

# Notes on Mark

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## Introduction

### WRITER

The writer did not identify himself by name anywhere in this Gospel. This is true of all four Gospels.

"The title, 'According to Mark' (. . . [*kata Markon*]), was probably added when the canonical gospels were collected and there was need to distinguish Mark's version of the gospel from the others. The gospel titles are generally thought to have been added in the second century but may have been added much earlier. Certainly we may say that the title indicates that by A.D. 125 or so an important segment of the early church thought that a person named Mark wrote the second gospel."<sup>1</sup>

There are many statements of the early church fathers that identify the "John Mark" who is frequently mentioned in the New Testament as the writer.

The earliest reference of this type is in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (ca. A.D. 326).<sup>2</sup> Eusebius quoted Papius' *Exegesis of the Lord's Oracles* (ca. A.D. 140), a work now lost. Papius quoted "the Elder," probably the Apostle John, who said the following things about this Gospel: Mark wrote it, though he was not a disciple of Jesus during Jesus' ministry or an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. He accompanied the Apostle Peter and listened to his preaching. He based his Gospel on the eyewitness account and spoken ministry of Peter.

Mark did not write his Gospel in strict orderly sequence, meaning either chronological order<sup>3</sup> or rhetorical and artistic order<sup>4</sup>, but he recorded accurately what Peter remembered of Jesus' words and deeds. He considered himself an interpreter of Peter's content. By this, "the Elder" probably meant that Mark recorded the teaching of Peter for the church,

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<sup>1</sup>Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 172. See *ibid*, pp. 726-43 for a brief discussion of the formation of the New Testament canon.

<sup>2</sup>*The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 3:39:15.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Hengel, "Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems in the Gospel of Mark," in *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1—8:26*, p. xxvii.

though not necessarily verbatim, as Peter expressed himself.<sup>5</sup> Finally, "the Elder" said that Mark's account is wholly reliable.

Another important source of the tradition that Mark wrote this Gospel is the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark (A.D. 160-180). It also stated that Mark received his information from Peter. Moreover, it recorded that Mark wrote after Peter died, and that he wrote this Gospel in Italy.<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 180-185), another early church father, noted that Mark wrote after Peter and Paul had died.<sup>7</sup> Other early tradition documenting these facts comes from Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150-160), Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 195), Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200), the Muratorian Canon (ca. A.D. 200), and Origen (ca. A.D. 230). This testimony dates from the end of the second century. Furthermore it comes from three different centers of early Christianity: Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Rome (in Italy), and Alexandria (in Egypt). Thus there is strong external evidence that Mark wrote this Gospel.

The Mark in view is the "John Mark" mentioned frequently in the New Testament (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:36-39; Col. 4:10; Phile. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13; et al.). He was evidently a relative of Barnabas, and he accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, but left these apostles when they reached Perga. Mark became useful to Paul during Paul's second Roman imprisonment, and was also with Peter when Peter was in Rome. Peter described him as his "son," probably his protégé.<sup>8</sup>

It seems unlikely that the early church would have accepted this Gospel as authoritative, since its writer was a secondary figure, without having convincing proof that Mark wrote it. Perhaps Luke showed special interest in John Mark, in Acts, because he was the writer of this Gospel, more than because he caused a breach between Paul and Barnabas.<sup>9</sup>

"It is evident that he [Mark] was a charismatically endowed teacher and evangelist. . . . A careful reading of the Gospel will serve to introduce the author as a theologian of the first rank who never forgot that his primary intention was the strengthening of the people of God in a time of fiery ordeal."<sup>10</sup>

## **DATE**

The earliest Mark could have written, if the testimonies of the Anti-Marcionite Prologue and Irenaeus are correct, was after the death of Peter and Paul. The most probable dates of Peter's martyrdom in Rome are A.D. 64-67. Paul probably died as a martyr there in A.D. 67-68. However, Clement of Alexandria and Origen both placed the composition of

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<sup>5</sup>Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>The Anti-Marcionite Prologue.

<sup>7</sup>*Against Heresies*, 3:1:2.

<sup>8</sup>For a table comparing Peter's address in Acts 10:36-40 and the structure of Mark's Gospel, see Carson and Moo, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup>A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. xxxi.

<sup>10</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 23.

this Gospel during Peter's lifetime. This may mean that Mark wrote shortly before Peter died. Perhaps Mark began his Gospel during Peter's last years in Rome and completed it after Peter's death.

The latest that Mark could have written his Gospel was probably A.D. 70, when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. Many scholars believe that since no Gospel writer referred to that event, which fulfilled prophecy, they all must have written before it. To summarize, Mark probably wrote this Gospel sometime between A.D. 63 and 70.

### **ORIGIN AND DESTINATION**

Most of the early Christian tradition says Mark wrote in Italy, and specifically in Rome.<sup>11</sup> This external testimony finds support in the internal evidence of the Gospel itself. Many indications in the text point to Mark's having written for Gentile readers originally, particularly Romans. He explained Jewish customs that would have been strange to Gentile readers (e.g., 7:2-4; 15:42). He translated Aramaic words that would have been unfamiliar to Gentiles (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22). Compared to Matthew and Luke he used many Latinisms and Latin loan words, indicating Roman influence.

Mark showed special interest in persecution and martyrdom, which would have been of special interest to Roman readers when he wrote (e.g., 8:34-38; 13:9-13). Christians were then suffering persecution in Rome, and in various other places throughout the empire, especially after Nero began to persecute Christians in A.D. 65. For Romans, death by crucifixion was enough to disqualify Jesus as the Savior, and much of what Mark emphasized showed that He did not deserve crucifixion.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the early circulation and widespread acceptance of this Gospel among Christians suggest that it originated from, and went to, a powerful and influential church.<sup>13</sup>

"Matthew is directed to the religious man. Mark was written to the strong man. Luke is addressed to the thinking man. The Gospel of John is directed to the wretched man, the man who needs salvation."<sup>14</sup>

### **CHARACTERISTICS**

Linguistically, Mark used a relatively limited vocabulary when he wrote this Gospel. For example, he used only about 80 words that occur nowhere else in the Greek New Testament, compared with Luke's Gospel that contains about 250 such words. Another unique feature is that Mark also liked to transliterate Latin words into Greek. However, the Aramaic language also influenced Mark's Greek. He evidently translated into Greek many of Peter's stories that Peter had recounted in Aramaic. The result was at times a rather rough and ungrammatical Greek wording, compared with Luke, who had a much more polished style of writing. However, Mark used a forceful, fresh, and vigorous style

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<sup>11</sup>Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria.

<sup>12</sup>Robert H. Gundry, *Mark*, p. 1045.

<sup>13</sup>Walter W. Wessel, "Mark," in *Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 609.

<sup>14</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 4:163.

of writing. This comes through in his frequent use of the historical present tense that expresses action as happening at once. It is also obvious in his frequent use (41 times) of the Greek adverb *euthys* translated "immediately."<sup>15</sup> The resulting effect is that as one reads Mark's Gospel, one feels that he or she is reading a reporter's eyewitness account of the events.

"Though primarily engaged in an oral rather than a written ministry, D. L. Moody was in certain respects a modern equivalent to Mark as a communicator of the gospel. His command of English was seemingly less than perfect and there were moments when he may have wounded the grammatical sensibilities of some of the more literate members of his audiences, but this inability never significantly hindered him in communicating the gospel with great effectiveness. In a similar way, Mark's occasional literary lapses have been no handicap to his communication in this gospel in which he skillfully set forth the life and ministry of Jesus."<sup>16</sup>

"The evidence points to Mark's being not a creative literary artist but an extremely honest and conscientious compiler."<sup>17</sup>

Mark addressed his readers directly (e.g., 2:10; 7:19), through Jesus' words (e.g., 13:37), and with the use of rhetorical questions addressed to them (e.g., 4:41). This gives the reader the exciting feeling that he or she is interacting with the story personally. It also impresses the reader with the need for him or her to respond to what the story is presenting. Specifically, Mark wanted his readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, and to follow Him.

Historically, Mark recorded many intimate details that only an eyewitness could have observed, which he evidently obtained from Peter (e.g., 1:27, 41, 43; 2:12; 3:5; 7:34; 9:5-6, 10; 10:24, 32). He stressed Jesus' acts and gave a prominent place to His miracles in this Gospel. Mark recorded 20 of Jesus' miracles.<sup>18</sup> Matthew, on the other hand, stressed Jesus' discourses, His teachings about His kingdom. Mark recorded a smaller proportion of Jesus' words, and a greater proportion of His works, than Matthew did. Jesus comes through in Mark's Gospel as a *Man of action*. Mark emphasized Jesus' role as the "Servant of the Lord."

"Mark's story of Jesus is one of swift action and high drama. Only twice, in chapters 4 and 13, does Jesus pause to deliver extended discourses."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>See Rodney J. Decker, "The Use of *euthys* ('immediately') in Mark," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 1:1 (Spring 1997):90-121.

<sup>16</sup>David K. Lowery, "A Theology of Mark," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup>Cranfield, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup>See Appendix 6 "The Miracles of Jesus" in my notes on Matthew for a chart of all the miracles recorded in the Gospels.

<sup>19</sup>J. D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples*, p. 1.

Candor also marks this Gospel. Mark did not glorify the disciples, but recorded them doing unflattering things such as criticizing Jesus. He also described the hostility of Jesus' family members toward Him. He stressed the human reactions and emotions of Jesus.

All four Gospels are primarily narrative literature in their genre. Cranfield distinguished four different kinds of narrative material in Mark's Gospel:

"(i) Narratives the wealth of detail and vividness of which suggest direct derivation from the reminiscence of an eyewitness. . . . (ii) Narratives which by their rounded form and lack of vivid details give the impression of being units of oral tradition which have been worn smooth by frequent repetition. . . . (iii) Narratives which, though based on tradition, do not seem to be actual units of oral tradition, but rather to have been constructed by Mark himself . . . (iv) Brief summary statements indicating in general terms what was happening during a certain period . . ." <sup>20</sup>

Theologically, this Gospel presents a high Christology beginning with the introduction of Jesus as "the Son of God" (1:1). Mark revealed Jesus' preference for the title "Son of Man," which He used to describe Himself frequently.

### **PURPOSE**

These characteristics help us understand Mark's purpose for writing, which he did not state directly. Mark's purpose was not just to give his readers a biographical or historical account of Jesus' life. He had a more practical purpose. The biographical material he chose to include and omit suggests that he wanted to enable his Christian readers to endure suffering and persecution for their faith effectively. To do this, he recorded much about Jesus' sufferings. About one third of this Gospel deals with the passion of Jesus.

"Mark's Gospel has been called a Passion story with a long introduction." <sup>21</sup>

Moreover, there are many other references to suffering throughout the book (e.g., 1:12-13; 3:21-22, 30-35; 8:34-38; 10:30, 33-34, 45; 13:8, 11-13). Clearly, Mark implied that faithfulness and obedience as a disciple of Jesus will inevitably result in opposition, suffering, and perhaps death. This emphasis would have ministered to the original readers who were undergoing persecution for their faith. It is a perennial need in pastoral ministry. It is interesting that the theme of suffering is strong in Peter's first epistle, too. Evidently this was a subject that lay heavily on Peter's heart. Mark also wanted his Gentile Christian readers to be good servants of God and other people. Therefore he devoted much attention to Jesus' training of the Twelve for service.

Mark had a theological (Christological) as well as a pastoral (discipleship) purpose in writing. It was to stress the true humanity of the Son of God. Whereas Matthew presented Jesus as the Messiah, Mark showed that He was the human servant of God who suffered as no other person has suffered. Mark stressed Jesus' complete obedience to His Father's

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<sup>20</sup>Cranfield, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1665.

will. This emphasis makes Jesus an example for all disciples to follow (10:45). One wonders if Mark presented Jesus as he did, in order to balance a tendency that existed in the early church, by Docetists and others, to think of Jesus as divine but not fully human.

"Whereas a parenetic [exhorting] purpose with regard to Christian discipleship would explain only one small element in the contents of Mark and even then would misconstrue that element, an apologetic purpose with regard to the Cross provides a comprehensive explanation of all elements and, more especially, of the ways in which those elements are presented. Fitting together to form an apology for the Cross are not only the authority and radicalism of Jesus' teaching but also the fulfillment of his predictions, not only his power-packed miracles and exorcisms but also the supernatural manner and accompaniments of his death, not only his attraction of crowds but also his burial by a pious and brave member of the Sanhedrin, not only his baptismal approval by the Father and enduement with the Spirit but also his resurrection."<sup>22</sup>

"In my view, the Markan evangelist presents Jesus as the true son of God and in doing so deliberately presents Jesus in opposition to Rome's candidates for a suitable emperor, savior, and lord. All the features that made up the emperor cult and the various customs associated with the office and title of emperor in various ways find expression in NT Christology. Most of these features are paralleled in Mark; others are paralleled elsewhere in the NT."<sup>23</sup>

### **MARK'S POSITION AMONG THE GOSPELS**

It is common today for scholars to hold *Markan* priority. This is the view that Mark wrote his Gospel first and the other Gospel evangelists wrote after he did. This view has become popular since the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Before that, most biblical scholars believed that Matthew wrote his Gospel first.<sup>25</sup> Since then, many scholars have concluded that Mark was one of the two primary sources that the other Synoptic Gospel writers used, the other being Q.<sup>26</sup> There is presently no definitive solution to this problem of which came first, though by far the majority of scholars favor Mark.

Scholars favoring Markan priority base their view on the fact that: Mark contains about 90 percent of what is in Matthew and about 40 percent of what is in Luke. Matthew and Luke usually follow Mark's order of events, and they rarely agree against the content of Mark when they all deal with the same subject. Matthew and Luke also often repeat Mark's wording, and they sometimes interpret and tone down some of Mark's statements. Normally, Mark's accounts are fuller than Matthew and Luke's, suggesting that they may have edited his work.

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<sup>22</sup>Gundry, p. 1026.

<sup>23</sup>Craig. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27—16:20*, p. lxxxix.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xlv. See his full discussion of the synoptic problem on pp. xlv-lviii.

<sup>25</sup>See R. A. Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark*, pp. 41-48.

<sup>26</sup>See my note on the introduction to Matthew for a fuller discussion of Q.

However, sometimes Matthew and Luke agree against Mark in a particular account. Luke omitted a large section of Mark's material, including all of what is in Mark 6:45—8:26. Moreover, in view of the likelihood that Mark wrote in the 60s, if he wrote first, Matthew and Luke may have written after the fall of Jerusalem. This seems unlikely, because although that event fulfilled prophecy, neither writer cited the fulfillment as such.<sup>27</sup>

All things considered, I favor *Matthean* priority. This view is currently enjoying a resurgence in popularity. William Farmer has been a leader among those who hold Matthean priority.<sup>28</sup> Christopher Mann, who wrote the Anchor Bible commentary on Mark, argued at length for Mark drawing on (conflating, i.e., combining and or condensing) Matthew and Luke, as well as the eyewitness testimony of Peter.<sup>29</sup> However, this debate is not crucial to the interpretation of the text.

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-13
  - A. The title of the book 1:1
  - B. Jesus' preparation for ministry 1:2-13
    1. The ministry of John the Baptist 1:2-8
    2. The baptism of Jesus 1:9-11
    3. The temptation of Jesus 1:12-13
- II. The Servant's early Galilean ministry 1:14—3:6
  - A. The beginning of Jesus' ministry 1:14-20
    1. The message of the Servant 1:14-15
    2. The first disciples of the Servant 1:16-20
  - B. Early demonstrations of the Servant's authority 1:21-34
    1. Jesus' teaching and healing in the Capernaum synagogue 1:21-28
    2. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law 1:29-31
    3. Jesus' healing of many Galileans after sundown 1:32-34
  - C. Jesus' early ministry throughout Galilee 1:35-45
    1. The first preaching tour of Galilee 1:35-39
    2. The cleansing of a leprous Jew 1:40-45
  - D. Jesus' initial conflict with the religious leaders 2:1—3:6
    1. The healing and forgiveness of a paralytic 2:1-12
    2. The call of Levi and his feast 2:13-17
    3. The religious leaders' question about fasting 2:18-22
    4. The controversies about Sabbath observance 2:23—3:6

<sup>27</sup>John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 98. For fuller discussion, see the commentaries and works on Bible introduction.

<sup>28</sup>William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem*.

<sup>29</sup>C. S. Mann, Mark, pp. 47-71. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, pp. 6-7, for a summary of arguments for Markan priority.

- III. The Servant's later Galilean ministry 3:7—6:6a
  - A. The broadening of Jesus' ministry 3:7-19
    - 1. Jesus' ministry to the multitudes 3:7-12
    - 2. Jesus' selection of 12 disciples 3:13-19
  - B. The increasing rejection of Jesus and its result 3:20—4:34
    - 1. The increasing rejection of Jesus 3:20-35
    - 2. Jesus' teaching in parables 4:1-34
  - C. Jesus' demonstrations of power and the Nazarenes' rejection 4:35—6:6a
    - 1. The demonstrations of Jesus' power 4:35—5:43
    - 2. Jesus rejection by the Nazarenes 6:1-6a
- IV. The Servant's self-revelation to the disciples 6:6b—8:30
  - A. The mission of the Twelve 6:6b-30
    - 1. The sending of the Twelve 6:6b-13
    - 2. The failure of Antipas to understand Jesus' identity 6:14-29
    - 3. The return of the Twelve 6:30
  - B. The first cycle of self-revelation to the disciples 6:31—7:37
    - 1. The feeding of the 5,000 6:31-44
    - 2. Jesus' walking on the water and the return to Galilee 6:45-56
    - 3. The controversy with the Pharisees and scribes over defilement 7:1-23
    - 4. Jesus' teaching about bread and the exorcism of a Phoenician girl 7:24-30
    - 5. The healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment 7:31-36
    - 6. The preliminary confession of faith 7:37
  - C. The second cycle of self-revelation to the disciples 8:1-30
    - 1. The feeding of the 4,000 8:1-9
    - 2. The return to Galilee 8:10
    - 3. Conflict with the Pharisees over signs 8:11-13
    - 4. Jesus' teaching about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod 8:14-21
    - 5. The healing of a blind man near Bethsaida 8:22-26
    - 6. Peter's confession of faith 8:27-30
- V. The Servant's journey to Jerusalem 8:31—10:52
  - A. The first passion prediction and its lessons 8:31—9:29
    - 1. The first major prophecy of Jesus' passion 8:31-33
    - 2. The requirements of discipleship 8:34—9:1
    - 3. The Transfiguration 9:2-8
    - 4. The coming of Elijah 9:9-13
    - 5. The exorcism of an epileptic boy 9:14-29
  - B. The second passion prediction and its lessons 9:30—10:31
    - 1. The second major prophecy of Jesus' passion 9:30-32



- 2. The pitfalls of discipleship 9:33-50
- 3. Lessons concerning self-sacrifice 10:1-31
- C. The third passion prediction and its lessons 10:32-52
  - 1. The third major prophecy of Jesus' passion 10:32-34
  - 2. Jesus' teaching about serving 10:35-45
  - 3. The healing of a blind man near Jericho 10:46-52
- VI. The Servant's ministry in Jerusalem chs. 11—13
  - A. Jesus' formal presentation to Israel 11:1-26
    - 1. The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11
    - 2. Jesus' judgment on unbelieving Israel 11:12-26
  - B. Jesus' teaching in the temple 11:27—12:44
    - 1. The controversy over Jesus' authority 11:27—12:12
    - 2. The controversy over Jesus' teaching 12:13-37
    - 3. Jesus' condemnation of hypocrisy and commendation of reality 12:38-44
  - C. Jesus' teaching on Mt. Olivet ch. 13
    - 1. The setting 13:1-4
    - 2. Warnings against deception 13:5-8
    - 3. Warnings about personal danger during deceptions 13:9-13
    - 4. The coming crisis 13:14-23
    - 5. The second coming of the Son of Man 13:24-27
    - 6. The time of Jesus' return 13:28-32
    - 7. The concluding exhortation 13:33-37
- VII. The Servant's passion ministry chs. 14—15
  - A. The Servant's anticipation of suffering 14:1-52
    - 1. Jesus' sufferings because of betrayal 14:1-11
    - 2. Jesus' sufferings because of desertion 14:12-52
  - B. The Servant's endurance of suffering 14:53—15:47
    - 1. Jesus' Jewish trial 14:53—15:1
    - 2. Jesus' Roman trial 15:2-20
    - 3. Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial 15:21-47
- VIII. The Servant's resurrection ch. 16
  - A. The announcement of Jesus' resurrection 16:1-8
  - B. The appearances and ascension of Jesus 16:9-20
    - 1. Three post-resurrection appearances 16:9-18
    - 2. Jesus' ascension 16:19-20

Carson and Moo divided the book a bit differently, as follows.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>See Carson and Moo, pp. 169-72.

- I. Preliminaries to the ministry 1:1-13  
Transition 1:14-15
- II. First part of the Galilean ministry 1:16—3:6  
Transition 3:7-12
- III. Second part of the Galilean ministry 3:13—5:43  
Transition 6:1-6
- IV. The concluding phase of the Galilean ministry 6:7—8:26  
Transition 8:27-30
- V. The way of glory and suffering 8:31—10:45  
Transition 10:46-52
- VI. Final ministry in Jerusalem 11:1—13:37  
Transition 14:1-2
- VII. The passion and empty tomb narratives 14:3—16:8

### **MESSAGE**

Matthew presents Jesus in the purple and gold of royalty. Mark portrays Him in the brown and green of a servant who has come to do His Father's will.

The message of the book is similar to Matthew's message. A concise statement of it appears in 1:14-15: "After John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" Jesus proclaimed this good news during most of His earthly ministry.

