

# Last Days *in the* Temple



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**CONTROVERSY.** Probably all the events of this week's lesson occurred on the final Tuesday of Jesus' earthly life. These were hours of fierce controversy as the religious leaders attempted one time after another to embarrass Jesus publicly or to get Him to say something they could use against Him with the Roman authorities. Here we see various groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians)—normally at odds with one another—united in opposition to Jesus.

In the midst of enemies and controversies, Jesus stands alone. No one comes to His defense, but He does not need anyone, for He answers every trick question with insight and authority that stumps and confounds His accusers. Meanwhile, He takes the initiative against them with probing parables and questions that expose their hypocrisy.

At the end of the long, trying day, Jesus casts a last look around Him and leaves the temple. He will never return to that earthly structure.

**The Week at a Glance:** How did Christ respond to those who questioned His authority? What was Jesus' message in the parable of the wicked husbandmen? How did Jesus respond to flattery? For Jesus, what was the essence of all true religion and faith?

**Scripture Passage for the Week:** *Mark 11:27–12:44.*

**Memory Text:** “ “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment’ ” (*Mark 12:30, NKJV*).

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 28.*

## “We Cannot Tell”

**By** cleansing the temple Jesus had clearly set forth Himself as One whose authority was greater than the temple and the chief priests and teachers of the law who served at the temple. It’s not surprising, then, that their first challenge to Jesus on this final day in the temple centered around authority. Study Jesus’ encounter with His critics (*Mark 11:27-33; see also Matt. 21:23-27 and Luke 20:1-8*). **Why didn’t the critics answer Jesus’ question? Why couldn’t they?**

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Jesus never resorted to verbal trickery. His speech was always open, direct, and pure. In turning the religious leaders’ question back on themselves, He was trying to break through the mental barriers they had erected against Him. The answer to His question was the same as the answer to their question. Both Jesus and John the Baptist spoke and worked out of a divine commission; no human agency had given them their task and authorized them. If only the critics could see their own blindness toward John, perhaps their eyes would be open to Him. Jesus, amid such hostility, was, nevertheless, ministering to those who were opposed to Him!

Also, notice their answer to Jesus, “We cannot tell.” *That is, we cannot tell it out loud, for to do so would ultimately expose ourselves to the crowd.* Jesus not only confounded them, He gave them another opportunity to repent, an opportunity that they apparently didn’t take advantage of.

**Why else could they not answer Jesus’ question?** *See Mark 1:7, 8; John 1:29.*

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What a place Jesus put them in. If they acknowledged that John was from God, then what were they going to do with John’s testimony about Jesus? If they acknowledged John’s divine credentials, how could they then explain their hostility to Christ?

**We mustn’t be too quick to judge these critics, though, lest we judge ourselves, as well (*Rom. 2:1*). In what ways, often much more subtle than what appears here, do we try to squirm our way around God’s authority in our lives?**

## The Parable of the Tenants (*Mark 12:1-12*).

This is one of the most powerful parables Jesus ever told. Its application was so direct and its message so terrifying that it must have had a profound effect on all who heard it. Here Jesus clearly foretells His own death and the rejection of the unfaithful in Israel.

**What** passage from the Old Testament, no doubt familiar to His hearers, did Jesus draw upon in presenting the parable of the wicked tenants? *See Isa. 5:1-7.*

Many of the parables of Jesus teach a single point, and the details do not apply. In this parable, however, we see a clear application for each of the characters and objects.

**Keeping** in mind Isaiah 5:1-7, write down what each of the following in Mark 12:1-11 represents:

**The vineyard:**

**The householder, owner of the vineyard:**

**The tenants (“husbandmen” in the King James Version):**

**The servants sent to collect the fruit:**

**The owner’s son:**

**The wall or hedge (Hint: What did God give Israel to set it apart from other people?):**

**The tower (Hint: What was the most prominent structure in Israel?):**

**What** effect did Jesus’ parable have on the religious leaders? Why didn’t they immediately arrest Jesus? *Mark 12:12.*

These were strong words indeed from the Master. But time was running out—for Him and for Israel. He hoped that this parable with its stern warning might yet cause some hearers to change their course.

**Suppose someone came to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and gave the same message to us as Jesus gave to Israel. How would you respond, and why?**

## Smooth Words *(Mark 12:13-17)*.

The next plot against Jesus brought together two groups that normally did not associate with each other. The Pharisees were strict observers of the laws of Judaism—not just what the Lord had given through Moses but the multitude of regulations that had been added by the scribes over the centuries. The Herodians, however, were a political party rather than a religious sect. They supported the royal family, which ruled as puppets of Rome.

**What** trick did these men try to use on Jesus before asking their question? Who tried the same thing on Him once before? See *John 3:1, 2*.

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“For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned,” Jesus had said (*Matt. 12:37*). In this case, these men by their words condemned themselves, because they acknowledged that He was “true” and that He taught the “way of God.” No doubt, unless at some point they repented, these men will meet their words again in the final judgment.

**Look** up the following texts. What are they all talking about? Why do you think the Bible speaks on this topic as it does? *Pss. 5:9; 12:2, 3; Prov. 20:19; 26:28; 28:23; 29:5*.

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The Hebrew word for “flattery” comes from a root word that can mean “smoothness” or “slippery.” How apt a description of this misuse of language! Indeed, flattering words can be used to slip past a person’s defenses and catch them at their weakest point: their ego and sense of self-worth. Though flattery might work with others, those who tried it on Christ get nowhere with this shameful tactic.

