
- He is going to bring the promised kingdom, but it will replace the old way of doing things
- Even though we are losing what we have once believed in, don't stop believing in God
- The new kingdom will be run very different from the old kingdom. It will be a place where forgiveness rules.

*Conclusion – What does this mean for us?*

There are several ideas which may spring for us from this scripture;

1. Be careful of making trust in 'religious' ideas or customs a substitute for trusting God.
2. Continue to have faith that God is building his kingdom and that he wants me to live as a kingdom person in order to show others what the kingdom looks like.
3. Our hope is not in our prayers but in the one to whom we pray.

### **Group Questions:**

In your group spend some time studying the first 2 verses of Mark 1. Follow the outline below.

1. Read the verses in as many different translations as you have in the group

2. What are your initial thoughts and ideas about the words?
3. Why do you think Mark said, “This is the beginning of the Gospel...”?
4. Mark was written to people suffering under the persecution of Nero. What do you think the idea of ‘Good News’ would have meant to them?
5. Isa. 61 gives a description of what it will look like when the messenger that Mark quotes from Isa. 40 in verse 2, arrives. Read through Isa. 61 and discuss how this might apply to the ministry of Jesus.
6. 14 times in 16 chapters Mark describes Jesus as the “Son of Man”. Here in Mark 1:1 he uses Jesus’ human name. Why might that be important?
7. Mark also describes Jesus as Messiah. What might this have meant for his readers? What does this mean to you?
8. Mark describes Jesus as the Son of God. What might this have meant to Mark? Does it mean the same thing to us? Consider Hosea 11:1 as you think about your answer.

### ***Take Home Exercise:***

1. Choose a couple of chapters from one of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark or Luke and follow through a literary context study as we have done for Mark 11.
2. Be prepared to share some of your findings with your group.

### **Memory Work:**

#### ***Psalm 119:10-12 (New International Version)***

- <sup>10</sup> I seek you with all my heart;  
do not let me stray from your commands.
- <sup>11</sup> I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you.
- <sup>12</sup> Praise be to you, O LORD;  
teach me your decrees.