Another verse that is key to understanding the message of this Gospel is 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." This verse provides the unique emphasis of the book, Jesus' role as a servant, and a general outline of its contents.

First, the Son of Man came. That is the Incarnation. The Son of Man was God incarnate in human nature. His identity is a major theme in this Gospel, as it is in all the Gospels.

Second, the Son of Man did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister. That is service. This Gospel also has much to teach disciples about service to God and to our fellow men.

Third, the Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many. That is His sufferings. Mark's Gospel stresses the sufferings of the Suffering Servant of the Lord. Mark is the Gospel of the Servant of God.

Jesus was, of course, by nature the Son of God. He is, and always has been, equal with the Father, because He shares the same divine nature with the Father. However in the Incarnation, Jesus became the Servant of God.

The hope for a divine Servant of God was an Old Testament revelation. Isaiah had more to say about the Servant of the Lord than any other Old Testament prophet, though many other prophets spoke of Him too.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul expounded the significance of Jesus becoming the Servant of God more than any other writer. His great Kenosis passage, in Philippians 2, helps us grasp what it meant for the Son of God to become the Servant of God. In the Incarnation, Jesus limited Himself. He did not cease to be God, but He poured Himself into the nature and body of a man. This limited His divine powers. Moreover, He submitted Himself to a mission that the Father prescribed for Him that constrained His divine freedom. Mark presents Jesus as a real man who was also God in the role of a servant.

Consider first the *nature* of Jesus' service.

The second person of the Trinity became a servant to create a gospel, to provide good news for human beings. This good news is that Jesus has provided salvation for humankind. To provide salvation, the eternal Son became a servant. Whenever the Bible speaks of Jesus as a servant it is always talking about His providing salvation.

Mark began by citing Isaiah, who predicted the Servant of God (1:3; cf. Isa. 40:3). The quotation from Malachi in verse 2 is only introductory. This is very significant because Mark, unlike Matthew, rarely quoted from the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup> Isaiah pictured One who would come to accomplish God's purpose of providing final salvation. His picture of the Servant became more distinct and detailed, like a portrait under construction, until in chapter 53, Isaiah depicted the Servant's awful sufferings. This chapter is the great background for the second Gospel, as Psalm 110 lies behind the first Gospel.

The picture of the Servant suffering on the Cross is the last in a series of pictures that Mark has given us. He also shows the Servant suffering in His struggle against the forces of Satan and his demons. Another picture is of the Servant suffering the opposition of Israel's religious leaders. Another one is of the Servant suffering the dullness and misunderstanding of His own disciples. These are all major themes in Mark's Gospel that have in common the view of Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

Turning to the Apostle Paul's theological exposition of the Suffering Servant theme in Scripture, we note that he picked up another of Mark's emphases. Mark did not just present Jesus as the Suffering Servant as an interesting theological revelation. He showed what that means for disciples of the Suffering Servant. We need to adopt the same attitude that Jesus had (Phil. 2:5). Disciples of the Suffering Servant should expect and prepare for the same experiences He encountered. We need to have the same graciousness, humility, and love that He did. The Son of God emptied Himself to become a servant of God and man. We must also sacrifice ourselves for the same purpose.

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<sup>31</sup>See W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels*, pp. 190-91, for a table of 63 references to the Old Testament in Mark.

Isaiah revealed that the central meaning of the Servant's mission was to provide salvation through self-sacrifice (Isa. 53). Paul also revealed that the Son became a servant to provide salvation through self-sacrifice (Phil. 2). The sense in which the Son of God became the Servant of the Lord is that He created a gospel by providing salvation from the slavery of sin.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He announced, "The time is fulfilled" (1:15). The person whom Isaiah and the other prophets had predicted had now arrived. God had drawn near by becoming a man. He had drawn near in the form of a humble servant. He was heading for the Cross. He would conquer what had ruined man and nature. He would provide good news for humankind, and He would return one day to establish His righteous kingdom over all the earth in grace and glory. The Cross was the focal point of Jesus' service.

"Jesus" was His human name. "Messiah" was the title that described His role, though most people misunderstood it. "Son of God" was the title that represented His deity. These three are primary in Mark's Gospel.

In addition to the *nature* of Jesus service, we also need to consider what Mark teaches about the *characteristics* of Jesus' service.

Jesus' sympathy with sinners stands out in this Gospel. Mark recorded no word of severity coming from Jesus' lips for sinners. Jesus reserved His severity for hypocrites, those who pretended to be righteous but were really unrighteous. He was hard on them because they ruined the lives of other people.

Sympathy comes from suffering. We have sympathy for someone who is undergoing some painful experience that we have gone through. It is hard to sympathize with someone whose experience is foreign to us.

Sympathy comes from suffering, and it manifests itself in sacrifice. It involves bearing one another's burdens. Jesus' sympathy for us sinners arose from sharing our sufferings, and it became obvious when He sacrificed Himself for us. If there was ever anyone who bore the burdens of others, it was Jesus (10:45).

Consider, also, the *result* of Jesus' service. It is the gospel. Reference to the gospel opens and closes this book (1:1; 16:20). The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was resurrected on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

When Jesus arose from the dead, His disciples were fearful, and they refused to believe that He was alive. Jesus' strongest words of criticism of them occur in 16:14: "He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen." This is the climax of the theme of the disciples' unbelief that runs through this Gospel. Look what He said to them immediately after that in 16:15: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." He sent them out to proclaim the good news of salvation accomplished to every creature. The resurrection of the Servant is the great proof of the acceptability of His service, and it demands the service of His disciples.

The abiding appeal of this book is, "Repent and believe the gospel" (1:15). Repenting is preliminary. Believing is the essential call.

Jesus did not preach that people should believe *into* the gospel (Gr. *eis*), nor that they should believe *close to* the gospel (Gr. *apo*). He called them to rest *in* the gospel (Gr. *en*). The gospel is a sphere of rest. We can have confidence in the gospel, put our trust in it, and rest in it.

The unbelievers in Mark's Gospel refused to rest in the reality that Jesus was not just a human Messiah come to deliver Israel from Rome, but the divine Son of God. The disciples had little rest in their spirits, because they still could not overcome the limited traditional misconceptions of Messiah's role in history, even though they believed that Jesus was God's Son.

The application of this Gospel to the church as a whole is: "Believe the gospel." As the disciples not only believed, but also struggled to believe, so the church needs to have a continuing and growing confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the "Servant of God."

It is a message of pardon and of power. Peter had to learn that it was a message of pardon after his triple denial of Jesus. All the disciples had to learn that it is a message of power after they refused to believe that God had raised Jesus back to life.

When the church loses its confidence in the gospel, its service becomes weak. If we doubt the power of the gospel, we have no message for people who are the servants of sin. The measure of our confidence in the gospel will be the measure of our effectiveness as God's servants.

How can we have greater confidence in the gospel? It is not primarily by studying or trying or experiencing. It is mainly by the illuminating work of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts. Jesus' disciples were blind until God opened their eyes, first to Jesus' true identity, and then to see Jesus' central place in time and history. They huddled in unbelief following the resurrection, until the Holy Spirit illuminated their understanding about the significance of the resurrection. Then they went everywhere proclaiming the gospel (16:20).

Mark calls on individual disciples of Jesus to believe in this gospel, to rest in it for pardon from sin and for power for service. He tells the story of the perfect Servant of God, whose perfect and perfected service is procuring a perfect salvation. God's Son became a *servant* to get near people, to help them, and to lift them up. *That* is the good news which people need to hear; that "good news" gospel message is what is meant in the phrase "preach the *gospel*."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:25-39.

## Exposition

### I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-13

This opening section of the book sets the stage for the presentation of Jesus Christ as the unique Servant of the Lord. Mark omitted references to Jesus' birth and youth.<sup>33</sup> These subjects are irrelevant when presenting the life of a servant.

"The accent falls upon the disclosure that Jesus is the Messiah, the very Son of God, whose mission is to affirm his sonship in the wilderness. His encounter with Satan provides the background for the delineation of the conflict between the Son of God and the forces of Satan which is so prominent an element in the Marcan narrative of Jesus' ministry."<sup>34</sup>

#### A. THE TITLE OF THE BOOK 1:1 (CF. LUKE 3:1-2)

Mark may have intended this sentence to introduce the ministry of John the Baptist, since that is what follows immediately (vv. 4-8). It could also refer to the inception of Jesus' public ministry and therefore be a title of the Gospel's introduction (1:1-13). It seems more probable, however, that this verse is a title for the whole book. It summarizes Mark's whole Gospel. Incidentally, the New Testament never uses the word "Gospel" to describe a book of the Bible. That is a more recent use of the word.

"The term 'gospel' or 'evangel' was not a word first coined among the Christians. On the contrary, the concept was significant both in pagan and Jewish culture. Among the Romans it meant 'joyful tidings' and was associated with the cult of the emperor, whose birthday, attainment to majority and accession to power were celebrated as festival occasions for the whole world. The reports of such festivals were called 'evangels' in the inscriptions and papyri of the Imperial Age."<sup>35</sup>

Possibly Mark began his Gospel as he did ("the beginning") in order to recall the opening verse of Genesis. The good news about Jesus Christ provides a "beginning" of as great significance as the creation of the cosmos. When Jesus came to earth and began His ministry, God created something new. This Gospel presents a *new beginning*, in which God revealed "good news about Jesus Christ." Thus this title might be a clue to the divine origin of the second Gospel.

"In Galatians 4:4-6, Paul viewed the gospel story as in two parts, God's sending 'his Son' and the sending of 'the Spirit of his Son.' Mark covers the first of these two sendings. The full apostolic message also included the sending of the Holy Spirit. But the story of the sending of the Son of God had its historical beginning with the coming of John the forerunner."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>See Appendix 1 "A Harmony of the Gospels" at the end of my notes on Matthew.

<sup>34</sup>Lane, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>36</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*, p. 27

The Scriptures refer to three beginnings: (1) the undatable beginning in eternity past, when "the Word" (Jesus) existed with God the Father (John 1:1), (2) the beginning of the heavens and the earth, when God created them (Gen. 1:1), and (3) the beginning of the good news ("gospel") about Jesus Christ, that began when John the Baptist and Jesus started their public ministries (Mark 1:1).

The word "gospel" is the modern equivalent of the old English "god-spel" meaning good news. The Greek word is *euangelion*. The gospel is the "good news" that God has provided eternal salvation through the ministry of Jesus Christ (cf. Isa. 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1-3; Rom. 1:16). This term is important in the theological emphasis of Mark's narrative (cf. 1:14-15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:9-10; 14:9). Here "gospel" refers to the gospel message, not to the Book of Mark.

"The Gospel is neither a discussion nor a debate,' said Dr. Paul S. Rees. 'It is an announcement!'"<sup>37</sup>

The word "gospel" also had a pagan background associated with the emperor cult. The birth of an heir to the throne, his coming of age, and his accession to office were announced as "good news"—"gospel," *euangelion*. The early Christians, therefore, connected the "gospel" of Jesus Christ with the "gospel" of the *true* ruler of *God's* kingdom.<sup>38</sup>

The word "gospel" also describes a certain type of literature, a literary genre. Gospel literature is not just history or biography. It is "preaching materials, designed to tell the story of God's saving action in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>39</sup> Mark's Gospel contains the good news that the early Christians preached (cf. Acts 2:36).<sup>40</sup>

"Mark does not write as a disinterested historian. He writes as a preacher conveying God's good news of salvation by emphasizing Jesus' saving ministry . . . Mark also writes as a theologian, arranging and interpreting the tradition to meet the needs of his hearers."<sup>41</sup>

"Jesus Christ" is the subject of this gospel (objective genitive). He is also the source of it (subjective genitive). Probably the former meaning is what Mark had in mind here. He seems to have wanted to provide an account of Jesus' ministry, so his readers could have a factual basis for their understanding of the gospel they had believed.

"Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua," meaning "Yahweh is salvation" or "salvation of Yahweh." "Christ" transliterates the Greek word *kristos*, which means "anointed." The Hebrew word for "anointed" is *masiah*, from which we get "Messiah."

<sup>37</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:110.

<sup>38</sup>Cranfield, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup>R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian*, p. 21.

<sup>40</sup>C. F. D. Moule, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup>Wessel, p. 611.

By the time Mark wrote his Gospel, "Jesus Christ" had become a proper name, not a name (Jesus) and a title (Christ), the original meanings of these words. However, Mark intended "Christ" to have its full titular meaning as well (cf. 8:29; 12:35; 14:61; 15:32). "Jesus" was a common name among the Jews until the beginning of the second century A.D., when the Jews stopped using it, because they hated Jesus of Nazareth, and Gentiles stopped using it, out of respect for Him.<sup>42</sup>

Mark further identified Jesus Christ as the "Son of God." This title does not appear in some important early manuscripts of Mark, but it is probably legitimate.<sup>43</sup> It expresses Jesus' unique relationship to God and identifies an important theme in the second Gospel (cf. 1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32; 14:36, 61; 15:39). The title does not necessarily imply divinity, or preexistence in heaven, since it sometimes describes human beings (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7). Nevertheless, as modifying Jesus here, the title is messianic, but it connotes a subordinate relationship to God. Mark presented Jesus as the *Servant of God*—particularly—in this book. Rather than recording a nativity narrative that showed that Jesus was the Son of God, Mark simply stated that fact with this title.<sup>44</sup>

"... from the start the narrator of Mark's story establishes with the reader a relationship of confidence by divulging the secret of Jesus' identity long before it becomes known to characters in the story, for the first line is an aside to the reader revealing that Jesus is the anointed one, the son of God. This technique puts the reader on the inside, among those who know, and enables the reader to understand more than many of the characters in the drama understand. This technique is an important foundation in this story which is concerned with what is hidden and what is secret."<sup>45</sup>

"The Gospel is not a mystery story in which the identity of the main character has to be guessed; from the outset it is made clear who this is—the Son of God."<sup>46</sup>

Taken together: "Jesus," "Christ," and "Son of God" present Jesus as a Man who was God's special agent, but who was also fully divine.

"The superscription refers to Jesus as 'the anointed one, the son of God.' At the end of the first half of the story, Peter acknowledges Jesus as 'the anointed one' [8:29] and at the end of Jesus' life the centurion identifies Jesus as 'son of God' [15:39]. The first half of the gospel emphasizes the authority of Jesus to do acts of power. The second half emphasizes the suffering of Jesus in filial obedience to God. Although the characterization

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<sup>42</sup>Cranfield, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup>See Carson and Moo, p. 187.

<sup>44</sup>See Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Defining the Titles 'Christ' and 'Son of God' in Mark's Narrative Presentation of Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):537-59.

<sup>45</sup>David M. Rhoads and Donald M. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup>E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion*, p. 168.



of Jesus is consistent throughout, there appears, nevertheless, a clear development in the portrayal of Jesus from one half of the gospel to the next. In the first step, he serves with power; in the second, he serves as the one who suffers. Throughout the style and the structure of episodes the two-step progressions prepare the reader to be drawn more readily into seeing this larger second step and accepting this clearer, more precise understanding of Jesus."<sup>47</sup>

"In the gospel story he narrates, Mark tells, of course, of Jesus. Intertwined with the story of Jesus, however, are two other story lines: that of the religious authorities and that of the disciples."<sup>48</sup>

### **B. JESUS' PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY 1:2-13**

Mark proceeded to record three events that the reader needs to understand in order to appreciate Jesus' ministry correctly. They are: John the Baptist's ministry, Jesus' baptism, and Jesus' temptation. Two words that recur throughout this section of the text are key to understanding Mark's emphasis: "desert" and "the Spirit."<sup>49</sup>

#### **1. The ministry of John the Baptist 1:2-8 (cf. Matt. 3:1-6, 11-12; Luke 3:3-6; 15-18)**

The writer pointed out that the ministry of Jesus' forerunner fulfilled prophecy. It made a significant impact on those whom John contacted.<sup>50</sup> Then Mark recorded the essence of John's message.

1:2-3 Mark began with a quotation from the Old Testament. A proper understanding of Jesus' ministry requires an understanding of prophecy concerning Messiah. He literally wrote: "It stands written" (perfect tense in the Greek text). The early Christians believed that the Old Testament was God's authoritative Word.

This quotation is a blend of words taken from the Septuagint version of Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3. Mark shaped this quotation to stress the messianic emphasis in these Old Testament passages. He probably introduced this quotation by referring to Isaiah, because the Isaiah part contains the main point he wanted to stress (v. 3), or perhaps because Isaiah was the more prominent of the prophets he quoted.

The *desert* ("wilderness"), where God met with His people, was a significant Old Testament motif. Messiah would come out of the desert.

<sup>47</sup>Rhoads and Michie, pp. 48-49.

<sup>48</sup>Kingsbury, p. vii.

<sup>49</sup>See Frank J. Matera, "The Prologue as the Interpretive Key to Mark's Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34 (October 1988):3-20.

<sup>50</sup>For parallels between the ministries of John the Baptist and Elijah, See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1:255-56.

"The Lord" proved to be Jesus. Mark's introduction of the word "way" (Gr. *hodos*, lit. road or highway) begins one of his themes, namely, the path through life. This is what a disciple of Jesus must follow (cf. 8:27; 9:33; 10:17, 32, 52; 12:14).

This is the only time Mark quoted an Old Testament passage, except for when he quoted Jesus referring to the Old Testament. The quotation in 15:28 lacks ancient manuscript authority. What a contrast with Matthew!

"The point of the whole quotation is that John's preparatory ministry, in fulfillment of prophecy, authenticated Jesus' Messiahship and prepared for the beginning of His official ministry as the Messiah."<sup>51</sup>

1:4 The "wilderness" or desert (Gr. *eremos*) where John ministered was dry and uninhabited. It was the wilderness of Judea west and north of the Dead Sea (Matt. 3:1).

John baptized people when they gave evidence of *repentance*. "A baptism of repentance" means a baptism characterized by repentance. The Jews whom John baptized not only changed their minds, the basic meaning of *metanoia*, but they also changed their behavior. This is the only occurrence of *metanoia* in Mark. The changes were for, and resulted in, "the forgiveness of sins." Change of behavior does not earn forgiveness, but change of behavior demonstrates genuine contrition that results in forgiveness.

"The end of pride is the beginning of forgiveness."<sup>52</sup>

The unusual thing about John's baptism was that in his day, Gentiles baptized themselves when they converted to Judaism, and the Jews baptized themselves for ritual cleansing.

"As Israel long ago had been separated from Egypt by a pilgrimage through the waters of the Red Sea, the nation is exhorted again to experience separation; the people are called to a second exodus in preparation for a new covenant with God."<sup>53</sup>

Peter's sermon in Acts 10:37 began at the same place as Mark's Gospel: with the ministry of John the Baptist. This is one hint of Peter's influence on the second Gospel.

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<sup>51</sup>Hiebert, p. 29.

<sup>52</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup>Lane, p. 50.

- 1:5 Multitudes of Jews responded enthusiastically to John's ministry. Large crowds from southern Palestine and Jerusalem went to "the Jordan River," in response to his call to prepare for Messiah's appearance. Mark's use of "all" was hyperbolic. Every individual did not come out to John, but very many did. Those who did, confessed "their sins" by submitting to *baptism*. By allowing the forerunner of Messiah to baptize them, the Jews who submitted to his baptism were pledging to receive Messiah when He came.
- 1:6 This description of John would have identified him as a typical "holy man" of the ancient East who lived in the desert. His clothing was woven "camel's hair" held in place with "a leather belt" (cf. 2 Kings 1:8; cf. Mal. 4:5-6). This is how prophets typically dressed (cf. Zech. 13:4). His diet consisted of dried "locusts" and the "honey" of "wild" bees. This was clean food for the Jews (cf. Lev. 11:21-22).

"[Locusts were a] common item of diet then and now in the Near East, high in vitamin content. There is no justification for the identification of the word with 'carob,' the pods of the carob tree, sometimes known as 'St. John's bread.'"<sup>54</sup>

John may have been a lifelong Nazirite, or he may simply have lived an ascetic life out of devotion to God (Luke 1:15). His personal appearance and behavior, in addition to his divine anointing, must have encouraged the Jews who came to him to abandon self-indulgent living—in preparation for Messiah's appearing.

"A careful comparison of the Qumran Covenanters with John the Baptist . . . reveals differences so extensive as to make the possibility of contact unimportant."<sup>55</sup>

"At last that solemn silence was broken by an appearance, a proclamation, a rite, and a ministry as startling as that of Elijah had been. In many respects, indeed, the two messengers and their times bore singular likeness. It was to a society secure, prosperous, and luxurious, yet in imminent danger of perishing from hidden, festering disease; and to a religious community which presented the appearance of hopeless perversion, and yet contained the germs of a possible regeneration, that both Elijah and John the Baptist came. Both suddenly appeared to threaten terrible judgment, but also to open unthought-of possibilities of good. And, as if to deepen still more the impression of this contrast, both appeared in a manner unexpected, and even antithetic to the habits of their

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<sup>54</sup>Mann, p. 196.

<sup>55</sup>Lane, p. 48.

contemporaries. John came suddenly out of the wilderness of Jueaea [*sic*], as Elijah from the wilds of Gilead; John bore the same strange ascetic appearance as his predecessor; the message of John was the counterpart of that of Elijah; his baptism that of Elijah's novel rite on Mount Carmel. And, as if to make complete the parallelism, with all of memory and hope which it awakened, even the more minute details surrounding the life of Elijah found their counterpart in that of John."<sup>56</sup>

1:7-8 Mark's synopsis of John's message is brief (cf. Matt. 3:7-10; Luke 3:10-14). It stresses the coming of the Mighty One who would baptize "with the Holy Spirit." John described the greatness of this One by contrasting himself with the Messiah. Slaves did not have to "untie" their masters' sandals, but John felt unworthy ("not fit") to do even this most menial task for Messiah. This emphasis on the humility of God's servants persists through this Gospel.