**Though we all need to be on guard against using flattery to manipulate others, we also need to guard against being duped by it. What was it about Jesus that enabled Him not to fall for this trick? How can we, who no doubt like receiving praise, have the same protection ourselves?**

## A Trick Question *(Mark 12:18-27)*.

The Sadducees were a religio-political party made up of wealthy, liberal, secular-minded people. They accepted only the five books of Moses, Genesis to Deuteronomy, as inspired, and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Now they came to Jesus with a trick question that they felt sure would embarrass Him. No doubt it was a stock scenario that they had used in arguing with the Pharisees and others against the doctrine of the resurrection (yet, if you really look at their argument, it was kind of ridiculous: a woman who marries seven brothers, one right after the death of the other?). If Jesus disagreed with them, the Sadducees thought they could hold Him up to ridicule; but if He agreed, that would further offend the Pharisees.

**Notice** Christ's first words to them. He hit them right where it hurt. Why were His words such a rebuke to, of all people, religious leaders?

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Because the Sadducees accepted only the books of Moses, Jesus did not quote from other parts of the Old Testament that point to the resurrection, such as Isaiah and Daniel. So far as we know, His reference of Exodus 3:6 is the first time this famous passage was so used. The Sadducees, who considered themselves experts in the first five books of the Bible, suddenly found themselves on the defensive.

**Read** carefully the verse that Christ quoted. How can we understand this in the context of the power of God and the resurrection of the dead? See also John 11:26; 1 John 5:11, 12. How does Mark 12:27 help answer this question?

In Jesus' own teachings to the people, He made the same point of this argument: Those who believe in Him, such as did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have already crossed over from death to life and will surely come forth from the grave at His call (*John 5:24, 25*). Even though our body turns to dust, we are bound up in the life of God, and we will live again. No wonder, then, for us death is only a sleep, a quiet rest for those whom, though in the grave, God considers as "living."

**If someone were to ask you, "Do you know the power of God?" what would you reply, and why?**

## The Greatest Commandment *(Mark 12:28-34)*.

Read carefully and prayerfully Mark 12:28-34. After reading that, read the following quote from Ellen White:

“The wisdom of Christ’s answer had convicted the scribe. He knew that the Jewish religion consisted in outward ceremonies rather than inward piety. He had some sense of the worthlessness of mere ceremonial offerings, and the faithless shedding of blood for expiation of sin. Love and obedience to God, and unselfish regard for man, appeared to him of more value than all these rites. The readiness of this man to acknowledge the correctness of Christ’s reasoning, and his decided and prompt response before the people, manifested a spirit entirely different from that of the priests and rulers. The heart of Jesus went out in pity to the honest scribe who had dared to face the frowns of the priests and the threats of the rulers to speak the convictions of his heart. ‘And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 608.

**Taking what Jesus said, what the scribe said, and what Ellen White said, write what you believe it means for us, today, in the twenty-first century, to love God and love our neighbor. How can we show this love in a practical way? In what ways might we be deceiving ourselves about our so-called “love” for God and our neighbors? What changes might we need to make in our lives that will allow us to better follow these commandments? Share answers with each other in class.**

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**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 593–616.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1** Why is the resurrection of the dead something that we need to take only on faith? Or is there any evidence from the natural world that points to the resurrection of the dead? Do we need any natural evidence in order to believe in it?
- 2** Kathryn Cravens once wrote: “If a man is vain, flatter. If timid, flatter. If boastful, flatter. In all history, too much flattery never lost a gentleman.” Why do you think that people are so susceptible to flattery? How can we as Christians be on guard against both giving flattery or being taken in by it?
- 3** When do we cross the line between giving someone valid praise and flattering them?
- 4** Discuss as a class what your church could do, as a church, to show the world that you are a congregation of people who truly love God and love their neighbors. Are you doing anything as a church that would give anyone the idea that you are following those commandments, or is your church nothing more than a Saturday morning social club?
- 5** Discuss as a class what Jesus meant by rendering to God what’s God’s and rendering to Caesar what’s his. Think of the historical context in which Jesus made that statement. Why, if He had wanted, could He have justified rebellion against such a corrupt system? Why do you think He didn’t, and what lessons, if any, does that have for us today?

**Summary:** In this last, drama-filled day in the temple, we find Jesus put on the defensive but always in command of the situation, ever seeking to reach with His love those who hated Him.

## The Datu's Dream

Letty Jampit

Datu (chief) Dalangin made it known how he felt about Christians. "The world is full of different religions," he would say. "Everyone claims they have the truth, but who knows which one really does? I will continue to worship spirit gods of my forefathers, the gods who dwell in the woods and give us food to eat so we won't starve."

Sometimes the datu attended the worship in the little Adventist chapel in the village. But he did not go to listen; he went to ridicule. He laughed at the stories we told and disturbed the worship.

So, it was no surprise when the datu and his wife came to worship one Sabbath. But this time they sat quietly in a corner, listening. They were not chewing betel nut as they usually did and made no comments about the songs we sang or the stories we told.

When testimony time came, the datu stood and spoke. "I often have dreams, but I don't see a meaning in them and quickly forget them. But one night recently I had a dream that disturbed me; I have not been able to forget it. That is why I am here today."

"In my dream I saw 24 churches of different sizes and styles standing in the heavens. All the churches were dark except one. A small, humble church was brightly lit, not by candles but by a holy presence, such as the angels we see in the pictures you show us. I asked the angel what church this was and why it was the only one lighted. The angel told me gently, 'This is the Seventh-day Adventist church; it keeps the Sabbath day holy, the day on which your missionary teachers worship. This is the true church that you should join now, before it is too late. Jesus is coming soon.'"



The datu paused a moment then he added, "My wife and I have decided to join this church."

Today Datu Dalangin and his wife and children are preparing for baptism into God's remnant church.

*A Manobo Datu (left) Letty Jampit is a student missionary teaching school in the village of Basak in the mountains of southern Philippines.*