

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN MARK'S GOSPEL – CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Having answered the chief priests' question with a question which they did not dare to answer, Jesus responded as so often before with a parable. Without making any mention of His accusers or their demand to have Him declare where His authority came from, He told a story no-one listening would have had any trouble working out. They would be familiar with Isaiah's illustration of Israel being compared to a vine planted by God which only produced worthless grapes because of rebellion,(Isa.5:1-10) and would therefore be judged by God. What is new in this parable is the addition of vine-growers and harvesters to the picture. The religious leaders whose responsibility should have been the care of God's people to keep them healthy and fruitful saw only an opportunity to enrich themselves. The Lord had sent prophets in the Old Testament and finally His Son in the New Testament to harvest the fruit which belonged to Him. He acknowledged that the vine-growers should receive some benefit for their work,(I Cor.9:7) but not the whole lot! So many prophets had been ill-treated in the past and now they were planning to kill the Son. After warning the leaders of the judgement from God which they would face, Jesus took them back to the very Psalm which the crowd had quoted as He entered Jerusalem.(Ps.118:22,23) The One whom the vine-growers would reject would become the foundation of God's work on earth.(I Cor3:11; Matt.16:16-18) Jesus' authority was from God in heaven. Where did theirs come from? They got the point and went away to plan His murder.(12:1-12)

Jesus' enemies set a couple of traps. First they sent an unlikely team of Pharisees and Herodians. The Pharisees claimed to believe every word in the Old Testament but had turned it into a set of rules interpreted by them. The Herodians were a political party who saw the salvation of the Jews in terms of supporting the Herods who ruled the Jews under Roman domination. The two groups were normally bitter rivals but were now united against their common enemy, Jesus. The question they asked about paying taxes to Caesar was one on which they held exactly opposite views. The Pharisees were against and the Herodians were for. They began with flattery to coax Him into their trap. Whatever answer Jesus might give would enrage one group or the other. As usual the Lord could see their hypocritical motives and came up with a brilliant answer. If the coin had Caesar's head on it because he made it in the first place, he should be allowed to have it back in tax if he demanded it. At the same time God made us and wants His image imprinted on our lives, so we should belong to Him.(Gen.1:26,27; II Cor.3:18) They retreated speechless.(12:13-17)

The next trap was set by the third dominant Jewish group, the Sadducees, who took the Bible lightly and dismissed the idea of life beyond death. They were only interested in their power over the people. Their question was almost certainly a hypothetical one about 7 brothers marrying the same childless wife in turn after the previous brother died. With whom would she be re-united in heaven? Jesus' answer was simple and in three parts. We put ourselves in silly situations because we do not know the Bible or what God can do. There is no marriage in heaven. Why did God say 'I am the God of...' regarding dead people if He was still their God beyond the grave? The Sadducees too were lost for words.(12:18-27)

Impressed by the answers he had heard, one scribe very sincerely asked for help to make sense of so many laws, 613 according to Jewish experts. Jesus drew two statements from the Old Testament which summed them all up. Love God wholly, and our neighbour sacrificially. Now no-one had a word to say.(12:28-34)

The chapter ends with two strong warnings and a human illustration. In Ps.110:1 David anticipated the Messiah as being not just his Son but God's Son contrary to what the scribes taught. Those same scribes, Jesus warned, were motivated by status and public recognition but robbed the poor. Substantial showing-off donations were one way to be honoured by men. The quiet gift by a poor widow of the little she had meant so much more to God than the wealthy exhibitionists.(12:35-44)

Again let me encourage you to review your titles for the sections of chapter 12 to see what new insight God has given you. My suggested titles for the sections of chapter 11 are as follows: verses 1-7 the borrowed donkey; 8-10 the welcomed king; 11 the inspected temple; 12-14 the fruitless fig-tree; 15-18 the reclaimed temple; 19-21 the cursed fig-tree; 22-26 the removed mountain; 27-33 the challenged authority. The next chapter has one obvious theme which should immediately be apparent at a first reading. What is it? I

suggest you might divide it as follows:- verses 1-8; 9-13; 14-23; 24-27; 28-32; 33-37. Again look for a title to each section as it is immediately apparent.

**Section 1 - verses 1-8 Q.1** One of Jesus' disciples tried to impress Him to be a tourist. How have religious people often made the same mistake as this disciple? What startling response did Jesus make? How long had this temple taken to build?(Jn.2:20) This was the Jews' third temple, built by Herod the Great. What had happened to the other two? What do you suppose would have been the reaction of the disciple turned tourist guide on hearing Jesus' prophecy? It is a fact of history that this temple was destroyed in AD70 at the end of the Jewish revolt against the Romans.

**Q.2** Jesus' first four disciples met with Him privately to discuss this shocking piece of news. What two things did they want to know? What more useful questions might they have asked? How do we also tend to focus in the wrong direction about the future?(II Cor.5:7)

**Q.3** What three kinds of event did Jesus give warning about to His disciples? What two dangers are there when such things happen? How have such things happened in our own time? What sort of conclusions did people jump to in Jesus' lifetime about the meaning of major disasters?

**Section 2 - verses 9-13 Q.4** What special dangers do Christians face in difficult times? Give examples of such things in the book of Acts, and today. How did the believers respond at these moments? What would be the most hurtful of these attacks? Why do they happen?

**Q.5** What three things does God want to happen in our lives under persecution? Which must come first and why? How will the other two consequences follow?

**Section 3 - verses 14-23 Q.6** What was the 'abomination of desolation'?(Dan.9:27; 11:31) An abomination is something loathsome and revolting. Desolation means emptiness. What kind of thing might this describe happening in the temple? Do you know if any such thing had ever happened in Jewish history?

**Q.7** What response was advised to the Christians when they observed such an event? What was liable to hold them back too long when they needed to escape? Why would it be particularly difficult in winter? How do the same warnings apply to the way we respond to pressures on us now?

**Q.8** Could the description of tribulation in verse 19 just apply to the destruction of the temple in AD70 or must it refer to something bigger? 'Tribulation' means 'under pressure'. What kinds of pressure do we experience in tough times? The Jewish war lasted 3 1/2 years with a remarkable break in the middle which gave the Christians in Jerusalem an opportunity to escape. Could this be what Jesus was referring to?

**Q.9** Again what temptation will we usually face at difficult times? How can we recognise it and avoid being trapped?

**Section 4 - verses 24-27 Q.10** In what way will God eventually intervene in history? When had something similar happened before?(Mark 15:33) To which of these two occasions had Joel been referring in the Old Testament?(Joel 2:10,31) What much bigger event will happen on the second occasion? How will it affect us if we are still living at that time?

**Q.11** If believers are to be gathered from the remotest parts of the earth what does this tell us must happen before Jesus' return can occur?

**Section 5 - verses 28-32 Q.12** How did Jesus again use the illustration of the fig tree? What does the earlier story in chapter 11 tell us will help to hasten this later event? How are we to interpret current world events as they point to Christ's return? Was Jesus now talking about the destruction of the temple or His final return? Why do you suppose He seemed to mix the two events in together?

**Q.13** Can we know the date of Christ's return? If not then what is the point of learning about it? Why did not even Jesus know the date as the Son of God? What does this teach us about His life on earth?

**Section 6 - verses 33-37**

**Q.14** What illustration did Jesus use to teach us about knowing but not knowing about His return? What do the times of day He referred to tell us about how the world will seem just before He does return? What are we to be doing while we are waiting for His coming? What does it mean to you to 'be alert'?