Another contrast is the baptisms of the two men (v. 8). This one foreshadows the superior ministry of the Coming One.

"The Baptist evidently meant that the great coming One would not merely cleanse with water but would bring to bear, like a deluge, the purging, purifying, judging presence of God himself."<sup>57</sup>

Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit probably looks forward to a baptism yet future from our viewpoint in history. In Matthew's and in Luke's account of this statement, John said Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire." The single article before two nouns in the Greek text implies a single baptism with Spirit and fire. While a similar baptism happened on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:5; 2:32-33), not all of what the prophets predicted would happen—when that baptism took place—actually transpired then (cf. Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28-32). Consequently we anticipate a future baptism with the Spirit—and fire—that will fulfill these prophecies completely.

## **2. The baptism of Jesus 1:9-11 (cf. Matt. 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-23)**

Mark next recorded two events that immediately preceded the beginning of Jesus' public ministry: His baptism and His temptation. The first of these events signaled His appearing as Messiah and His induction into that office. Mark simply recorded the fact of Jesus' baptism and two attendant events that confirmed that He was the Messiah.

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<sup>56</sup>Edersheim, 1:255.

<sup>57</sup>Moule, p. 10.

1:9 The fact that Mark identified Jesus simply as "Jesus," may show that he wrote his Gospel to people already familiar with Him. (The name "Jesus" occurs more frequently in Mark's Gospel than any other name of the Savior.) Jesus did not come to John from Judea or Jerusalem (cf. v. 5), but "from Nazareth in Galilee," where He had grown up and was now living.<sup>58</sup> The obscurity of this little town is clear from the fact that neither the Old Testament, nor Josephus, nor the Talmud ever mentioned it.<sup>59</sup>

Jesus underwent John's baptism to identify with man and man's sin (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). He did not do so because He needed to repent of personal sins. He had none! He also submitted to baptism because by doing so, He identified with the particular group of people that John was baptizing, namely: the Israelites. Jesus associated His baptism with His death (10:38; Luke 12:50). Consequently it is probably proper to conclude that He viewed His baptism as a public acceptance of His role as Israel's Suffering Servant, Messiah. Jesus was about 30 years old then (Luke 3:23).

1:10 This is the first of Mark's 42 uses of the Greek adverb *euthys* ("immediately") that give his narrative a feeling of rapidly moving action. Mark used this word more than the other three evangelists combined.

"As the story progresses, the frequency of the word 'immediately' drops off, but reappears later to reinforce how quickly the arrest and trial of Jesus take place. And the tempo varies. Whereas early in the narrative the action shifts rapidly from one location to another, the end of the journey slows to a day-by-day description of what happens in a single location, Jerusalem, and then an hour-by-hour depiction of the crucifixion. Because the whole narrative moves toward Jerusalem and toward crucifixion, the slowing of the tempo greatly intensifies the experience of this event for the reader."<sup>60</sup>

Mark described "Jesus" *Himself* seeing "the heavens" opened ("being parted"), though at least John the Baptist saw this as well (John 1:32-34).

"Jesus' *seeing* the heavens being split and the Spirit descending into him makes him aware of receiving heavenly power. This awareness will lead him to use the power throughout the rest of Mark."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>See the map "Places Mentioned in Mark's Gospel" at the end of these notes.

<sup>59</sup>For Josephus' description of Galilee, see *The Wars of the Jews*, 3:3:2-3.

<sup>60</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 45.

<sup>61</sup>Gundry, p. 48.

Mark also used the vivid word *schizomenous*, meaning tearing or rending, to describe the heavens opening. This word recalls Isaiah 64:1, where the prophet called on God to rend the heavens and come down (cf. Ps. 18:9, 16-19; 144:5-8). God now answered Isaiah's prayer. The descent of the Spirit on Jesus constituted His anointing for ministry (cf. Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). He was God's anointed servant ("Christ"; cf. David, another anointed of the Lord).

The "dove" is a bird that symbolizes the humble self-sacrifice that characterizes it. It was a bird that poor Israelites' offered in sacrifice to the Lord. The same spirit of humble self-sacrifice indwelt Jesus.

"The Spirit" coming upon Jesus here does not imply that Jesus had lacked Holy Spirit empowering previously. Here the Spirit came to empower Jesus specifically for His messianic ministry, which began now. The Spirit came "into" Him (Gr. *eis auton*), not simply "upon" Him (Gr. *epi auton*).

1:11

The Father's "voice from heaven" expressed approval of Jesus and His mission, in words recalling Genesis 22:2. What the voice said identified the speaker. God's words from heaven fused the concepts of King (Ps. 2:7) and Servant (Isa. 42:1). This combination constituted the unique sonship of Jesus. Note the presence of the Trinity in verses 10 and 11.

"The first clause of the [Father's] declaration (with the verb in the present tense of the indicative mood) expresses an eternal and essential relationship. The second clause (the verb is in the aorist indicative) implies a past choice for the performance of a particular function in history."<sup>62</sup>

From this point on, the reader of Mark's Gospel knows God's authoritative evaluation of Jesus. This evaluation becomes the norm by which we judge the correctness or incorrectness of every other character's understanding of Him.

"If Mark refuses knowledge of Jesus' identity to human characters in the beginning and middle of his story, who, then, knows of his identity? The answer is Mark himself as narrator, the reader, and such supernatural beings as God, Satan, and demons."<sup>63</sup>

Jesus began His official role as the Messiah at His baptism (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:26; Heb. 1:5). He also began His official role as the Suffering Servant of the Lord then (cf. 8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34, 45; 15:33-39).

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<sup>62</sup>Lane, p. 58.

<sup>63</sup>Kingsbury, p. 38.

"Jesus' baptism did not change His divine status. He did not *become* the Son of God at His baptism (or at the transfiguration, 9:7). Rather, His baptism showed the far-reaching significance of His acceptance of His messianic vocation as the suffering Servant of the Lord as well as the Davidic Messiah. Because He is the Son of God, the One approved by the Father and empowered by the Spirit, He is the Messiah (not vice versa)."<sup>64</sup>

### **3. The temptation of Jesus 1:12-13 (cf. Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13)**

Jesus' temptation by Satan was another event that prepared the divine Servant for His ministry.<sup>65</sup> Mark's account is brief, and it stresses the great spiritual conflict that this temptation posed for Jesus. The writer omitted any reference to Jesus' feelings about the temptation. A servant's response to his trials is more important than his feelings about them. Jesus must have told His disciples about His temptation sometime after it occurred.

1:12 "Immediately" connects the temptation closely with the baptism. The same "Spirit" who came upon Jesus at His baptism, now "impelled" or drove (Gr. *ekballo*) Him "into the wilderness" for testing.<sup>66</sup> In the Old Testament, the Israelites associated inhabited and cultivated land with God's blessing, and wilderness with His curse. Jesus had submitted humbly to identification with humankind and Israel in particular. Now He experienced the consequences of that identification: temptation. Temptation is not an indication that one is out of God's will. It sometimes results from following the Spirit's leading.

"Mark's expression does not mean that Jesus was forced out into the wilderness against His will but that He went with a strong sense of the Spirit's compulsion upon Him. Since the object of His Messianic mission was to 'destroy the works of the devil' (1 Jn 3:8), Jesus recognized that His acceptance of the Servant vocation made the encounter essential. It was the initiation of His mission to overthrow the devil. His miracle-working ministry of authority over demons was based on the victory won in this encounter."<sup>67</sup>

"Mark makes evident that the wilderness in his story carries a dual significance: At times it is a hostile and threatening atmosphere, at other times it is a place of preparation."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Grassmick, pp. 105-6.

<sup>65</sup>For comparison of Moses', Elijah's, and Jesus' 40-day periods of temptation, see Edersheim, 1:294.

<sup>66</sup>See Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

<sup>67</sup>Hiebert, p. 39.

<sup>68</sup>B. Dale Ellenburg, "A Review of Selected Narrative-Critical Conventions in Mark's Use of Miracle Material," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:2 (June 1995):175-76.

1:13 The traditional site of this temptation, dating back to the twelfth century A.D., is the *Mons Quarantania*, the "Hill of the Forty Days." It stands just west of Jericho. However, the exact location is unknown.

The Greek word *peirazo* means to put someone or something through a trial to demonstrate its character. God allowed Satan to tempt Jesus for two reasons: to show that He would not draw away from the Father's will, and to demonstrate His qualification for His mission. The name "Satan" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *satan*, meaning "adversary."

By omitting reference to the three tempting offers that Satan posed, Mark focused the reader's attention on the fact that Jesus endured continuous testing for "40 days." He pointed out this continuing conflict throughout this Gospel (8:11, 32-33; 10:2; 12:15). Mark's unique reference to "the wild beasts" heightens the fierceness of the temptation. The Jews associated the wilderness with wild beasts and Satanic hostility (cf. Isa. 13:20-22; 34:8-15; Ps. 22:11-21; 91:11-13).

". . . in His exposure to the assaults of Satan, Jesus was 'Adam' as well as 'Israel.' Israel's sonship was modeled on Adam's, since God is the Creator-Father in both instances. The wilderness forges a link between the two, for it represents reverse imagery, especially with Mark's mention of the 'the wild beasts' (1:13). Opinion on the proper location of the animals is divided between the paradise and wilderness settings. However, it may be that the Gospels glance at the beasts both in Adam's mandate to rule the earth (Gen. 1:26-28) and in their association with satanic powers (Ps. 22:11-21; Ezek. 34:5, 8, 25; Luke 10:19), thus suggesting the chaos that threatens to (re)impose itself on the ordered world (e.g., Job 5:22; Ezek. 5:17; 14:21; . . .)." <sup>69</sup>

God's angelic servants "were ministering to" Jesus during His time of testing (cf. Heb. 1:14). "Angels" always refers to heavenly beings in Mark.<sup>70</sup> God did not leave His Son alone, but provided grace to help in this time of need.

"The presence of angels to sustain Jesus underlines the cosmic dimension of the temptation: Jesus' struggle with Satan is a clash between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil. In the temptation, then, Jesus Son of God shows what his ministry will be about: the binding of Satan

<sup>69</sup>Don B. Garlington, "Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:603 (July-September 1994):288-89. See also Guelich, p. 39.

<sup>70</sup>Mann, p. 204.



and the inauguration of the end-time age of salvation (3:27)."<sup>71</sup>

"The first Adam succumbed in an environment that was beautiful and friendly; the last Adam maintained His purity in an environment that was desolate and hostile."<sup>72</sup>

In the introduction to his Gospel, Mark stressed the humility and faithful service that Jesus rendered to God at the commencement of His public ministry. Jesus was fully human, yet at the same time He was fully approved by the Father and aided by the Spirit, and strengthened and encouraged by God's angelic helpers. He was also fully deity. Readers undergoing persecution for their faith can find great encouragement in this section, especially in Jesus' victory over temptation from Satan.

## **II. THE SERVANT'S EARLY GALILEAN MINISTRY 1:14—3:6**

Mark omitted Jesus' year of early Judean ministry (John 1:15—4:42), as did the other Synoptic evangelists. He began his account of Jesus' ministry of service in Galilee, northern Israel (1:14—6:6a). Because of increasing opposition and rejection, Jesus made several withdrawals from Galilee followed by returns to this region. Mark recorded four of these (6:6b—8:30). Then Jesus left Galilee for Jerusalem. Mark recorded lessons on four important subjects pertinent to discipleship—that Jesus taught His disciples during this transition—for his readers' benefit (ch. 10). Next Jesus ministered in Jerusalem, and Mark selected three significant events there for inclusion in his story (chs. 11—13).

"Four major characters stand out, as do two groups of minor characters: Jesus, the religious authorities, the disciples, the crowd, and those groups of minor characters who either exhibit faith or somehow exemplify what it means to serve."<sup>73</sup>

Examples of minor characters who model great faith in Jesus are the leper who requested cleansing (1:40-45), the friends of the paralytic (2:3-5), Jairus (5:21-24, 35-43), the woman with the hemorrhage (5:25-34), the Syrophenician woman (7:25-30), the father of the demon possessed boy (9:14-29), and blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52). Those who model service are the woman who anointed Jesus for burial (i.e., Mary; 14:3-9), Simon of Cyrene (15:21), Joseph of Arimathea (15:42-46), and the women who visited Jesus' tomb to anoint His body (16:1).

Mark stressed Jesus' ministry as a servant in his Gospel. The rest of the book details how He served God and man. During the first part of Jesus' ministry, He laid down His life in service (1:14—13:37). His passion is the record of His laying down His life in self-sacrifice (chs. 14—16). Mark began his account of Jesus' service with an overview of selected events in Jesus' early Galilean ministry that were typical of His whole ministry

<sup>71</sup>Kingsbury, p. 35.

<sup>72</sup>Hiebert, p. 40.

<sup>73</sup>Kingsbury, p. 4.

(1:14—3:6). He first recorded four narratives, which took place in and around Capernaum, that provide the reader with a good idea of what Jesus' ministry looked like (1:14-38). Then Mark included a group of stories that show how hostility to Jesus was growing (2:1—3:6).

### **A. THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY 1:14-20**

Mark introduced his readers to the message of the Servant (vv. 14-15) and the first disciples of the Servant (vv. 16-20).

#### **1. The message of the Servant 1:14-15 (cf. Matt. 4:12, 17; Luke 4:14-15)**

This topic sentence summarizes Jesus' whole ministry in Galilee. It identifies when it started, where it happened, and the essence of what Jesus' proclaimed that was the basis of His ministry.

1:14 Jesus began His Galilean ministry, the first major phase of His public ministry, after His forerunner had ended his ministry. Jesus' forerunner suffered a fate that prefigured what Jesus would experience (cf. 9:31; 14:18). Mark used the same root word in Greek to describe both men. The passive voice of the verb *paradidomi* ("taken into custody" or "put in prison," lit. delivered up) suggests God's sovereign control over both men's situations.

Probably Jesus chose "Galilee" as His site of ministry because the influence of hostile Pharisees and chief priests was less there than it was in Judea. Fewer Jews lived in Samaria as well, which lay between Judea and Galilee.<sup>74</sup>

". . . Jesus changes setting more than forty times in his travels throughout Galilee and into gentile territory."<sup>75</sup>

Jesus heralded the good news of God. The Greek construction permits two different translations: "the good news about God" and "the good news from God." Mark probably intended the second meaning because the next verse explains what the good news that God revealed through Jesus was. "Preaching" this "good news" was Jesus' characteristic activity, and it was foundational for all the other forms of His ministry.

"As 'good news' the *euangelion* was most commonly used in antiquity for news of victory; so much was this the case that good fortune was held to attend the very words of the Proclamation, and the word could be used as a religious

<sup>74</sup>For Josephus' description of Samaria, see *The Wars* . . . , 3:3:4.

<sup>75</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 68.

term, in that offerings accompanied the reception of news of victory (cf. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* Vol. 8)."<sup>76</sup>

1:15 Jesus' message consisted of two declarations and two commands. First, He declared that "the time" that God had predicted in the Old Testament had arrived (was "fulfilled"). He was referring to the end of the present age and the beginning of the messianic age, as His second declaration clarified (cf. Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:2; 9:6-15).

The term "kingdom" (Gr. *basileia*), as it occurs with "the kingdom of God" in Scripture, does not just mean everything over which God exercises sovereign authority. The term "kingdom of God" occurs 14 times in Mark: 1:15; 4:11, 26, 30; 9:1, 47; 10:14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 12:34; 14:25; and 15:43. It means a particular worldwide kingdom over which He Himself will rule directly.<sup>77</sup> Of course God *does* sovereignly rule over all, and over His people in a more particular sense (1 Chron. 29:12; Ps. 103:19-20). However, this is not the rule of God that the Old Testament prophets spoke of, when they described a descendant of David ruling over all the earth from Jerusalem.

Many Old Testament passages predicted the coming of the messianic Davidic kingdom (2 Sam. 7:8-17; Isa. 11:1-9; 24:23; Jer. 23:5-6; Dan. 2:34; Mic. 4:6-7; Zech. 9:9-10; 14:9; cf. Matt. 20:21; Mark 10:37; 11:10; 12:35-37; 15:43; Luke 1:31-33; 2:25, 38; Acts 1:6). Jesus' Jewish hearers knew exactly what He meant when He said the kingdom of God was "at hand," or they should have if they did not. The presence of the King argued for the nearness of His kingdom, but it was still in the future (cf. 9:47-48).

". . . the identification of the kingdom of God with the Church made by Augustine, which has become deeply rooted in Christian thinking, is not true to the teaching of Jesus."<sup>78</sup>

The Jews needed to make a double response since the kingdom of God was at hand. They needed to "repent" and "believe." These two words call for successive actions, but the action is really one act that involves two steps taken almost simultaneously. Repenting involves turning from something, and believing involves embracing something else. For example, a drowning man who is clinging to a scrap of wood needs to do two things when a lifeguard reaches him. He needs to release the wood and entrust himself to the lifeguard.

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<sup>76</sup>Mann, p. 205.

<sup>77</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*basilikos*," by K. L. Schmidt, 1(1964):591.

<sup>78</sup>Cranfield, p. 67.

When John the Baptist called the Jews to repent, he urged them to abandon their former hope of salvation because the Lifeguard was there to save them. When Jesus said, "Believe in the gospel," He meant, "Believe the good news that Messiah is here." Messiah was the subject of the gospel and the object of belief.

This is the only occurrence of the phrase "believe in [Gr. *en*] the gospel" in the New Testament. It points to the gospel as the basis of faith.

## **2. The first disciples of the Servant 1:16-20 (cf. Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11)**

The account of the calling of these first disciples clarifies that repenting and believing the gospel (v. 15) should result in abandoning one's former life to follow Jesus from then on. This is the appropriate response that Mark commended to his readers with these disciples' example.

1:16 The "Sea of Galilee" was the scene of a thriving fishing industry in Jesus' day.<sup>79</sup> "Simon and Andrew . . . were fishermen" by trade. Fishermen on this lake did not enjoy high social standing, but their work required skill. The Greek word for "net" describes a circular rope with a tent-shaped net attached. Fishermen threw this type of net out into the water, let it sink, and then drew the rope that closed the neck of the trap and secured the fish inside.

"The word ["Simon"] occurs seven times in Mark . . . and *Peter* nineteen times. The tradition of Papias, that Mark was the interpreter of Peter, would seem to be confirmed by the frequency with which Mark mentions Peter."<sup>80</sup>

1:17-18 Simon (Peter) and Andrew had met Jesus previously (John 1:35-42). Mark stressed the urgency of Jesus' call and the immediacy of the disciples' response (cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21). Normally young men who wanted to learn from a rabbi sought one out, but Jesus called Simon and Andrew to participate in an urgent task with Him.

"Follow Me" meant "Come behind Me as a disciple." It was an invitation, but in view of who Jesus was, it had the force of a command. These men would have understood it as a call to become a *permanent* disciple of Jesus.<sup>81</sup> The figure of fishing people out of divine judgment comes from the Old Testament (Jer. 16:16; Ezek. 29:4-5, 38:4; Amos 4:2; Hab. 1:14-17). God was the fisher of men. Likewise, the sea had a metaphorical meaning of sin and death (Isa. 57:20-21). This illustration would have

<sup>79</sup>For Josephus' description of this lake, see *The Wars* . . . , 3:10:7.

<sup>80</sup>Mann, p. 209.

<sup>81</sup>Edersheim, 1:474.

appealed to fishermen. Jesus was calling these men to assist Him in delivering people from divine judgment by taking the gospel to them. As with fishing, this calling would also involve hard work, self-sacrifice, and skill.

"First, the call came *after* the open breach with, and initial persecution of, the Jewish authorities. It was, therefore, a call to fellowship in His peculiar relationship to the Synagogue. Secondly, it necessitated the abandonment of all their former occupations, and, indeed, of all earthly ties. (Matt. 4:20, 22) Thirdly, it was from the first, and clearly, marked as totally different from a call to such discipleship, as that of any other Master in Israel. It was not to learn more of doctrine, nor more fully to follow out a life-direction already taken, but to begin and to become, something quite new, of which their former occupation offered an emblem."<sup>82</sup>

"These words (whose originality stamps them as a genuine saying of Jesus) show that the great Founder of the faith desired not only to have disciples, but to have about Him men whom He might train to make disciples of others: to cast the net of divine truth into the sea of the world, and to land on the shores of the divine kingdom a great multitude of believing souls [cf. John 17:6]."<sup>83</sup>

"Jesus did not invent the term 'fishers of men.' In that day, it was a common description of philosophers and other teachers who 'captured men's minds' through teaching and persuasion."<sup>84</sup>

The brothers' response was admirably immediate (Gr. *euthys*). They began to follow Jesus by quitting their jobs as fishermen: "Immediately they left their nets and followed Him."

"In by far the greatest number of cases a man follows Jesus Christ, not because of anything that Jesus said but because of everything that Jesus is."<sup>85</sup>

Their commitment to Jesus increased as time passed. There is a strong emphasis on discipleship in the second Gospel. Evidently Simon and Andrew believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they had much to learn about His full identity (cf. John 3:22-30).

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 1:474-75.

<sup>83</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>84</sup>Wiersbe, 1:112.

<sup>85</sup>Barclay, p. 20.

"Precisely because Jesus has come fishing becomes necessary."<sup>86</sup>

1:19-20 Jesus then issued the same call to two similar brothers with the same response. All four men were evidently partners in the fishing business (cf. Luke 5:7, 10). "James" and "John" had also come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:35-42). Mark recorded more about their decision to follow Jesus than he did about Simon and Andrew's. "James" (Jacob in Hebrew) and "John" broke family ties to follow Jesus.

". . . by New Testament times, the phrase 'to follow' had added to itself an ethical aspect, for it is always the superior who walks ahead, and the inferior who follows: therefore, at the least, a rabbi-disciple relationship was implied."<sup>87</sup>

The mention of "hired men" suggests that their father "Zebedee" owned a prosperous business that James and John left.<sup>88</sup> It also shows that these brothers did not leave their father all alone without help; they were not being irresponsible. The fact that there were "hired men" may show that "they were among the closest thing to a middle class that existed at the time."<sup>89</sup> The main point, however, is the immediacy of their response to Jesus. This reflects Jesus' great authority over people. James and John were Jesus' cousins (cf. Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). However, they did not yet know that He was also God.

"Noteworthy is that the call of each pair of brothers conforms to an identical pattern, to wit: (a) Underway, (b) Jesus sees the brothers, (c) calls them, and (d) immediately they go after him. By means of this pattern, Mark sets forth the nature and purpose of discipleship.

"The nature of discipleship is joining oneself to Jesus in total allegiance. . . .

"The purpose of discipleship is announced by Jesus in his call to Simon and Andrew: 'Come after me, and I shall make you become fishers of men' (1:17). Plainly, discipleship has 'mission work' as its purpose. Striking is the universal nature of the mission Jesus envisages."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Lane, p. 68.

<sup>87</sup>Cole, p. 61.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. Mann, p. 210.

<sup>89</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture*, p. 98.

<sup>90</sup>Kingsbury, pp. 90, 91.

"In contrast to those who followed rabbis and continued a trade, Jesus' specially chosen disciples leave everything to dedicate themselves fully to following the call (Luke 9:61). Also in contrast to the rabbinic model, the one being followed chooses them, whereas students of rabbis chose whom they would follow. In the remark about following him, Jesus personalizes the model of discipleship. They do not go after law or teaching in abstraction, but rather, learn to model themselves after a person."<sup>91</sup>

The Gospels present Jesus "calling" disciples on four separate occasions: (1) In Jerusalem, Jesus invited Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael to "come" and "follow" Him (John 1:35-51). (2) By the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called Andrew, Simon (Peter), James, and John to "follow" him (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). (3) By the seashore near Capernaum, Jesus called Levi (Matthew) to "follow" him (Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:13-14; Luke 5:27-28). (4) On "the mountain" in Galilee, Jesus "appointed" the Twelve to be "apostles" (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; cf. Matt. 10:1-4).

"Except perhaps for Judas, the disciples do not greatly influence the plot, or course of events, in Mark's story. . . .

"Though a group, the disciples plainly stand out as a single character.

". . . the many traits the disciples exhibit spring from two conflicting traits: The disciples are at once 'loyal' and 'uncomprehending.' On the one hand, the disciples are 'loyal': Jesus summons them to follow him and they immediately leave behind their former way of life and give him their total allegiance. On the other hand, the disciples are 'uncomprehending': Understanding fully neither the identity nor the destiny of Jesus and not at all the essential meaning of discipleship, they forsake Jesus during his passion."<sup>92</sup>

## **B. EARLY DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE SERVANT'S AUTHORITY IN CAPERNAUM** **1:21-34**

This section of the Gospel records three instances of ministry in Capernaum. These were Jesus' teaching and healing in the synagogue, His healing of Peter's mother-in-law, and His healing of many others. These events further demonstrated Jesus' authority. They all occurred on one day, or two days from the Jewish perspective in which a new day began at sunset. Mark implied that this was a typical day of ministry for Jesus.

### **1. Jesus' teaching and healing in the Capernaum synagogue 1:21-28** **(cf. Luke 4:31-37)**

1:21 "Capernaum" became Jesus' base of ministry in Galilee (cf. Luke 4:16-31). It stood on the Sea of Galilee's northwest shore and was the hub of the

<sup>91</sup>Bock, p. 99

<sup>92</sup>Kingsbury, pp. 8, 9.

most populous district in Galilee. Archaeologists have done extensive restoration work there. They have reconstructed a synagogue that stood on that spot in the third and fourth centuries.

The synagogues came into existence during the Babylonian exile. The word originally described a group of people, but it later became associated with the building in which the people met. The word "church" has experienced a similar evolution. Customarily the leaders of a local synagogue would invite recognized visiting teachers to speak to the congregation. Mark referred to Jesus' teaching ministry frequently, but he did not record much of what Jesus taught. Jesus' actions were of more interest to him. This seems to reflect the active disposition of Peter, who influenced Mark's writing, and perhaps the active character of the Romans for whom Mark wrote.

"What Jesus *says* discloses his understanding of himself and his purposes. What Jesus *does* reveals primarily the extent and nature of his authority from God. Both what Jesus does and says determine his values and the dynamics of his relations with other characters. They also show Jesus' integrity in living up to his values and commitments."<sup>93</sup>

1:22 Mark used a strong Greek word to describe the reaction of Jesus' hearers, though he did not record what Jesus taught. The word is *explessonto*, meaning that Jesus' words astounded or overwhelmed the people. A distinguishing feature of Mark's Gospel is his references to people's emotional reactions (cf. v. 27; 2:12; 5:20, 42; 6:2, 51; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18), even those of Jesus (6:6). It was Jesus' great authority that impressed them. He was, of course, not a mere scribe (teacher of the law) but a prophet, even the greatest Prophet ever to appear. Jesus proclaimed revelation directly from God, as a prophet, rather than just interpreting the former revelations that God had given to others, and reiterating the traditional rabbinic interpretations of the law.

"They [the scribes] habitually established their views by long learned quotations from other rabbis. At best, they could only claim an authority derived from their understanding of the law. Their teaching was generally pedantic and dull, occupied with minute distinctions concerning Levitical regulations and petty legalistic requirements."<sup>94</sup>

"Fundamentally . . . Mark presents Jesus' conflict with the religious authorities as one of authority: Does Jesus or does

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<sup>93</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 103.

<sup>94</sup>Hiebert, p. 52.



he not discharge his ministry as one authorized by God? As this conflict unfolds, it becomes progressively more intense, until it finally ends in Jesus' death."<sup>95</sup>

"The narrator paints the authorities in a consistently negative light from their first mention as legal experts who teach without authority. The narrator builds their characterization on their opposition to Jesus. What the authorities say involves primarily questions which imply accusations or aim at trapping Jesus. As for what they do, they primarily work at plotting the destruction of Jesus. Neither Jesus nor the narrator says anything favorable about them. And the narrator's inside views on their thoughts and feelings regularly distance the reader from the authorities. Apart from attributing a few favorable attitudes to Herod and Pilate, the narrator depicts the authorities as thoroughly untrustworthy characters."<sup>96</sup>

1:23 An outburst from a man in the congregation interrupted the service. He was under the influence of a demonic spirit. The Jews spoke of demonic spirits as evil or "unclean" spirits. Mark used the terms "demon" and "unclean spirit" interchangeably.<sup>97</sup> This is his first reference to demonic influence on human beings.<sup>98</sup> The man cried out with a strong emotional shriek (Gr. *anekraxen*).

"Neither the New Testament, nor even Rabbinic literature, conveys the idea of permanent demonic indwelling, to which the later term 'possession' owes its origin."<sup>99</sup>

1:24 The man cried out, but it was really the demon speaking through him. This is clear because Jesus replied to the demon (v. 25). The words "What do we have to do with You?" represent a Hebrew idiom that spells conflict (cf. 5:7; Josh. 22:24; Judg. 11:12; 2 Sam. 16:10; 19:22). Today we might express the same thought by saying, "Why are You meddling with us? Mind Your own business!"

The demon recognized Jesus, and it knew about His mission. It was common for the Jews to identify a person by his place of origin (cf. 10:47; 14:67; 16:6). In Jesus' case this was Nazareth. We could just as accurately

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<sup>95</sup>Kingsbury, p. 67.

<sup>96</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 117.

<sup>97</sup>Mann, p. 214.

<sup>98</sup>For additional information on demonic influence, see William M. Alexander, *Demonic Possession in the New Testament: Its Relations Historical, Medical, and Theological*; Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of the Spiritual Forces Behind the Present World Unrest*, ch. 6; and idem., *Demons in the World Today*, ch. 6.

<sup>99</sup>Edersheim, 1:481.

translate the words rendered "Have you come to destroy us" as a statement of fact: "You have come to destroy us." In either case, the demon expressed dread. Clearly this demon recognized Jesus as its Judge. This showed Jesus' great authority.

By calling Jesus "the Holy One of God," the demon testified to His empowerment by the Holy Spirit—the Enemy of all unclean spirits. This title also probably implies belief in Jesus' deity. The title "Holy One" was a popular designation of God in the Old Testament. Isaiah called God the Holy One about 30 times (Isa. 1:4; 5:19, 24; et al.). Whereas people referred to Jesus as "Lord" (7:8), "Teacher" (9:17), "Son of David" (10:47-48), and "Master" (10:52), the demons called Him "the Holy One of God" (1:24), "the Son of God" (3:11) or "the Son of the Most High God" (5:7).

"These 'confessions' . . . can hardly be explained as testimonies wrested from the demons against their will. More probably they are to be understood as desperate attempts to get control of Jesus or to make him harmless, in accordance with the common idea of the time that by using the exactly correct name of a spirit one could gain the mastery over him."<sup>100</sup>

1:25-26 Jesus did not need a magical formula to exorcize this demon, as other exorcists of His day did.<sup>101</sup> He simply ordered it to be quiet and to leave the man. Jesus probably commanded the demon to "be muzzled" (Gr. *phimotheti*) because He desired to maintain control when the demon revealed His identity. The Jews might have mobbed Jesus because He fed and healed them. The Romans might have concluded that He was mobilizing an insurrection to overthrow the government, and could have arrested Him prematurely.

"At his trial we discover why Jesus hides his identity. Upon openly declaring who he is, the authorities condemn him to death for blasphemy. The dilemma for Jesus is this: how can he inaugurate God's rule, yet evade the efforts of the authorities to trap him? Many aspects of the secrecy motif are related to this problem."<sup>102</sup>

The malicious nature of the demon is evident in its treatment of the man.

Jesus' authority over demons showed that He had power as God's Servant to destroy the devil and his agents. Mark continued to stress Jesus' continuing conflict with demonic forces and power over them in his Gospel. This emphasis would have given his original suffering readers

<sup>100</sup>Cranfield, p. 77.

<sup>101</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 8:2:5.

<sup>102</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 84.

encouragement that Jesus' power could overcome any enemy that might assail them.

"We expect a servant to be *under authority* and to *take orders*, but God's Servant *exercises* authority and *gives* orders—even to demons—and His orders are obeyed."<sup>103</sup>

"To have allowed the defensive utterance of the demon to go unrebuked would have been to compromise the purpose for which Jesus came into the world, to confront Satan and strip him of his power. As such, this initial act of exorcism in the ministry of Jesus is programmatic of the sustained conflict with the demons which is a marked characteristic in the Marcan presentation of the gospel."<sup>104</sup>

1:27-28 The people's reaction to this exorcism was an important part of Mark's narrative. The witnesses expressed alarm, as well as amazement, at this unique demonstration of authority by word and by deed. This was the typical result of the "fishing" that Jesus and His disciples did.

The "authority" that the crowd referred to was probably prophetic authority.<sup>105</sup> Jesus spoke and did miracles like one of the former prophets. His "new teaching" was new in that prophetic authority marked His teaching, in contrast to the teaching of the inferior teachers of His day—and even the authorized rabbis. It was new in quality, not in time.<sup>106</sup>

"One surprise following close on another provoked wondering inquiry as to the whole phenomenon."<sup>107</sup>

The result of this miracle was that people all over that part of Galilee heard about Jesus.

"Despite the fact that the crowd reacts to Jesus' teaching and healing with amazement, or astonishment, this is an expression not of understanding but of incomprehension.

". . . the crowd in Mark's story is at once 'well disposed' toward Jesus and 'without faith' in him. In being well disposed toward Jesus, the crowd stands in contrast to its leaders, the religious authorities. In being without faith in Jesus, the crowd stands in contrast to the disciples."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Wiersbe, 1:111.

<sup>104</sup>Lane, p. 75.

<sup>105</sup>Cranfield, p. 74.

<sup>106</sup>Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 176.

<sup>107</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1:346.

<sup>108</sup>Kingsbury, pp. 23, 24. Cf. 6:51-52.

This incident highlights the authority of Jesus that the worshippers in Capernaum first observed in His teaching, and then witnessed in His exorcism. The people should have concluded that only a great prophet of Yahweh could possess such authority. Jesus did not reveal who He was completely on this occasion, but He did give these practicing Jews enough revelation about Himself so they should have accepted it and asked for more. James Edwards clarified the divine authority of Jesus, as Mark recorded it in many places, that demonstrated His deity.<sup>109</sup>

## **2. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law 1:29-31 (cf. Matt. 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-39)**

This incident, which happened immediately after the previous one, displays a different aspect of Jesus' authority: His power over physical sickness. In Jesus day, people regarded fever as a disease not necessarily related to other maladies.<sup>110</sup>

"The Talmud gives this disease precisely the same name . . . , 'burning fever,' and prescribes for it a magical remedy, of which the principal part is to tie a knife wholly of iron by a braid of hair to a thornbush, and to repeat on successive days Exod. iii. 2, 3, then ver. 4, and finally ver. 5, after which the bush is to be cut down, while a certain magical formula is pronounced. (Shabb. 37a)."<sup>111</sup>

This account is full of detail, and it must have come to Mark through Peter, who had a special interest in this healing. Evidently "Simon and Andrew" shared this "house" with "Simon's mother-in-law" and perhaps other family members. Jesus' power resulted in instantaneous and complete recovery. The fact that Peter had a family helps us appreciate the sacrifice he made to follow Jesus. The result of this woman's healing was that she served.

". . . selfless also means an eager willingness to serve."<sup>112</sup>

Jesus' miracles can be divided into four groups: exorcisms, healings, raising the dead, and nature miracles.<sup>113</sup> Miracles occupy a large part of Mark's Gospel: 47 percent of the verses in chapters 1 through 10 deal with them directly or indirectly.<sup>114</sup>

## **3. Jesus' healing of many Galileans after sundown 1:32-34 (cf. Matt. 8:16-17; Luke 4:40-41)**

This little pericope shows that the former two healings were not isolated cases. Jesus' power benefited "many" people ("the whole city"), who came to Peter's house after

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<sup>109</sup>See James R. Edwards, "The Authority of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:2 (June 1994):217-33.

<sup>110</sup>Lane, p. 77.

<sup>111</sup>Edersheim, 1:486.

<sup>112</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *The Miracles of our Lord*, p. 39.

<sup>113</sup>See Appendix 6, in my notes on Matthew, for a list of them in probable chronological order.

<sup>114</sup>Cranfield, p. 82.

sundown ended the Sabbath, allowing the Jews to travel farther to obtain His help (cf. Exod. 20:10; Mark 3:1-5).

"The two-step progression is the most pervasive stylistic feature in the gospel. It occurs in phrases, sentences, pairs of sentences, and the structure of episodes. It is a key to understanding many lines and episodes. A simple example is, 'When it was evening, after the sun set. . . .' The time reference, 'When it was evening,' is repeated in 'after the sun set.' However, this is no mere repetition, for the second part adds precision and clarifies the first part. Both parts comprise a two-step progressive description. The first part is important, yet the emphasis often lies on the second step which usually contains the more significant element. In this example, the second step refers to the setting sun, which denoted precisely the end of the Sabbath when people were again permitted to travel and could therefore seek out Jesus for healing."<sup>115</sup>

"Jesus forces healing on no one. He does not seek people out to heal but heals only those who come to him. He initiates a healing only when he takes responsibility for healing on the Sabbath. And Jesus heals freely, with no strings attached to those healings. He does not demand that people believe he is the anointed one (none do) or even believe in the Jewish God. He does not require a person to be morally good . . . . Jesus does not expect to gain personally from healing, for he never asks anyone he heals to follow him. Usually he orders them, often harshly, to keep quiet or go home. They proclaim or follow on their own, and Jesus does not consider either action a condition for healing."<sup>116</sup>

"What a symbol of this world's misery, need, and hope; what a symbol, also, of what the Christ really is as the Consoler in the world's manifold woe! Never, surely, was He more truly the Christ; nor is He in symbol more truly such to us and to all time, than when, in the stillness of that evening, under the starlit sky, He went through that suffering throng, laying His hands in the blessing of healing on every one of them, and casting out many devils. No picture of the Christ more dear to us, than this of the unlimited healing of whatever disease of body or soul. In its blessed indefiniteness it conveys the infinite potentiality of relief, whatever misery have fallen on us, or whatever care or sorrow oppress us."<sup>117</sup>

Jesus' healings demonstrate His compassion for people.

"No scene [*sic is*] more characteristic of the Christ than that on this autumn evening at Capernaum."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 47. See pp. 47-49 for several other examples of this narrative device.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>117</sup>Edersheim, 1:487.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 1:486.

Probably Jesus did not permit the demons to identify Him because this would have encouraged the people to think of Him as most of the Jews then thought of the Messiah. He wanted to avoid this stereotype as much as He could because it did not represent the type of Messiah He was. Notice the clear distinction between demonic influence and mere physical illness (cf. 6:13).

This section of the Gospel (1:21-34) shows Jesus doing miracles, both to identify Himself as God's Servant, and to authenticate His message (v. 15).

### **C. JESUS' EARLY MINISTRY THROUGHOUT GALILEE 1:35-45**

Jesus made several preaching tours throughout Galilee. Mark summarized the first of these (vv. 35-39), and then related one especially significant event during that tour (vv. 40-45). This section continues to present Jesus as the "Servant of the Lord," who went about doing the messianic work that His Father had assigned to Him.

#### **1. The first preaching tour of Galilee 1:35-39 (cf. Luke 4:42-44)**

While these verses record the itinerant ministry of Jesus, Mark's emphasis was clearly on Jesus' spiritual preparation for that ministry. It highlighted His dependence on His Father.

1:35 Mark implied that these events happened the next day: "In the early morning." Many people would have slept late after such a busy day, but Jesus rose early, even before dawn, and went to a remote (Gr. *eremon*, v. 4, wilderness, cf. v. 12) place to pray (Gr. *proseucho*, the general word for prayer). This sacrificial act paints Jesus as consciously dependent on His Father for strength and direction for what lay ahead of Him (i.e., a servant; cf. Isa. 50:4). Secluded prayer also implies further conflict with Satan, since Satan had confronted Him in the wilderness previously. Prayerlessness typically manifests self-sufficiency, but prayerfulness reveals humility.

"Mark selectively portrayed Jesus at prayer on three crucial occasions, each in a setting of darkness and aloneness: near the beginning of his account (v. 35), near the middle (6:46), and near the end (14:32-42). All three were occasions when He was faced with the possibility of achieving His messianic mission in a more attractive, less costly way. But in each case He gained strength through prayer."<sup>119</sup>

In this case, the wave of popular support that Jesus had ridden the day before, threatened to carry Him into political leadership that might have washed out the Cross.

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<sup>119</sup>Grassmick, p. 110.

1:36-37 Simon and his companions—who they were is unimportant—did not understand Jesus' need for prayer. They seem to have had the common attitude, that when things are favorable, we do not need God's help. Their words implied annoyance. Apparently they felt Jesus was not taking advantage of His popularity to promote His mission. They did not realize that God directed Jesus' mission, not the responses of people. This is the first instance of Peter's impetuous leadership that Mark recorded.

"His [Jesus'] purpose is not to heal as many people as possible as a manifestation of the kingdom of God drawn near in his person, but to confront men with the demand for decision in the perspective of God's absolute claim upon their person."<sup>120</sup>

1:38-39 Peter viewed the healing ministry of Jesus as primary, as did many of his companions. Jesus viewed it as only a small part of His larger mission. He had "come out" from God to fulfill this mission. Peter encouraged Jesus to stay where He could not escape pressure to perform miracles (cf. John 7:3-5). Jesus chose to move on to other parts of "Galilee," where He could present the gospel (v. 14) and His claims (v. 15), since "that is what"—as He said—"I came out for."

Verse 39 summarizes this preaching tour throughout Galilee. It may have lasted several weeks or even months (cf. Matt. 4:23-25). Jesus centered His ministry during this time in the synagogues, because His mission was essentially religious rather than political or economic. His main activity was heralding (Gr. *kerysso*) the gospel, but He authenticated His preaching with miracles, the most dramatic of which were exorcisms.

Josephus wrote that Galilee, which contained much rich agricultural land, was full of cities and villages, not the least of which contained 15,000 inhabitants.<sup>121</sup> This figure may refer to the cities and their surrounding villages, however, because there is evidence that towns like Capernaum and Bethsaida, both on the Sea of Galilee, had only 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants each.<sup>122</sup> Herod Philip II ("the tetrarch") elevated Bethsaida from the status of a village to that of a city, because of its increased population, and called it "Bethsaida Julius," in honor of Tiberius Caesar's daughter.<sup>123</sup> Each group of villages had its head city, and synagogues existed in these regional capitals.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Lane, p. 82.

<sup>121</sup>Josephus, *The Wars* . . . , 3:3:2.

<sup>122</sup>Lane, p. 232.

<sup>123</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . . , 18:2:1.

<sup>124</sup>Lane., p. 83.

**2. The cleansing of a leprous Jew 1:40-45 (cf. Matt. 8:1-4; Luke 5:12-16)**

This pericope evidently describes one incident during the Galilean preaching tour just summarized. It provides a striking example of Jesus' supernatural power. This is only one of two healings of lepers that the Gospels record, though Jesus healed other lepers besides these (cf. Matt. 11:5). The other recorded incident involved Jesus cleansing 10 lepers in Samaria (cf. Luke 17:11-19). The only Old Testament instances of lepers experiencing healing involved Miriam (Num. 12:10-15) and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5). This incident that Mark recorded was significant because it brought the religious leaders from Jerusalem into Galilee to investigate Jesus. This is the beginning of the hostility motif in Mark.

"Lepers were allowed to live unhampered wherever they chose, except in Jerusalem and cities which had been walled from antiquity. They could even attend the synagogue services if a screen was provided to isolate them from the rest of the congregation. In spite of these two provisions, however, leprosy brought deep physical and mental anguish for both the afflicted individual and the community in which or near which he lived."<sup>125</sup>

"The generic term 'leprosy' (Greek *lepra*) included many skin ailments—psoriasis, vitiligo, elephantiasis—and it must not be concluded that Hansen's disease (the causative agent of which was first isolated in 1871) is intended here."<sup>126</sup>

"If you are willing" (v. 40) expressed the leper's confidence in Jesus rather than doubt as to the Lord's willingness to heal him.<sup>127</sup>

Mark is the only evangelist who recorded that "compassion" moved Jesus to heal this pitiable man (v. 41). However, his version of this miracle stressed what the leper did after Jesus healed him. Jesus had "sternly warned" (Gr. *embrimaomai*) the cleansed leper not to tell anyone what Jesus had done for him (vv. 43-44; cf. vv. 25, 34; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 9:9). Only Mark used this strong word. It stresses the forcefulness and authority with which Jesus instructed and sent the cleansed leper to the priest.<sup>128</sup>

Jesus wanted to avoid becoming known simply as a miracle worker, which might lead to pressure to avoid the Cross. However, the man disobeyed Jesus, even though he probably thought he had good reason to do so, namely, to bring praise to Jesus. His disobedience to Jesus' word frustrated His work rather than advancing it. Jesus needed to minister to people, but the leper's action forced Him to spend more time in uninhabited, solitary places (Gr. *eremon*, vv. 4, 35).

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 85. See also Ryrie, pp. 43-44.

<sup>126</sup>Mann, p. 219.

<sup>127</sup>Cranfield, p. 91.

<sup>128</sup>Gundry, p. 96.



Perhaps Mark pointed this out to encourage his Christian readers to follow the Word of God carefully. Sometimes believers disobey God because we think our way will be better than His. It never is. Frequently it has the same result as this cleansed leper's disobedience. It retards God's mission rather than advancing it. The fact that this man was a cleansed leper makes believers' identification with him easy, since leprosy in the Bible is similar to sin, and believers are cleansed sinners.

J. Vernon McGee quoted a preacher who commented on this leper's response:

"The Lord told him not to tell anybody and he told everybody. He tells us to tell everybody and we tell nobody."<sup>129</sup>

The leper's disobedience did not destroy God's plan, but only created complications. The Galileans still kept seeking Jesus out (v. 45).<sup>130</sup>

"We should learn some important spiritual lessons from this chapter. To begin with, if the Son of God came as a servant, then being a servant is the highest of all callings. We are never more like the Lord Jesus than when we are serving others. Second, God shares His authority with His servants. Only those who are *under* authority have the right to *exercise* authority. Finally, if you are going to be a servant, be sure you have compassion; because people will come to you for help and rarely ask if it is convenient!"<sup>131</sup>

#### **D. JESUS' INITIAL CONFLICT WITH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS 2:1—3:6**

Mark next recorded five instances in which Israel's leaders opposed Jesus, evidently not in chronological order. These occurred during the Galilean ministry of Jesus. Mark appears to have grouped them so his readers would see that opposition from leaders, particularly religious leaders, was something Jesus had to contend with and overcome. His readers were probably facing similar opposition, and this section should encourage and help all Christians experiencing conflict because they are trying to fulfill God's mission for them.

Popularity with the masses led to problems with the magistrates. Opposition to Jesus intensifies throughout this section.

"The five conflicts between Jesus and the authorities in Galilee show a concentric [chiastic] relationship of A, B, C, B<sup>1</sup>, and A<sup>1</sup>. . . .

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<sup>129</sup>McGee, 4:166.

<sup>130</sup>See Joel F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):332-43; Kingsbury, pp. 24-27.

<sup>131</sup>Wiersbe, 1:114.

". . . this central episode [Jesus' teaching about fasting, 2:18-22] focuses on Jesus' response rather than on conflicts or actions, and Jesus' response illuminates all five of the episodes that make up the concentric pattern."<sup>132</sup>

"Mark's story is one of conflict, and conflict is the force that propels the story forward. The major conflict is between Jesus and Israel, made up of the religious authorities and the Jewish crowd. Since the crowd does not turn against Jesus until his arrest, his antagonists are the authorities. . . .

"The groups comprising the religious authorities are the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders."<sup>133</sup>

**1. The healing and forgiveness of a paralytic 2:1-12 (cf. Matt. 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26)**

". . . as Rabbinism stood confessedly powerless in face of the living death of leprosy, so it had no word of forgiveness to speak to the conscience burdened with sin, nor yet word of welcome to the sinner. But this was the inmost meaning of the two events which the Gospel-history places next to the healing of the leper: the forgiveness of sins in the case of the paralytic, and the welcome to the chief of sinners in the call of Levi-Matthew."<sup>134</sup>

2:1-2            These two verses are an introduction to what follows. Mark frequently used summaries such as this one (cf. 1:14-15, 39; 2:13; 3:7-12, 23; 4:1, 33-34; 8:21-26, 31; 9:31; 10:1; 12:1). They are a characteristic of his literary style. "Several days afterward" translates a Jewish phrase that means "after a considerable interval."<sup>135</sup>

When Jesus returned "to Capernaum" after one of His preaching tours, it did not take news of His arrival long to circulate. Soon locals were mobbing Him. Jesus could not find a restful retreat even at home in Capernaum. He graciously used the opportunity to preach to them. Mark's account stresses Jesus' popularity.

2:3-4            "In order to understand the action these verses describe, it is necessary to visualize the layout of a typical Palestinian peasant's house. It was usually a small, one-room structure with a flat roof. Access to the roof was by means of an outside stairway. The roof itself was usually made of wooden beams with thatch and compacted earth in order to shed the rain. Sometimes tiles were laid between the beams and the thatch and earth placed over them."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 52. See pp. 52-53 for their full description of this narrative structure.

<sup>133</sup>Kingsbury, p. 63.

<sup>134</sup>Edersheim, 1:499.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 1:501.

<sup>136</sup>Wessel, p. 632.

"The marl roof had to be rolled after each heavy rain in order to keep it water-tight . . ." <sup>137</sup>

Another possibility is that this was the roof of a porch that was attached to the house.<sup>138</sup> Mark's unusually detailed account pictures "four men" almost frantic to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus so Jesus would heal him. They must have been unconcerned about the damage they were doing to the house and the shower of dirt they sent raining down on everyone below.

2:5 The pains they took proved their "faith" in Jesus' ability and willingness to heal (cf. James 2:26). Jesus responded by dealing with their friend's need better than they had expected. Sin is the root of all sickness, not that there is always a close correspondence between sinfulness and sickness (cf. Luke 13:1-3; John 9:2-3). Jesus authoritatively forgave the man's "sins" as only God could do, and so dealt with the ultimate cause of sickness. We might think that Jesus was only announcing God's forgiveness in view of their faith, as Nathan announced God's forgiveness of David (2 Sam. 12:13). But the scribes took Jesus' statement as blasphemy (v. 7).

"We must admire several characteristics of these men, qualities that ought to mark us as 'fishers of men.' For one thing, they were deeply concerned about their friend and wanted to see him helped. They had the faith to believe that Jesus could and would meet his need. They did not simply 'pray about it,' but they put some feet to their prayers; and they did not permit the difficult circumstances to discourage them. They worked together and dared to do something different, and Jesus rewarded their efforts. How easy it would have been for them to say, 'Well, there is no sense trying to get to Jesus today! Maybe we can come back tomorrow.'" <sup>139</sup>

"What we need in the church today is stretcher-bearers—men and women with that kind of faith to go out and bring in the unsaved so they can hear the gospel. There are many people today who are paralyzed with a palsy of sin, a palsy of indifference, or a palsy of prejudice. A great many people are not going to come into church where the gospel is preached unless you take a corner of the stretcher and bring them in." <sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 215.

<sup>138</sup>Edersheim, 1:504.

<sup>139</sup>Wiersbe, 1:115.

<sup>140</sup>McGee, 4:168.

2:6-7 Jesus' claim to possess divine authority upset the teachers of the law who were present. The fact that they were sitting in that crowded house shows the respect the Jews gave them. No Old Testament prophet ever claimed personal authority to forgive sins, though Nathan had announced God's forgiveness to David (2 Sam. 12:13). The Jews believed even the Messiah could not forgive sins because the Old Testament never attributed that power to Him. Only "God" could do that (cf. Exod. 34:6-9; Ps. 103:3; 130:4; Isa. 43:25; 44:22; 48:11; Dan. 9:9; Mic. 7:18).<sup>141</sup> Consequently they regarded Jesus' claim as blasphemous.<sup>142</sup> Later they condemned Jesus to death for what they considered blasphemy (14:61-64).

"So from the very beginning of the story Jesus walks a tightrope—under constant threat—and must evade incriminating charges until the right time. His narrow escape from such a serious charge early in the story contributes significantly to the tension and suspense in this conflict."<sup>143</sup>

"The main purpose of the miracles was to teach, to reveal. Christ used miracles to demonstrate his deity (Mark 2:7), to support his claims to being the messiah (Matthew 9:27), and to serve as illustrations of deeper spiritual truths (see John 6:32-35). But the miracles also remind us of the consequences of sin—sickness, blindness, death—and of the power of the Lord to do something about those consequences. That is why many of his physical cures illustrate so well the spiritual salvation he secured when he died and rose from the dead."<sup>144</sup>

2:8-9 Jesus' perception on this occasion seems to have been simple discernment (cf. 5:30; 8:12), rather than prophetic insight (supernatural knowledge).<sup>145</sup>

Only God can heal and forgive sins. These actions are equally impossible to men. However, a person cannot verify his claim to forgive sins, but his claim to be able to heal paralysis is verifiable. The scribes therefore assumed that the claim to heal paralysis was the greater one. Jesus frequently used the rabbinic device of asking counter questions, especially when dealing with opponents (cf. 3:4; 11:30; 12:37).

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<sup>141</sup>Cf. Edwards, p. 222.

<sup>142</sup>See Darrell L. Bock and Mikel Del Rosario, "The Table Briefing: Did the Historical Jesus Claim to Be Divine?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:691 (July-September 2016):352-61.

<sup>143</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 87.

<sup>144</sup>Ryrie, pp. 10-11.

<sup>145</sup>Mann, p. 224.

2:10-11 Jesus chose to do what they considered harder to show that He could also do what they considered easier.

"He did the miracle which they could see that they might know that he had done the other one that they could not see."<sup>146</sup>

This is Mark's first use of the title "Son of Man." He used it 14 times (cf. v. 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 [twice], 41, 62). Scholars have debated the meaning of this title, but the best evidence points to Jesus meaning that He was the divine Messiah—the representative Man (cf. Dan. 7:13-14).<sup>147</sup>

"Jesus apparently chose this title for Himself because its use would not immediately associate Him in the thinking of the people with the undesirable connotations which had developed around the common term *Messiah*. Thus, His use of the term half concealed and half revealed His self-identification as the personal Messiah. While the term was recognized to have Messianic connections, the title *Son of man* would not force the people to make a premature decision concerning His identity in terms of their usual Messianic expectations. It would enable Him to connect His Messianic self-presentation with views more in harmony with His own Person and teaching."<sup>148</sup>

Jesus used the title "Son of Man" when He spoke of His sufferings and death (8:31; 9:9-13, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41). He also used it when speaking of His future return in glory (8:38; 13:26, 32; 14:62). Thus He used this title to blend the concepts of the Suffering Servant and the Messiah in His listeners' minds. It also connected and identified Him with mankind as the Son of Man. Still, He was the Man with "authority on earth to forgive sins," the Judge.

Verse 10 reads awkwardly. It begins with Jesus apparently addressing the scribes. Without finishing His sentence He turned to the paralytic and spoke to Him (v. 11). Some commentators have concluded that Jesus did not utter the first part of verse 10, but Mark inserted it in the narrative as a statement to his readers.<sup>149</sup> Those who hold this view usually point out that Mark did not record Jesus' revealing of Himself as the Son of Man to unbelievers before the Resurrection.<sup>150</sup> Advocates take verse 28 as another statement by Mark to his readers.

<sup>146</sup>A. M. Hunter, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, p. 38.

<sup>147</sup>See Taylor, pp. 197-98, who also presented four other views.

<sup>148</sup>Hiebert, p. 67.

<sup>149</sup>Cranfield, p. 100; Wessel, p. 633; Grassmick, pp. 112-13.

<sup>150</sup>E.g., Lane, pp. 96-98; and G. H. Boobyer, "Mark II, 10a and the Interpretation of the Healing of the Paralytic," *Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1954):115.

"The purpose of Mark's commentary is to make the community of believers aware that they have experienced the messianic forgiveness of the Son of Man."<sup>151</sup>

However, this type of editorial insertion is unusual in the Synoptics. Perhaps Jesus addressed the scribes and then let His comment to the paralytic, along with the miraculous healing, be the conclusion of His word to them.<sup>152</sup>

Jesus gave the paralytic a threefold command. "Rise" tested his faith. "Take up your pallet" required him to assume responsibility for himself that others had previously shouldered. "Go home" gave him direction that he needed.

"The pronouncement in v. 10 means that the One who has authority to forgive sins in heaven is present in the Son of Man to forgive sins 'on earth.'"<sup>153</sup>

2:12 The man responded to all three commands "immediately" and obediently.

Jesus' healing was complete and instantaneous. Everyone in the house witnessed the miracle including the religious leaders. They were amazed (Gr. *existasthai*, lit. "out of their minds," cf. 3:21; 5:42; 6:51). They had witnessed something that neither they nor anyone else had ever seen. No one had ever given evidence of forgiving the sins of someone else. This was a strong testimony to Jesus' deity. However, from the reaction of the observers, most of them apparently marveled at the physical miracle (even "glorifying God")—but did not *worship Jesus as God*.

"The pericope ends, then, with a recognition of his power as God-given. Mark's audience are [*sic is*] to infer that the Crucifixion will therefore be unjustified."<sup>154</sup>

## **2. The call of Levi and his feast 2:13-17 (cf. Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32)**

The call of Levi as one of Jesus' disciples was the setting for the second instance of opposition from the religious leaders that Mark recorded in this section.

"Having shown Jesus' authority to forgive sins (vv 1-12), Mark can appropriately introduce a story about Jesus' calling sinners."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Lane, p. 98.

<sup>152</sup>Taylor, p. 197; Hiebert, p. 67.

<sup>153</sup>Edwards, p. 223.

<sup>154</sup>Gundry, p. 115.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

2:13 "Again" (Gr. *palin*) identifies this incident as a different occasion (cf. 1:16). Jesus had been in Capernaum, which was very close to the Sea of Galilee, but now He returned to the water's edge where He could teach the large crowds that followed Him (cf. 1:45; 2:13; 3:7, 13; 4:1; 5:21; et al.).

"This action becomes meaningful when it is seen as part of a recurring pattern in Mark's Gospel. After a demonstration of the saving power of God, Jesus withdraws from the populace to a lonely region, whether the wilderness, the mountain or the sea. . . . Like the return to the wilderness, the move to the sea entails a deliberate entrance into the sphere of forces which manifest their hostility to God."<sup>156</sup>

2:14 "Levi" was this man's given name whereas Matthew ("gift of God," also Nathanael and Theodore) was a nickname. Matthew used the latter name for himself in his Gospel (Matt. 9:9; cf. Mark 3:18), but Mark and Luke spoke of him by his given name.

". . . in Galilee it was common to have two names—one the strictly Jewish, the other the Galilean. (Talmudic tractate *Gittin* 34 b)"<sup>157</sup>

"It was not uncommon for a man to receive or assume a new name upon entering a new career."<sup>158</sup>

The Jews despised tax collectors because they worked for the Romans and because they often extorted money for Rome from their fellow Jews.<sup>159</sup> Levi worked for Herod Antipas since he lived in Capernaum. A major road passed through Capernaum connecting Damascus and the Mediterranean coast.

"Capernaum was the first important place in Herod Antipas' territory that travellers from Herod Philip's territory or Decapolis would pass through, coming round the north end of the lake."<sup>160</sup>

The taxes Levi collected at his "tax booth" included: export and import fees, sales and custom taxes, and various tolls.<sup>161</sup> Levi gave up a lucrative business when he chose to follow Jesus. A fisherman might return to fishing, but a tax collector could not return to his job, since many people

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<sup>156</sup>Lane, p. 100.

<sup>157</sup>Edersheim, 1:514.

<sup>158</sup>Hiebert, p. 69.

<sup>159</sup>See. A. W. F. Blunt, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>160</sup>Cranfield, p. 102.

<sup>161</sup>Guelich, p. 101.

competed for this career—even though it involved social ostracism. Nonetheless, Levi responded immediately to Jesus' gracious and authoritative invitation to follow Him.

"When a Jew entered the customs service he was regarded as an outcast from society: he was disqualified as a judge or a witness in a court session, was excommunicated from the synagogue, and in the eyes of the community his disgrace extended to his family."<sup>162</sup>

"Had Matthew refused the call he would have had a local ill-fame as the follower of a disreputable trade which all men hated; because he answered the call he gained a world-wide fame as the man who gave to men the record of the words of Jesus. God never goes back on the man who stakes his all on Him."<sup>163</sup>

The fact that both Levi and James the Less had fathers named "Alphaeus" does not necessarily mean they were brothers. Apparently they were not. No Gospel writer linked them as they linked Simon and Andrew, or James and John. Furthermore Alphaeus was a fairly common name.

2:15-16

Eating a meal together meant something in Jesus' world that it does not mean today in the West. Hospitality was a sacred duty in the ancient Near East. When someone invited someone else to eat with him, he was extending a pledge of loyalty and protection to that person. To accept an invitation to dinner implied a willingness to become a close friend of the host. Jesus' acceptance of table fellowship with "sinners" (i.e., outcasts) conveyed by action the forgiveness that He gave verbally in 2:5.<sup>164</sup>

"It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness; in short, sharing a table meant sharing life."<sup>165</sup>

This meal took place in Levi's house (Luke 5:29). Apparently he had a large house that accommodated the throng easily, which indicates that he had some wealth.

Normally the Jews of Jesus' day ate their meals *seated*. They only *reclined* on pillows or rugs when special guests were present or for festival meals.<sup>166</sup> Obviously Levi regarded Jesus' presence with him as a special occasion.

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<sup>162</sup>Lane, pp. 101-2.

<sup>163</sup>Barclay, p. 49.

<sup>164</sup>Guelich, p. 105.

<sup>165</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 115.

<sup>166</sup>Idem, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, pp. 48-49.



The antecedent of the "them" who followed Jesus is probably the "tax collectors and sinners," though it may be the disciples. The term "the scribes of the Pharisees" occurs nowhere else in the Gospels. These were teachers of the law who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees.

"The Pharisees were progressive, a party among, though not of, the people. Their goal was that Israel should become the righteous nation of the covenant. To this end they taught compliance with the 'tradition of the elders,' an oral code of conduct effectively adapting the law of Moses to later times and changing demands."<sup>167</sup>

"Tax collectors" had a bad reputation because they were often dishonest.<sup>168</sup> The term "sinners" refers to Jews who did not follow the Pharisees' traditions, as well as worse sinners. Jesus' critics believed that He should not associate with such people if He had a genuine regard for the Old Testament, as they professed to have. To do so risked ceremonial defilement.

". . . the Talmud distinguishes two classes of 'publicans': the tax-gatherer in general (*Gabbai*), and the *Mokhes*, or *Mokhsa*, who was specially the *douanier* or custom-house official. Although both classes fall under the rabbinic ban, the *douanier*—such as Matthew was—is the object of chief execration."<sup>169</sup>

2:17 Self-righteous people such as these Pharisees saw no need for *true* righteousness, because they viewed themselves as already "righteous." However, the people the Pharisees labeled "sinners" represented real sinners, those lacking righteousness. Jesus said He spent time with sinners because they were the people who felt a need for what He had to offer, namely, spiritual healing. He was evidently modifying a well-known proverb. Jesus was using the terms "righteous" and "sinners" ironically here.

"It would be true to say that this word of Jesus strikes the keynote of the Gospel. The new thing in Christianity is not the doctrine that God saves sinners. No Jew would have denied that. It is the assertion 'that God loves and saves them as sinners.' . . . This is the authentic and glorious doctrine of true Christianity in any age."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup>Kingsbury, p. 63.

<sup>168</sup>J. R. Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33 (1971):39-61.

<sup>169</sup>Edersheim, 1:515.

<sup>170</sup>Hunter, pp. 40-41.

"The specific reference in verse 17 to Jesus' call of sinners to the Kingdom suggests that the basis of table-fellowship was *messianic forgiveness*, and the meal itself was an anticipation of the messianic banquet."<sup>171</sup>

This verse is a fine summary statement of Jesus' mission during His earthly ministry. It is one of only two sayings in Mark in which Jesus expressed His purpose in coming (cf. 10:45). Here He presented Himself as the Healer, a divine title in the Old Testament (Exod. 15:26).

"Among the most striking of His answers or apologies to them who examined Him, were those in which He vindicated Himself for mixing with publicans and sinners. They are three in number, spoken on as many occasions: the first in connection with Matthew's feast [Matt. 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32]; the second in the house of Simon the Pharisee [Luke 7:36]; and the third on an occasion not minutely defined, when certain scribes and Pharisees brought against Him the grave charge, 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' [Luke 15:2]. . . . The first may be distinguished as the *professional* argument, and is to this effect: 'I frequent the haunts of sinners, because I am a *physician*, and they are sick and need healing. . . .' The second may be described as the *political* argument, its drift being this: 'It is good policy to be the friend of sinners who have much to be forgiven; for when they are restored to the paths of virtue and piety, how great is their love! . . .' The third may be denominated the argument from *natural instinct*, and runs thus: 'I receive sinners, and eat with them, and seek by these means their moral restoration, for the same reason which moves the shepherd to go after a lost sheep, leaving his unstrayed flock in the wilderness, viz. because it is natural to seek the lost, and to have more joy in finding things lost than in possessing things which never have been lost. . . .'"<sup>172</sup>

". . . the one person for whom Jesus can do nothing is the person who thinks himself so good that he does not need anything done for him; and the one person for whom Jesus can do everything is the person who is a sinner and a failure and who knows it and who longs in his heart of hearts for a cure. To have no sense of need is to have erected a barrier between us and Jesus; to have a sense of need is to have the passport to His presence."<sup>173</sup>

<sup>171</sup>Lane, p. 106. Cf. Matt. 8:10-11; and Rev. 3:20; 19:6-9.

<sup>172</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>173</sup>Barclay, p. 51.

**3. The religious leaders' question about fasting 2:18-22 (cf. Matt. 9:14-17; Luke 5:33-39)**

The third objection the religious leaders voiced arose from the failure of Jesus' disciples to observe the traditional, not Scriptural, fast days that the Pharisees observed (cf. Lev. 16:29). Jesus' association with tax gatherers and sinners seemed to them to result in the neglect of devout practices. This incident shows that Jesus had the authority to overturn prevailing practices of piety and to turn the sorrow of fasting into the joy of feasting.<sup>174</sup>

2:18 We do not know why John the Baptist's disciples "were fasting." Perhaps it was because he was then in prison, or possibly it was an expression of repentance designed to hasten the coming of the kingdom. The Pharisees fasted twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays (cf. Luke 18:12).<sup>175</sup> The feast in Levi's house may have occurred on one of these days. Jesus' disciples were to fast (cf. Matt. 6:16-18), but they apparently did not observe the extra fasts that the Pharisees did.<sup>176</sup>

2:19-20 Jesus responded with a parable in which He is the "bridegroom" and His disciples are the friends ("attendants") "of the bridegroom" (cf. John 3:29). Jesus had come to unite with Israel, His bride, as her Messiah. The figure of Messiah as a bridegroom may have been unknown among the Jews at this time.<sup>177</sup> The wedding banquet seemed just a short time away. The prophets said it would occur after Messiah's death and resurrection and after the Tribulation. The bridegroom would have to leave His friends and His bride before the banquet. While they were still together, they could and did rejoice—not mourn, which fasting represented. Jewish custom exempted the friends of a bridegroom from certain religious obligations, including participating in the weekly fasts.<sup>178</sup> This was Jesus' first hint of His coming death in Mark's Gospel.<sup>179</sup>

2:21-22 Two more parables clarified why fasting was inappropriate for Jesus' disciples then.<sup>180</sup> Not only was the timing wrong, but the messianic age that Jesus would introduce would render the old traditional forms of Judaism obsolete. Judaism had become "old," and Jesus was going to set up a "new" form of God's kingdom on earth that would be similar to a new garment (cf. Heb. 8:13), the messianic kingdom.

A "garment" symbolized the covering of man's sinful condition in Old Testament usage (e.g., Gen. 3:21; Isa. 61:10). The Jews were to lay aside

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<sup>174</sup>Gundry, p. 131.

<sup>175</sup>Wessel, p. 636.

<sup>176</sup>See George C. Gianoulis, "Did Jesus' Disciples Fast?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):413-25.

<sup>177</sup>See Lane, p. 110.

<sup>178</sup>Hiebert, p. 74.

<sup>179</sup>Cranfield, p. 111.

<sup>180</sup>See Appendix 4 "The Parables of Jesus" at the end of my notes on Matthew for a full list of them.

"the old garment" of the Mosaic dispensation, and put on "the new" of the messianic age. Judaism had also become rigid and inflexible because of the traditions that had encrusted it, like old goatskins that contained wine. Jesus' kingdom could not operate within those constraints. It would be a new and more flexible vehicle for bringing joy ("new wine") to humanity.

The first of these three parables may have been more relevant to John's disciples since they anticipated a coming change. Jesus may have directed the second and third parables more to the Pharisees, since they wanted to maintain the legalistic practices of Judaism that were now threadbare and inflexible.

#### **4. The controversies about Sabbath observance 2:23—3:6**

The remaining two instances of opposition from the religious leaders arose over and concerned Sabbath observance. In the first case, the Pharisees opposed Jesus for permitting His disciples to do something they considered sinful. In the second, they opposed Him for doing something Himself that they objected to.

#### **Picking grain on the Sabbath 2:23-28 (cf. Matt. 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5)**

2:23-24 Jesus' disciples did something that the Mosaic Law permitted when they plucked the ears of wheat or barley (Deut. 23:25). However, by doing it on a Sabbath day, they violated a traditional Pharisaic interpretation of the law. The Pharisees taught that to do what the disciples did constituted reaping, threshing, and winnowing, and that was forbidden work on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10).<sup>181</sup>

"This reference to growing corn is the only clear indication in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. vi. 39) that the Ministry covered at least a year. The incident must have happened in the few weeks after Passover, from April to the beginning of June."<sup>182</sup>

2:25-26 The incident Jesus referred to is in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Mark was the only evangelist to mention that "Abiathar" was the "high priest" then. This seemingly contradicts the Old Testament since *Ahimelech*, the father of Abiathar, was the high priest then according to the writer of 1 Samuel. The best solution to this problem seems to be that Jesus referred to Abiathar because he was the better-known priest during David's reign. The phrase "in the time of" or "in the days of" probably means "during the lifetime of" rather than "during the high priesthood of."<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup>Mishnah *Shabbath* 7:2.

<sup>182</sup>Taylor, p. 216.

<sup>183</sup>James Morison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, pp. 60-63, gave 10 possible solutions to this problem.

Jesus' point was this: David broke the Law, as the Pharisees wrongly interpreted it, by eating bread that only the priests were to eat. Nevertheless he could do so because David's men were in need. Again, the offense was a matter of incorrect Pharisaic interpretation, not a true violation of the Law. Another example of violating the letter of the law to observe its spirit is King Hezekiah's granting the Israelites who were unclean permission to eat the Passover (2 Chron. 30:18-20). God did not object to that, either.

"... the drift of the argument is that the fact that scripture does not condemn David for his action shows that the rigidity with which the Pharisees interpreted the ritual law was not in accordance with scripture, and so was not a proper understanding of the Law itself."<sup>184</sup>

Another explanation of David's action is that God permitted it because of the urgency of his situation, and that Jesus was claiming that His mission was equally urgent.<sup>185</sup> A third view is that David could violate the Law because he was the Lord's Anointed and was therefore above the Law, and Jesus could violate the Law because He was the Lord's Anointed.

The Pharisees failed in two respects. First, they did not distinguish which laws were more important. Meeting genuine human need was more important than abstaining from work on the Sabbath.

"Human need is a higher law than religious ritual."<sup>186</sup>

Second, they did not recognize Jesus as the anointed Servant of the Lord that the Old Testament predicted would come: the Son of David. Mark did not mention, as Matthew did, that Jesus pointed out that One *greater than the temple* had come (Matt. 12:6). Mark's emphasis was not on Jesus as the King, as much as it was on Jesus as the Lord's anointed Servant. As God's anointed Servant, Jesus had the right to provide for His disciples' physical needs—even though that meant violating a tradition governing ritual worship.

2:27-28 The Pharisees made the Sabbath a straitjacket that inhibited the Jews, though the rabbis conceded that some life-saving activities superceded Sabbath observance.<sup>187</sup> Jesus pointed out that God gave the Sabbath as a good gift "for man." He designed it to free His people from ceaseless labor and to give them rest. Sabbath observance had to contain enough elasticity to assure the promotion of human welfare. Jesus' point was the following.

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<sup>184</sup>Cranfield, p. 115.

<sup>185</sup>Mark L. Bailey, in *The New Testament Explorer*, p. 72.

<sup>186</sup>Ralph Earle, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 49.

<sup>187</sup>Edersheim, 2:57, 60-61; Gundry, p. 142.

"Anyone could violate the Sabbath to meet a legitimate human need that keeping the Sabbath would leave unmet."<sup>188</sup>

"Since the Sabbath was made for man, He who is man's Lord . . . has authority to determine its law and use."<sup>189</sup>

Only Mark recorded, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (v. 27). One of his concerns in this Gospel was the welfare of mankind.

"The final arbiter in the use of all things is love and not law."<sup>190</sup>

Since in the Old Testament the Sabbath was the "Lord's Day" in a special sense, Mark's statement about Jesus in verse 28 identifies Him again for the reader as God.<sup>191</sup> Jesus had the right to determine how people should use the Sabbath. As mentioned previously, there is some question as to whether the words in this verse were those of Jesus or of Mark (cf. v. 10).

". . . the *exousia* [authority] of Jesus manifests itself *vis-a-vis* the rabbinic tradition, the religious hierarchy, and the temple tradition. Foremost here is Jesus' reinterpretation of the Sabbath . . ."<sup>192</sup>

"Christ was not asserting his freedom to violate the Sabbath law, but rather he was declaring his qualification to interpret that law."<sup>193</sup>

"With this word Mark drives home for his readers the theological point of the pericope. These things were written that they may understand Jesus' true dignity: he is the Lord of the Sabbath."<sup>194</sup>

One writer sought to prove that the New Testament teaches Sabbath observance for Christians.<sup>195</sup> I do not think it does (cf. Rom. 7:4; 10:4; 14:5; Gal. 4:10-11).

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<sup>188</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>189</sup>Taylor, p. 219.

<sup>190</sup>Barclay, p. 61.

<sup>191</sup>See Daniel Doriani, "The Deity of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):333-50.

<sup>192</sup>Edwards, p. 224.

<sup>193</sup>Donald W. Burdick, "The Gospel According to Mark," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 993.

<sup>194</sup>Lane, p. 120.

<sup>195</sup>Walter J. Chantry, "Does the New Testament Teach the Fourth Commandment?" *The Banner of Truth* 325 (October 1990):18-23.

This is the first of seven incidents that the Gospel evangelists recorded in which Jesus came into conflict with the Jewish religious leaders over Sabbath observance. The chart below lists them in probable chronological order.

<b>SABBATH CONTROVERSIES</b>				
<b>Event</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
The disciples plucked ears of grain in Galilee.	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Jesus healed a paralytic at the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem.				5:1-18
Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in Capernaum.	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Jesus referred to the Jews circumcising on the Sabbath.				7:22-23
Jesus healed a man born blind in Jerusalem.				9:1-34
Jesus healed a woman bent over in Judea.			13:10-17	
Jesus healed a man with dropsy in Perea.			14:1-6	

### **Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6 (cf. Matt. 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11)**

The following incident demonstrated Jesus' sovereign authority over the Sabbath. This is the last in this series of conflict accounts in this part of this Gospel (cf. ch. 12). It provides the climax in this section of Mark's narrative.

3:1-2            This event happened on a different "Sabbath" than the one just described in 2:23-28 (cf. Luke 6:6). The location of the synagogue is unimportant. The Greek word *xeraino* ("withered hand") implies that the man was unable to use his hand (cf. 4:6; 5:30; 9:18; 21:20-21). The Pharisees continued to watch Jesus in order to "accuse Him" (2:23; 3:6). Rather than honestly evaluating His claims, most of them looked for an opportunity to discredit Him. Here they found an opportunity to charge Him with a capital offense in Israel, namely, Sabbath violation (Exod. 31:14-17).

3:3-4            Rather than avoiding a conflict, Jesus provoked one. He did so to teach His critics a lesson. His question raised the issue of Sabbath observance from the level of what was legal to the level of what was moral. For Jesus not to heal the man would have been a violation of God's purpose for the Sabbath, namely, to bring blessing to people (cf. James 4:17). Moreover, by healing the man "on the Sabbath," Jesus was doing "good," whereas the Pharisees were doing "evil" by trying to trap Him.

"He was taking steps to save this wretched man's life; *they* were thinking out methods of killing Him."<sup>196</sup>

Mark alone wrote that the critics kept quiet, probably to clarify their guilt.

3:5 Vainly Jesus was "looking around" for someone who would respond to His question (cf. v. 34; 5:32; 10:23; 11:11). This expression is unique to the second Gospel. Evidently Peter remembered Jesus' "lookings" around and communicated these to Mark as significant indications of His "looking" *for the proper response* from people.

This is the only place in the New Testament where a writer explicitly stated that Jesus was angry. This was a case of righteous indignation in the presence of unrepentant evil. "Hardness of heart" (Gr. *porosei*) can also mean "blindness" (cf. Rom. 11:25; Eph. 4:18).<sup>197</sup> This is also the only account of this miracle that records Jesus' compassion for the objects of His anger. The tenses of the Greek verbs indicate that Jesus was angry momentarily (aorist tense), but His attitude of compassion was persistent (present tense). References to Jesus' emotions are peculiar to Mark's Gospel. They show His humanity.

"Jesus' action was perfectly consistent with His love and mercy. As a true man, Jesus experienced normal human emotions, among them anger as well as grief at obstinate sin. In His reaction to the sullen refusal of the Pharisees to respond to the truth, the incarnate Christ revealed the character of our holy God."<sup>198</sup>

"Their opposition rested on a fundamental misunderstanding—an inability, or refusal, to see that Jesus was God's eschatological agent and that his sovereign freedom with regard to law and custom sprang from that fact."<sup>199</sup>

Since Jesus did not use anything but His word to heal the man, His enemies could not charge Him with performing work on the Sabbath. Jesus' beneficent creative work on this occasion recalls His work in creating the cosmos (Gen. 1). The Pharisees should have made the connection and worshipped Jesus as God.

"Thus when Jesus as Son of Man declares himself to be master of the Sabbath . . . he presumes the very authority by which the Sabbath was instituted by the Creator.

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<sup>196</sup>Barclay, p. 63.

<sup>197</sup>Cranfield, p. 121.

<sup>198</sup>Hiebert, p. 81.

<sup>199</sup>D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, p. 110.



"This sovereign disposition toward the Sabbath is typical of Jesus' challenges to the rabbinic tradition as a whole. Such challenges are found primarily at the outset and conclusion of Mark, as if to signify that from beginning to end the antidote to the 'leaven of the Pharisees' (8:15) is the *exousia* [authority] of Jesus. He violates laws of purity by touching and cleansing a leper (1:40-45) and by association with sinners and tax collectors (2:13-17). He places in question the issue of purification by violating food prohibitions in fasting (2:18-22) and by eating with unwashed hands (7:1-23). He contravenes marriage laws in his teaching on divorce (10:1-12), and he openly denounces the scribes (12:38-40). In the question on the son of David he tacitly assumes supremacy over Israel's greatest king who, according to 2 Sam 7:14, would be the progenitor of the Messiah (12:35-37)."<sup>200</sup>

3:6 This verse is the climax of this whole confrontation section (2:1—3:6). Faced with the most convincing arguments and actions about Jesus' deity, the Pharisees chose to reject them. Furthermore, instead of simply leaving Jesus alone, they took steps to kill Him. As the gospel story unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that Jesus' enemies opposed Him because He constituted a threat to their authority. That motivation is evident here, too, because "the Herodians" were supporters of Roman authority over Palestine. Together, the Pharisees and the Herodians "feared he might be an unsettling political influence in Palestine."<sup>201</sup> These two groups had little in common except their common enemy, Jesus.

This is Mark's first explicit reference to Jesus' death. Jesus' enemies had decided to "destroy Him." They only needed to plan how. In spite of their objections to Jesus working on the Sabbath, they did not mind plotting His death on that day. His words and works, from their viewpoint, undermined their whole approach to the Law, their outward "piety," and their actions.

This decision of Jesus' enemies to kill Him constitutes a turning point in Mark's narrative. It is a benchmark that affected Jesus' ministry from then on.

### **III. THE SERVANT'S LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY 3:7—6:6A**

There are some structural similarities between 1:14—3:6 and 3:7—6:6a in Mark's story. The beginnings and endings of these two sections are similar. The first section describes Jesus' ministry in Galilee before the religious leaders determined to kill Him, and the second shows His ministry after that decision. That decision is the basis for the division of Jesus' Galilean ministry into an earlier and a later stage.

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<sup>200</sup>Edwards, p. 225.

<sup>201</sup>Wessel, p. 640.

### **A. THE BROADENING OF JESUS' MINISTRY 3:7-19**

This section is similar to 1:14-20 in that it records a general description of Jesus' ministry (vv. 7-12) and His calling of more disciples (vv. 13-19).

#### **1. Jesus' ministry to the multitudes 3:7-12 (cf. Matt. 12:15-21)**

This pericope introduces Jesus' continuing ministry in Galilee following the religious leaders' decision to kill Him (cf. 1:14-15; 2:13). It provides much more detail than the parallel account in Matthew.

3:7-8           The "sea" to which Jesus "withdrew" was the Sea of Galilee. He went there rather than to the areas farther south, where it would have been easier for His enemies to harass Him. Jesus withdrew because of the religious leaders' plot to kill Him (Matt. 12:15).

Mark put the disciples in the emphatic first position in the Greek text. They shared Jesus' breach with the religious leaders. They would be the objects of His preparation for future ministry because of Jesus' coming death.

Mark described many people coming to Jesus from all over Jewish Palestine. "Jerusalem" was in "Judea" to the south.<sup>202</sup> "Idumea," named only here in the New Testament, was the old Edomite territory southeast of Judea. People also came from the east side of "the Jordan" River (Perea and the Decapolis<sup>203</sup>), and from the Mediterranean coast to the northwest ("vicinity of Tyre and Sidon"). It is interesting that these locations form something of an outline of this Gospel. Jesus first ministered in Galilee (chs. 1—6), then in Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis (ch. 7), and finally in Jerusalem (chs. 10—16).<sup>204</sup> Notably absent were people from Samaria, the land of Jewish iconoclasts who separated from the other Jews.

3:9-10          Jesus addressed the crowds from a little "boat" (Gr. *plouarion*, not a fishing boat) on the lake when they "pressed" too heavily upon Him. Apparently the disciples kept this little boat handy whenever Jesus spoke to the crowds from the shore. If He needed to step back from them, He would have a place of retreat. Mark probably mentioned this detail to stress the large numbers of people who followed Jesus. It also shows Jesus' willingness to adapt His presentation to the needs of His audience. Perhaps "the big fisherman," Peter, was responsible for this notation.

The multitudes seemed to have little interest in worshipping Jesus as God, but they were eager to receive the physical benefits of His ministry. These benefits Jesus graciously bestowed on them.

<sup>202</sup>For Josephus' description of Judea, see *The Wars . . .*, 3:3:5.

<sup>203</sup>See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 307-9, 312.

<sup>204</sup>Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, p. 79.

3:11-12 As before, Jesus continued to exorcize demons. He also continued to forbid them to reveal His identity. This would have encouraged the people to associate the title "Son of God" with the physical aspects of Jesus' ministry almost exclusively (cf. 1:34). Moreover, Jesus by this means retained more control over His self-revelation and the progress of His mission. Perhaps He also did not want the people to associate Him with these demons.

The idea that Jesus silenced the demons because they sought to control Him by using His name and thereby gaining power over Him seems improbable to me.<sup>205</sup> While conflict with demonic forces is definitely a theme in Mark's Gospel, the demons had no real power over Jesus simply from knowing His name. This was a pagan superstition.

"The earliest confession of the Sonship seems to have come from evil spirits, who knew Jesus better than he [*sic* He] was known by His own disciples."<sup>206</sup>

## **2. Jesus' selection of 12 disciples 3:13-19 (cf. Luke 6:12-16)**

Jesus' selection of 12 disciples from among His many followers constituted an important advance in His ministry. These men would be the primary beneficiaries of His training for leadership to carry out His mission. The plot to take His life made the training of disciples imperative.

3:13 The exact location of this incident is uncertain. It was probably somewhere in Galilee, since this whole section describes Jesus' ministry there (1:14—6:6a). Jesus first called His disciples to join Him. Then, from that larger group, He selected 12 men as apostles (Luke 6:13). Evidently Jesus selected 12 apostles for leadership over Israel's 12 tribes in His messianic reign (Matt. 19:28). In view of Israel's rejection of Jesus, they became the nucleus of the church, which the New Testament never refers to as the "new Israel."<sup>207</sup> This is a term that covenant theologians have applied to the church, which has created serious confusion in the minds of many Bible students.

". . . from a mountaintop, an imagery reminiscent of Yahweh's summons to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:20), Jesus sovereignly summons the Twelve into a new community (Mark 3:13-19) and to a mission that is founded on a relationship with himself ('in order that they might be with him,' v. 14). He confers his authority on the Twelve

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<sup>205</sup>Cf. Lane, p. 130.

<sup>206</sup>Henry B. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 57.

<sup>207</sup>See Mann, p. 579.

and sends them out with dominion over demons (6:7-13) and with freedom from the tradition of the elders (7:5-13)."<sup>208</sup>

"In Mark's story world, the mountain connotes nearness to God and is therefore a place of divine-human communication and encounter. Atop a mountain, Jesus prays (6:46), is transfigured by God (9:2-8), and foretells the future (13:3-5)."<sup>209</sup>

Mark stressed that Jesus initiated this appointment, and the Twelve voluntarily responded (cf. Exod. 19:20). Perhaps he did this to remind his readers that God had chosen them as disciples; they had not sought this privilege. The response of these initial disciples provided a good example for all succeeding followers of Jesus.

3:14-15 "The Twelve" became a technical term for this group of disciples. Some early manuscripts add "whom also He named apostles" (cf. NIV). This was probably not in Mark's original Gospel. Probably a scribe inserted it having read Luke 6:13, the parallel passage, though some disagree.<sup>210</sup>

Jesus appointed these disciples for a twofold purpose: to "be with Him," and "to preach." The order is significant.

"Fellowship with Him must precede preaching about Him."<sup>211</sup>

Jesus also gave these disciples the ability ("authority") "to cast out demons," along with preaching. The miracles would convince many of their hearers that God had sent them as His spokesmen. Mark probably mentioned exorcisms because this was the greatest demonstration of the disciples' authority, not the only one. This Gospel documents Jesus' training of the Twelve in these two basic areas particularly: being with Jesus and preaching.

3:16-19 The following table shows the 12 disciples as they appear in the four lists that the Holy Spirit has given us in Scripture.

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<sup>208</sup>Edwards, p. 224.

<sup>209</sup>Kingsbury, p. 93.

<sup>210</sup>E.g., Christopher W. Skinner, "Whom He Also Named Apostles!: A Textual Problem in Mark 3:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):322-29.

<sup>211</sup>George Williams, *The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 734.

	<b>Matt. 10:2-4</b>	<b>Mark 3:16-19</b>	<b>Luke 6:14-16</b>	<b>Acts 1:13</b>
1.	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
2.	Andrew	James	Andrew	John
3.	James	John	James	James
4.	John	Andrew	John	Andrew
5.	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
6.	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
7.	Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
8.	Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
9.	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus
10.	Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Judas, son or brother of James	Judas, son or brother of James
11.	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
12.	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

All four lists contain three groups of four names each. The same individuals head each group, though there is variation within each group. Probably these groups constituted ministry teams that broke up into pairs when the Twelve preached apart from Jesus (6:7).

"Mark's list of the apostles contains more of the loving personal nicknames, naturally Aramaic, than do any of the lists in the other Gospels."<sup>212</sup>

Mark never used the double name "Simon Peter." Peter ("Rocky") was Simon's second given name, his nickname. All the lists place Peter first, and they all put Judas Iscariot last, except for the Acts list that omits him.

"Jesus *gave* Peter a new *name* because it was the Jewish custom to rename someone who had experienced a life-changing event. This renaming of the disciples has similarities to the renaming of Abram (Gen. 17:3-5) and of Saul (Acts 9[; 13:9])."<sup>213</sup>

"Boanerges" is a Hebrew word, but why Jesus called James and John "sons of thunder" is unknown. Perhaps they had an impetuous nature (cf. 9:38; Luke 9:54).

<sup>212</sup>Cole, p. 80.

<sup>213</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1645.

"Bartholomew" is not really a name, but a *patronym* meaning "son of Talmai (Ptolemy)." He may have had another name, but the disciples consistently referred to him as Bartholomew. Matthew's other name was Levi.

"James the son of Alphaeus" was also known as James the Less (or little, 15:40). "Thaddaeus" and "Judas, the son or brother of James" may have been the same person. Likewise, "Simon the Cananaean" was the same person as Simon the Zealot, "Cananaean" being the Aramaic form of "Zealot." The Zealots were a later political party bent on the overthrow of the Roman government, so it is unlikely that Simon was a member of this party. Probably the name "zealot" referred to Simon's personality, not his political affiliation.<sup>214</sup> "Iscariot" is a name of origin, but the exact location of Judas' hometown is uncertain, though many believe it was a town in Judea named Kerioth. "Iscariot" means "man of Kerioth."<sup>215</sup>

Another possibility is that "Iscariot" may mean "dagger-man," from the mixed Greek-Latin word *sikariotes*.<sup>216</sup> In this case, Judas may have been one of the Jewish patriots who sought to overthrow Roman rule by assassinating leading Romans and pro-Roman Jews (cf. Acts 21:38). Still another theory is that "Iscariot" derives from the Arabic *sqr*, "which varies in meaning from 'reddish-brown' to 'ruddy'."<sup>217</sup>

"It was a strange group of men our Lord chose to be his disciples. Four of them were fishermen, one a hated tax collector, another a member of a radical and violent political party [?]. Of six of them we know practically nothing. All were laymen. There was not a preacher or an expert in the Scriptures in the lot. Yet it was with these men that Jesus established his church and disseminated his Good News to the end of the earth."<sup>218</sup>

"Christianity began by insisting that the most diverse people should live together and by enabling them to do so, because they were all living with Jesus."<sup>219</sup>

"Learning, rank, wealth, refinement, freely given up to his [*sic*, Jesus'] service, He would not have despised; but He preferred devoted men who had none of these advantages

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<sup>214</sup>See Mann, p. 250; M. Smith, "Zealots and Sicarri, Their Origin and Relation," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971):1-19.

<sup>215</sup>See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Judas Iscariot," by R. P. Martin, pp. 673-75.

<sup>216</sup>Cole, p. 80.

<sup>217</sup>Mann, p. 251.

<sup>218</sup>Wessel, p. 643.

<sup>219</sup>Barclay, p. 69.

to undevoted men who had them all. And with good reason; for it mattered little, except in the eyes of contemporary prejudice, what the social position or even the previous history of the twelve had been, provided they were spiritually qualified for the work to which they were called. What tells ultimately is, not what is without a man, but what is within."<sup>220</sup>

## **B. THE INCREASING REJECTION OF JESUS AND ITS RESULT 3:20—4:34**

As Jesus' ministry expanded, so did rejection of Him as God's anointed Servant. Mark documented the increasing rejection that Jesus experienced (3:20-35), and then explained that Jesus taught the multitudes in parables as a result (4:1-34).

### **1. The increasing rejection of Jesus 3:20-35**

Mark again returned to the opposition theme (cf. 2:1—3:6). He directed his readers back and forth between Jesus' acceptance on a superficial level by the multitudes, His disciples' growing commitment to Him, and the increasing hostility of the religious leaders. This structural pattern highlights the contrasts between the three groups.

In this section, Mark used a chiasmic structure to show two different kinds of opposition that Jesus faced, which many of His disciples have faced as well. He used this "sandwich" structure elsewhere too (cf. 5:21-43; 6:7-31; 11:12-26; 14:1-11, 27-52). It focuses attention on the central part of the section (chiasm), in this case the serious charge that Satan controlled Jesus.

- A     The opposition of family 3:20-21
- B     The opposition of enemies 3:22-30
- A'    The opposition of family 3:31-35

### **The plan of Jesus' family 3:20-21**

The picture the writer painted was of Jesus and His disciples in a house in Capernaum ("home"). Jews wanting healing or some other favor from Jesus barged right in through the door. There were so many of them that Jesus "could not even eat a meal," much less get some needed rest. The house was completely full of seekers. Probably more people thronged around outside the building, trying to get in through the doors and windows. The Servant of the Lord was constantly at work serving.

Jesus' family members heard about His extreme busyness. The Greek term translated "His own people" (NASB, lit. "those with Him") is an idiom meaning His family members, not just His friends.<sup>221</sup> They felt concern for His health. Perhaps they worried that He was

<sup>220</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 38.

<sup>221</sup>J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, pp. 478-79.

not eating properly. They may even have concluded that His overworked condition had affected His mental stability.

Jesus' family decided to come to Capernaum from Nazareth, and "take charge ('custody') of Him" for His own good. The Greek word *kratesai* ("take custody" or "take charge") elsewhere describes arresting someone (cf. 6:17; 12:12; 14:1, 44, 46, 49, 51). Thus it appears that the best of intentions motivated Jesus' family. However, they misread the evidence. Jesus was not too busy, nor was He out of His mind (cf. Acts 26:24; 2 Cor. 5:13). He was simply carrying out His Father's will.

Sometimes those who have concern for a disciple's welfare apply pressure to depart from God's will. This constitutes opposition, not assistance. Some readers of Mark's story who suffer persecution from family members for following Jesus can identify.

### **The unbelief of Jesus' enemies 3:22-30 (cf. Matt. 12:22-37; Luke 11:14-26)**

Evidently it was between the time that Jesus' family left Nazareth to take custody of Him, and the time they arrived in Capernaum (v. 31), that this incident occurred. Mark's account is shorter than Matthew's, and stresses the nature of the mounting hostility of the religious leaders.

3:22            While well-meaning family opponents were coming from Nazareth, which lay to the west, hostile adversaries were moving up "from Jerusalem" to the south. "The scribes" (teachers of the law), who constituted an official delegation, had concluded that Satan ("Beelzebul, ruler of the demons") "possessed" Jesus and gave Him power to exorcize demons. They viewed Jesus as being allied with Satan.

"In the Greek, the name is always *Beelzeboul*; the familiar 'Beelzebub' is from the [Latin] Vulgate. Some view the name as a derisive corruption of the title of the god of Ekron, Baal-zebub, 'the lord of flies,' to make it mean the lord of dung. More probably it means lord of the dwelling, that is, the dwelling of the evil spirits. This agrees with the reference to 'the strong man's house' in verse 27, as well as Christ's comment in Matthew 10:25, that as 'the master of the house,' He has been called Beelzebub."<sup>222</sup>

3:23-27        Jesus replied to the charge against Him "with parables" (cf. Matt. 12:29; Luke 11:21-22). That is, He used comparisons. He pointed out that it was illogical for Him to "cast out" Satan's agents if He was one of Satan's agents. Satan would then be working against himself. Therefore, since Jesus was in fact destroying Satan's work, He must be stronger than Satan (v. 27).

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<sup>222</sup>Hiebert, p. 92. See also Cranfield, p. 136.



"It may be enough to say that 3:22-27 declares Jesus' ministry, without specifying the 'when,' to reflect the eschatological defeat of Satan as seen in his exorcisms."<sup>223</sup>

"Jesus occasionally avoids indictment by talking in riddles."<sup>224</sup>

3:28-30 Jesus followed up His refutation with a solemn warning, "almost like an oath."<sup>225</sup> The words "truly I say to you" or "I tell you the truth" occur 13 times in this Gospel, always on Jesus' lips. This phrase occurs 30 times in Matthew, six times in Luke, and 25 times in John (where the "truly" is always double). It denotes that Jesus was speaking out of His own authority. A comparable expression in the Old Testament is, "As I live, says the Lord."

"His use of 'Amen' to introduce and endorse his own words is without analogy in the whole of Jewish literature and in the remainder of the NT. . . . 'Amen' denotes that his words are reliable and true because he is totally committed to do and speak the will of God. As such, the Amen-formulation is not only a highly significant characteristic of Jesus' speech, but a Christological affirmation: Jesus is the true witness of God."<sup>226</sup>

"In light of the context this [sin] refers to an attitude (not an isolated act or utterance) of defiant hostility toward God that rejects His saving power toward man, expressed in the spirit-empowered person and work of Jesus. It is one's preference for darkness even though he has been exposed to light (cf. John 3:19). Such a persistent attitude of willful unbelief can harden into a condition in which repentance and forgiveness, both mediated by God's Spirit, become impossible. This person is guilty (*enochos*, 'liable to, in the grasp') of an eternal sin (sing., the ultimate sin because it remains forever unforgiven; cf. Matt. 12:32). Judas Iscariot (cf. Mark 3:29; 14:43-46) proved the reality of these words."<sup>227</sup>

We should not focus so exclusively on the exception to forgiveness that we fail to appreciate the breadth of forgiveness that Jesus offered here. "All sins" means all classes and types of sins, not all sins without exception. Jesus was not teaching universalism, the theory that everyone

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<sup>223</sup>Guelich, p. 177.

<sup>224</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 85.

<sup>225</sup>Mann, p. 255.

<sup>226</sup>Lane, p. 144.

<sup>227</sup>Grassmick, p. 117.

will go to heaven. "Blasphemy" is a type of sin, namely: speech that is hostile, malicious, injurious, and derogatory of God. This was the type of sin the scribes were committing.

The scribes were committing the unpardonable sin, because they attributed the power of Jesus' exorcisms to Satan rather than to the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:11-12).

"Having rejected the testimony of the Father, the Son, and now the Spirit's miraculous authentication, nothing more could be done for the salvation of those religious leaders."<sup>228</sup>

"Those who most particularly should heed the warning of this verse today are the theological teachers and the official leaders of the churches."<sup>229</sup>

This saying of Jesus has caused many people great anxiety throughout the history of the church. Many have wondered if they have committed the unpardonable sin. Concern that one may have committed it is a good indication that one probably has not. The way to avoid committing the unpardonable sin is to believe the testimony that the Holy Spirit has given about Jesus in Scripture, namely, that He is the Christ (i.e., the divine Messiah, cf. 1 John 5:1).

"It is impossible to commit an unpardonable sin today—if by that you mean one can commit a sin today, come under conviction because of it tomorrow, come to God in repentance, and He would not forgive you. You see, Christ died for *all* sin, not just some sin. He didn't die for all sin but *one*, the unpardonable sin. There is no such thing as being able to commit a sin today that He will not forgive. The attitude and state of the unbeliever is unpardonable—not the act. When a man blasphemes with his mouth, that is not the thing that condemns him; it is the attitude of his heart, which is a permanent condition—unless he stops resisting. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit: to resist the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life."<sup>230</sup>

### **The interference of Jesus' family 3:31-35 (cf. Matt. 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21)**

3:31 "His mother" Mary, along with Jesus' half-brothers, finally "arrived" from Nazareth (cf. vv. 20-21). By inserting Jesus' conflict with the scribes in this story, Mark heightened the readers' suspense about the results of

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<sup>228</sup>Bailey, p. 74.

<sup>229</sup>Cranfield, p. 148.

<sup>230</sup>McGee, 4:174.

Jesus' conflict with His family. Perhaps the house where Jesus was present was so full of people that His family could not get in, but had to send word to Him that they had arrived. This approach reflects normal family relationships. Jesus' mother and brothers were not being rude, but were expecting that Jesus would acknowledge their presence by respectfully coming out to meet them. They wanted to talk to Him privately and convince Him to restrain His activity.

There have been three main theories about the relationship of these "brothers" to Jesus. (1) The Helvidian view (after Helvidius, c. 380 A.D.) is that they were His blood brothers, born of Mary after Jesus' birth. This is the preferred view among Protestants. (2) The Epiphonian view (after Epiphanius, c. 382 A.D.) is that they were His half-brothers, the sons of Joseph by a former marriage. This view allows for the perpetual virginity of Mary, and is preferred by many Roman Catholics. (3) The Hieronymian view (after Jerome, c. 383 A.D.) is that they were Jesus' cousins, the sons of Mary the wife of Clopas, who, it is alleged by advocates, was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus.<sup>231</sup>

3:32-34 The multitude "sitting around" Jesus evidently consisted of a group of His disciples (v. 34). Jesus' question focused on the quality of relationship with Himself. He meant: "Who are the sort of people who are My family?" Again Jesus looked around, but this time affectionately (cf. v. 5). He identified His disciples as those closest to Him. This would have been a startling statement for Jesus' hearers, because the Jews valued *natural* family relationships highly. Jesus was not repudiating family relationships (cf. 7:10-13). He was teaching the priority of *spiritual* over natural relationships.

3:35 Those who do God's "will," not just those who profess discipleship, constitute Jesus' spiritual family. The terms "brother and sister and mother" are figurative. "Father" is absent because Jesus had only one spiritual Father. His spiritual "mothers" were those believing female disciples who sustained Him in motherly ways. Jesus claimed the authority to redefine motherhood and sibling relationships: according to the doing of God's "will," rather than blood lineage (cf. 6:1-6).<sup>232</sup>

This pericope should be a great encouragement to any disciple who is suffering persecution for his or her faith. Such disciples were Mark's original readers. Some disciples suffer broken family relationships and even ostracism because of their commitment to do God's will. Some experience intense opposition from unbelievers who try to make their good works look bad. One reward for such sacrifices is an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

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<sup>231</sup>See Mann, p. 258.

<sup>232</sup>Edwards, p. 224.

## **2. Jesus' teaching in parables 4:1-34**

This is the first of three extended teaching sessions that Mark recorded (cf. 7:1-23; 13:3-37). Jesus' three parables in this section describe the character of the messianic kingdom.

Parables are illustrations that teach truth by comparisons (Gr. *parabole*, lit. "something thrown alongside," similitudes). Some are long stories, but others are short similes, metaphors, analogies, or proverbial sayings (cf. 2:19-20, 21, 22; 3:24-25, 27). The popular definition that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, is essentially accurate as far as it goes. The use of parables for teaching was a common rabbinic device that Jesus adopted and used with great skill.

"A parable begins innocently as *a picture* that arrests our attention and arouses our interest. But as we study the picture, it becomes *a mirror* in which we suddenly see ourselves. If we continue to look by faith, the mirror becomes *a window* through which we see God and His truth. How we respond to that truth will determine what further truth God will teach us."<sup>233</sup>

### **The setting 4:1-2 (cf. Matt. 13:1-3a; Luke 8:4)**

Jesus may have taught these "parables" shortly after the incident Mark just finished recording (3:20-35; cf. Matt. 13:1). If so, this was a very busy day in Jesus' ministry. It may have included all the events in 3:19—4:41 (cf. Matt. 12:22—13:53; Luke 8:4-25). "Again" looks back to 3:7 and perhaps to 2:13. The "boat" (Gr. *plouion*) in which Jesus "sat" was a vessel larger than a rowboat (cf. 3:7), perhaps a fishing boat.

Matthew recorded Jesus giving two groups of parables on this occasion: four to the multitudes (Matt. 13:3b-35), and four to the disciples (Matt. 13:36-52). Mark recorded only Jesus' parables to the multitudes. Both evangelists recorded Jesus' explanations to His disciples, though what they recorded Him saying is not identical.

### **The parable of the soils 4:3-9 (cf. Matt. 13:3b-9; Luke 8:5-8)**

Jesus introduced and concluded this parable with instructions that His hearers should give it careful consideration (vv. 3, 9, cf. v. 23).

"It's like the 'Stop—Look—Listen' sign at a railroad crossing."<sup>234</sup>

Mark's account of this parable is almost identical to Matthew's. It is the only parable that Jesus spoke this day that all three synoptic evangelists recorded. Probably Jesus taught this parable many times during His ministry as an itinerant preacher, and the disciples were familiar with it. It is also a key parable because it introduced elements that recur in the other parables Jesus taught that day, such as the seed.

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<sup>233</sup>Wiersbe, 1:121.

<sup>234</sup>McGee, 4:176.

Rhoads and Michie suggested that "the interpretation of the seed falling on 'rocky' ground suggests an opposite and ironic meaning of that name [i.e., Peter, "Rock"], unmistakably depicting Peter and the other disciples."<sup>235</sup>

### Jesus' explanations to His disciples 4:10-29

This section of Mark's account records Jesus' words to His disciples that the multitudes did not hear.

#### The purpose of the parables 4:10-12 (cf. Matt. 13:10-17; Luke 8:9-10)

4:10 Mark alone noted that those who asked Jesus to explain the parables included the Twelve plus other disciples (v. 10). Evidently their question concerned *why* Jesus was using parables to teach, as well as what they meant. Jesus could have been clearer, but He deliberately chose to speak enigmatically.

4:11-12 Jesus drew a distinction between those who accepted His teaching, such as the Twelve, and those who rejected it, such as the scribes and Pharisees. Those "outside" were those outside the circle of discipleship. God was giving those who welcomed Jesus' teaching new revelation about the coming messianic kingdom. He was withholding that revelation from those who rejected Him. The parables were the vehicle of that revelation. The Holy Spirit enabled the receptive to understand this enigmatic revelation, but He made it incomprehensible to the unbelieving. The parabolic method acted as a filter to separate those two types of people.

". . . there is a sort of arithmetical progression in things spiritual; to him that already has something, more will be given (Mt. xxv. 29), and insight into the meaning of one parable will lead to spiritual perception of the meaning of other such parables. Contrariwise, failure to apprehend will lead us further and further into the fog, until we are completely mystified, groping in darkness."<sup>236</sup>

". . . just as Jesus predetermines his own death partly by healing on the Sabbath despite the Pharisees' watching him with murderous intent (see 3:1-6 with comments) and partly by choosing the betrayer (see 3:16-19 with comments), so also he predetermines his own death partly by speaking in parables."<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 128.

<sup>236</sup>Cole, p. 88.

<sup>237</sup>Gundry, p. 196.

The religious teachers of Jesus' day used parables extensively, so Jesus' hearers were familiar with them. But the rabbis used them only to illustrate and clarify, not to conceal.<sup>238</sup>

". . . the three seed parables illustrate various aspects of the Kingdom of God by depicting God's sovereign rule at work in the present but in a way unexpected in Judaism (cf. Jeremias, *Parables*, 146-53)."<sup>239</sup>

God was doing through Jesus what He had done through Isaiah centuries earlier. Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 drew this comparison. One writer believed Jesus meant that most of the Jews were still in exile spiritually.<sup>240</sup> We might add that this is always the double effect of revelation (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16). God uses it to enlighten the receptive, but He also uses it to befuddle the unreceptive. Their inability to comprehend is a divine judgment for their unbelief (cf. Rom. 11:25-32). Further enlightenment requires positive reception of present revelation. This knowledge is very helpful for Jesus' disciples. It would have been an encouragement to Mark's original readers as they shared the gospel with others and noted the two responses, as it is to modern readers.

"The judgment is a merciful one. The parable which the cold-hearted multitudes hear without understanding they remember, because of its penetrating and impressive form; and when their hearts become able to receive its meaning, the meaning will become clear to them. Meanwhile they are saved from the guilt of rejecting plain truth."<sup>241</sup>

"Throughout the ministry we can see these two motives (revealing and veiling) at work. On the one hand, Jesus gathers the crowds about him and teaches them, sends out the Twelve to preach, and reveals the power and compassion of God by his miracles. God's self-revelation is not to be accomplished in a corner. On the other hand, Jesus teaches the crowds indirectly by means of parables, seeks to conceal his miracles, and forbids the demoniacs to declare his identity. The two motives, both of which are necessary to the divine purpose, are constantly in tension—a fact which explains some apparent inconsistencies (e.g. between the command *egeire eis to meson* ["Rise and come forward"] in iii. 3 and the frequent injunctions to silence)."<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>238</sup>Edersheim, 1:580-81.

<sup>239</sup>Guelich, p. 206.

<sup>240</sup>Douglas S. McComiskey, "Exile and the Purpose of Jesus' Parables (Mark 4:10-12; Matt 13:10-17; Luke 8:9-10)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:1 (March 2008):59-85.

<sup>241</sup>Alfred Plummer, "The Gospel According to St. Mark," in *The Cambridge Greek Testament*, p. 124.

<sup>242</sup>Cranfield, p. 157.

"God's self-revelation is veiled, in order that men may be left sufficient room in which to make a personal decision. A real turning to God or repentance (*epistrephein*) is made possible by the inward divine enabling of the Holy Spirit (*dedotai*), but would be rendered impossible by the external compulsion of a manifestation of the unveiled divine majesty. The revelation is veiled for the sake of man's freedom to believe."<sup>243</sup>

**The explanation of the parable of the soils 4:13-20 (cf. Matt. 13:18-23; Luke 8:11-15)**

- 4:13 Jesus believed that the disciples should have understood the parable of the soils. It is, after all, one of the easier ones to understand.
- 4:14-20 Jesus did not give His disciples several hermeneutical principles by which they could understand the parables. He gave them a sample interpretation as a pattern that they could apply in understanding other parables.

The "seed" represents "the word" or message of God that "the sower" proclaims. People make a negative or a positive response when they hear this message. They may make a negative response for any one of three reasons. Regardless of the reason, a negative response proves unproductive in their lives. A positive response, however, will produce spiritual fruit, but the fruit will be in varying amounts depending on various factors.

"Each of the three fruitless hearts is influenced by a different enemy: the hard heart—the devil himself snatches the seed; the shallow heart—the flesh counterfeits religious feelings; the crowded heart—the things of the world smother the growth and prevent a harvest. These are the three great enemies of the Christian: the world, the flesh, and the devil (Eph. 2:1-3)."<sup>244</sup>

Some interpreters want to know which soils represent believers and which unbelievers. This was not Jesus' point in the parable. Both believers and unbelievers need to welcome the word gladly rather than allowing its enemies to make it unfruitful.

The "word" that Jesus was sowing was the good news concerning the coming messianic kingdom. The people He addressed gave these characteristic responses. However, these are typical responses that have marked the proclamation of God's Word throughout history, among

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<sup>243</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>244</sup>Wiersbe, 1:123.

believers and unbelievers alike. Mark's original readers would have found encouragement in this parable to receive the Word of God—as good soil—and to beware of the enemies that limit Christians' fruitfulness.

"Words may be sound and lively enough, but it is up to each hearer to let them sink in and become fruitful. If he only hears without responding—without doing something about it and committing himself to their meaning—then the words are in danger of being lost, or of never coming to anything. The whole story thus becomes a parable about the learner's responsibility, and about the importance of learning with one's whole will and obedience, and not merely with one's head."<sup>245</sup>

"In summary, the good hearers welcome the word immediately, so that Satan cannot snatch it away. They welcome it deeply, so that persecution because of it cannot induce them to apostatize. They welcome it exclusively, so that other concerns do not stifle it. The understanding that results from this kind of reception goes beyond the intellectual to touch conduct, commitment, and devotion. . . . Thus the mystery turns out to be that God's rule is established, not by conquest, but by speaking; and that a person participates in God's rule, not by joining an army, but by hearing the message in right ways . . ."<sup>246</sup>

### **The parable of the lamp 4:21-25 (cf. Luke 8:16-18)**

Jesus' statements in this pericope appear scattered throughout the other Gospels. Verse 21 occurs in Matthew 5:15 and in Luke 11:33. Verse 22 is in Matthew 10:26 and in Luke 12:2. Verse 24 appears in Matthew 7:2 and in Luke 6:38. Verse 25 is also in Matthew 13:12 and 25:29, in addition to Luke 19:26. This phenomenon does not mean that this pericope lacks authenticity. It means that Jesus frequently used these expressions at other times during His teaching ministry—not just here. He was an itinerant preacher, and itinerant preachers often use the same messages with the same or similar words with different audiences.

4:21 Jesus continued His address to the inquiring disciples (cf. vv. 10-20). The "lamp" would have been a small clay dish, with the edges pinched up to form a spout. A small piece of fabric typically hung over the spout from the body of the lamp serving as a wick. These household lamps usually held only a few teaspoons of oil, and rested on extensions of wood or plaster protruding from a wall. The "basket" was a common container that held about a peck (one-quarter bushel).

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<sup>245</sup>Moule, p. 36.

<sup>246</sup>Gundry, pp. 206-7.



The lamp seems to represent the illumination that Jesus had just given about the purpose of the parables and the meaning of the parable of the soils. He did not want His disciples to conceal what He had just told them but to broadcast it. In His day, this involved revelation about the impending kingdom particularly. In the wider sphere of application, it would include all that God has revealed (cf. Ps. 119:105).

Another interpretation sees Jesus as the Light that His disciples were not to conceal.<sup>247</sup> Jesus elsewhere spoke of Himself as the Light of the world (John 8:12). Nevertheless in this context, the "light" seems to represent *revelation*. Light has both metaphorical meanings in Scripture.

4:22 The former verse expressed a parable. This one explained a literal reality. As a principle, people do not hide precious things forever. They only conceal them temporarily, and then they bring them out into view. If they remain hidden forever, they are virtually lost. People conceal them to protect them from others who would abuse and take them. For example, people who own expensive jewelry or art treasures may keep them locked up for safe keeping part of the time, but they display them publicly at other times. Keeping them locked up privately all the time is a misuse of their purpose.

The disciples should not conclude, that just because God had previously hidden the characteristics about the kingdom that Jesus was revealing, He wanted them to remain unknown. The time had come to proclaim them publicly.

"The kingdom of God, as embodied in Jesus' Person and ministry, was now a veiled revelation to those without, but He intended that later it should receive a glorious manifestation through the ministry of His followers."<sup>248</sup>

4:23 What Jesus had told the multitudes (v. 9), He now repeated specifically for His disciples. They could "hear." They needed to use that ability by paying attention to what Jesus had just said.

4:24 The disciples needed to consider carefully what Jesus was telling them. The degree to which they paid attention to what He said, would be the degree to which they would profit from it. God would graciously bless attentive disciples with even greater benefit than the effort they expended in heeding His words. Their blessing would be disproportionately large.

4:25 If a person works hard to obtain something good, he or she normally receives other good things in addition. If a disciple pays attention to and assimilates the revelation God has given, God will increase his or her

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<sup>247</sup>E.g., Wessel, p. 652.

<sup>248</sup>Hiebert, p. 107.

capacity to understand and appropriate more revelation. However, this principle works the other way, too. The person who does not use his or her ability to understand and respond to God's revelation, appropriately loses that ability. The disciples needed to use their understanding of Jesus and the kingdom—by proclaiming the gospel—or they would lose their ability and their understanding. This is a call for disciples to continue growing (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18, the key verse of that epistle, I believe).

### **The parable of the seed growing by itself 4:26-29**

Since this parable supplements the parable of the soils, it appears that Jesus addressed it to the multitudes (cf. vv. 1-9). Mark is the only evangelist who recorded this part of the discourse. Each parable to the multitudes illuminated something about the messianic kingdom.

The identity of the man in the parable is secondary, though in view of the former parable, he represents Jesus and His disciples. The significant element is how the seed grows. In the former parable, the seed represented the good news about the kingdom, and it means the same thing here. The primary motif of the parable is the seed.<sup>249</sup>

The "seed" enters into the ground "and grows" mysteriously, without the continuing work of the sower. God causes it to grow. Farmers know the conditions that help or hinder plant growth, but they do not fully understand the growth process nor can they cause growth. Only God can do that. The earth itself appears to cause plants to grow automatically as they move through the various stages from germination to maturity. Jesus stressed this fact by putting the Greek word *automate* ("by itself") in the emphatic first position in the sentence. Finally the sower, who had played no visible role in the growth of the crop, returned to the field as its reaper. The same divine person who sows also reaps.

This parable would have encouraged the disciples to realize that the preaching of Jesus and their own preaching, in anticipation of the kingdom, would bear fruit in time. God would cause the seed that they planted in the ears and minds of many to germinate into new life and to grow. Growth of the believing community would increase, though no one could really explain why it was growing except that God was responsible for it (cf. Matt. 16:18). Eventually there would be a harvest of the crop when God, the ultimate sower, saw that the time was right. Probably this refers to the end of the messianic kingdom. The parable bridges history, from the initial time of sowing in Jesus' day, culminating in the harvest at the end of the messianic (millennial) kingdom.

Another interpretation of this parable views it as describing growth within individual believers.<sup>250</sup> The problem with this view is the identity of the kingdom of God. Other interpreters see it as picturing the mysterious appearing of the messianic kingdom at the time of harvest.<sup>251</sup> However, the emphasis in the parable is on the growth of the seed, not

<sup>249</sup>Guelich, p. 240.

<sup>250</sup>E.g., Cole, 94.

<sup>251</sup>E.g., Cranfield, p. 168; J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 152-53; and Wessel, pp. 652-53.

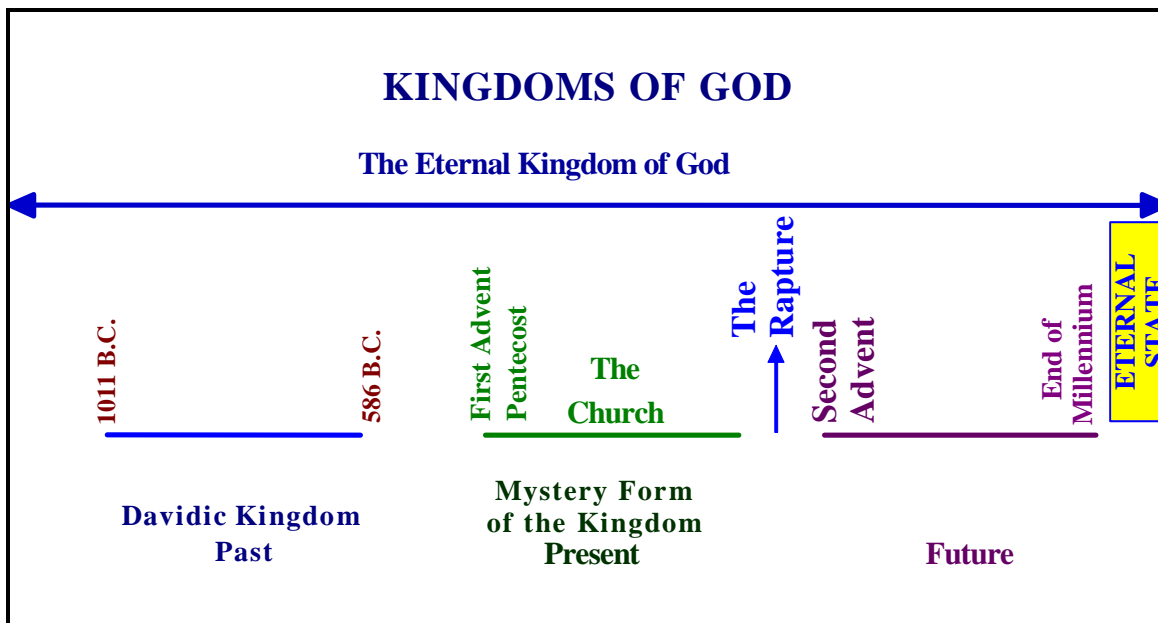
the harvest of the crop. A third view takes the period of growth to be the inter-advent age, with the harvest occurring when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom on earth.<sup>252</sup> This view limits the parable to the "mystery form" of the kingdom. I find nothing in the text to justify interpreting "the kingdom" as the Old Testament predicted it, or simply as the mystery form of the kingdom. I believe that when Jesus said the kingdom of heaven (or God) was similar to something, what He described included the messianic (millennial) kingdom. It did not just represent the inter-advent age leading up to its beginning.

### **The parable of the mustard seed 4:30-32 (cf. Matt. 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19)**

The third and last parable that Mark recorded Jesus giving to the multitudes, stressed the contrast between the kingdom's insignificant beginnings and its final impressively large size.

"Though proverbially used in Palestine as an example of the smallest seed, it [the mustard seed] is not so in fact."<sup>253</sup>

When Jesus came declaring that the kingdom of heaven was "at hand," He began preparations for the inauguration of the kingdom. He planted the seed. That beginning was a very inauspicious one. Even though Jesus had a popular following, He had few disciples who followed Him faithfully. Nonetheless this parable assured the multitudes that the kingdom would one day be impressively large. The Old Testament predicted that it would cover the earth and incorporate Gentiles as well as Jews (Ps. 2; Ezek. 17:22-24; 31:6; Dan. 4:12; et al.). The final form of the kingdom is at the end of the kingdom, not at its beginning when Jesus comes at His Second Coming to begin it. The parable describes the kingdom, not the church (all genuine Christians), and not Christendom (all professing Christians).



<sup>252</sup>E.g., J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 49, 53; and Grassmick, p. 121.

<sup>253</sup>Mann, p. 271.

The beginnings of the kingdom were small and discouraging. Jesus experienced rejection and left this world as an apparent failure. Nevertheless God will eventually establish the kingdom that the Old Testament prophets and Jesus predicted—as a worldwide organization that will dominate all aspects of life. This hope encourages believers, especially believers who are suffering for their faith. We can press on knowing that our labor in spreading the gospel is not in vain.

"The example of the mustard seed should prevent us from judging the significance of results by the size of the beginnings."<sup>254</sup>

### **The summary conclusion 4:33-34 (cf. Matt. 13:34-35)**

Some of the other parables Jesus taught included the following ones that Matthew recorded: He taught the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), and the parable of the yeast hidden in the meal (Matt. 13:33), to the multitudes. He also taught the parables of the hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44), the pearl (Matt. 13:45-46), the dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50), and the householder (Matt. 13:52) to the disciples.

Mark concluded his account of Jesus' kingdom parables by explaining Jesus' purpose and approach in teaching this way. These were only a few of the parables Jesus used to correct popular erroneous ideas about the kingdom. The parables were similar to bait for the multitudes. They kept them seeking what Jesus had to offer, which included revelation of Himself as the God-man. When seekers came to follow Jesus as disciples, He explained the true characteristics of His kingdom more clearly to prepare them for it. When Mark said that Jesus was not speaking to the people without parables, he meant that Jesus consistently spoke indirectly and in a veiled manner to them.<sup>255</sup>

The three parables Mark chose to record reveal three important facts about the kingdom. The parable of the soils shows that there will be a variety of responses to the good news about the kingdom. The parable of the seed growing by itself teaches that the good news will bring forth fruit by itself. The parable of the mustard seed reveals that though the word is small, it will eventually produce something very large and beneficial.

When we proclaim the gospel today, we are announcing good news about the kingdom. I do not mean that the gospel of the kingdom that John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' first disciples preached is the same as the gospel of God's grace that we preach. They focused specifically on the Messiah's kingdom as imminent. We focus on trusting in the Messiah. Nevertheless, just as their gospel included the importance of trusting in the Messiah, so ours includes the importance of preparing for the messianic kingdom. At least it should. The coming messianic kingdom should be an important factor in the thinking, motivation, and proclamation of modern disciples of Jesus (cf. Matt 6:10).

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<sup>254</sup>Nineham, p. 144.

<sup>255</sup>Cranfield, pp. 171-72.

## **C. JESUS' DEMONSTRATIONS OF POWER AND THE NAZARENES' REJECTION**

### **4:35—6:6A**

In spite of demonstrations of supernatural power, the multitudes continued to miss seeing who Jesus really was. Why? Because enlightenment comes only as a gift from God (Matt. 16:17). This section presents more evidence of Jesus' identity (4:35—5:43) and the failure of those who knew Him best to understand who He really was (6:1-6a).

### **1. The demonstrations of Jesus' power 4:35—5:43**

There are four miracles in this section. Jesus authenticated His words (vv. 1-34) with His works (4:35—5:43). He demonstrated power over nature, demons, illness, and death. The purpose of these miracles was to demonstrate Jesus' ability to vanquish all powers that are hostile to God.<sup>256</sup>

#### **The stilling of a storm 4:35-41 (cf. Matt. 8:18, 23-27; Luke 8:22-25)**

Many unique features of Mark's narrative indicate that at least some of it came from an eyewitness's account: probably Peter. These include mention of "that day" (v. 35), "as He [Jesus] was" and the "other boats" (v. 36), the "stern" and the "cushion" (v. 38), and the rebuke, terror, and bewilderment of the disciples (vv. 38, 41).

4:35-36        Jesus and the disciples would have been crossing from the west to the east side of the lake (cf. 5:1). Fewer people lived on the east side. Evidently Jesus wanted to get away from the multitudes that had given Him no rest all that day (3:20—4:34) and before. Mark normally did not give precise time designations. Probably he did so here ("evening") to impress the reader with Jesus' extreme busyness that moved Him to withdraw temporarily.

4:37-38        The Sea of Galilee was susceptible to sudden violent storms because of its geography.

"The atmosphere, for the most part, hangs still and heavy, but the cold currents, as they pass from the west, are sucked down in vortices of air, or by the narrow gorges that break upon the lake. Then arise those sudden storms for which the region is notorious."<sup>257</sup>

Jesus was probably sleeping on a seat, "in the stern" of the boat, that had a "cushion" on it. The fact that Jesus could sleep in such a storm shows His physical exhaustion, another indication of His full humanity. This is the only place where Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded Jesus sleeping, though He slept at other times, of course.

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<sup>256</sup>Lane, p. 173.

<sup>257</sup>G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, pp. 441-42.

Mark alone recorded the disciples' rebuke. It was inappropriate because of who Jesus was. However, the disciples did not yet fully appreciate who He was. They did not like the fact that Jesus appeared to be unconcerned about their safety. Note the contrast between the disciples' anxiety and Jesus' lack of concern.

"It was a cry of distrust, but one often matched by believers today in difficult circumstances when they feel that the Lord has forsaken them."<sup>258</sup>

The disciples should not have been fearful. Jesus had told them that they were going to the other side; He implied that they would arrive there (v. 35). Second, He was with them; they would not die because He would not die before His time. Third, Jesus was sleeping peacefully and was not afraid of the storm. Fourth, He had demonstrated compassion for them and the multitudes many times.

4:39-40

Mark is the only evangelist who recorded the words Jesus spoke. Jesus addressed His creation as His *child* ("Hush, be still"), and it responded accordingly. The wind ceased and the waves calmed down.

"In the calming of the storm (4:35-41) his 'rebuke' of the wind and 'muzzling' of the waves are phrased in the language of exorcism, recalling the power of God over chaos at creation. Both episodes are effected solely by the word."<sup>259</sup>

"In Mark's story the sea is a place of chaos and destruction as well as of instruction and fellowship."<sup>260</sup>

Jesus expressed disappointment that the disciples had not demonstrated more mature faith (cf. 7:18; 8:17-18, 21, 32-33; 9:19). "Timid" (NASB, Gr. *deiloi*) means fearful. "No faith" meant no trust in Him on this occasion. They did not yet realize that Jesus was *God*—the One who controls nature (cf. Ps. 89:8-9; 104:5-9; 106:8-9; 107:23-32).

". . . Jesus anticipates comprehension on the part of the disciples and they exhibit a profound lack thereof. The upshot is that conflict erupts between Jesus and the disciples, and nowhere is this more apparent than in a series of three boat scenes and two feeding miracles, with the miracles interspersed among the boat scenes."<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup>Hiebert, p. 115.

<sup>259</sup>Edwards, p. 223.

<sup>260</sup>Ellenburg, p. 175.

<sup>261</sup>Kingsbury, p. 97.

4:41 The disciples now became even more "afraid" than they had been when the wind and waves were swamping their boat. The Greek words Mark used, *ephobethesan phobon*, describe respectful awe that people feel in the presence of supernatural power (cf. 16:8). They had seen Jesus perform many healings and exorcisms, but this was a new revelation of the extent of His authority. Still they did not understand who He really was, as is clear from their question.

This story should encourage all of Jesus' disciples with the knowledge that He can control the natural circumstances of life, including its storms, and keep them safe. This would have been an especially comforting revelation to Mark's original readers in their persecutions.

"It is not surprising that in early Christian art the Church was depicted as a boat driven upon a perilous sea; with Jesus in the midst, there was nothing to fear."<sup>262</sup>

"Assuredly, no narrative could be more consistent with the fundamental assumption that He is the God-Man."<sup>263</sup>

### **The deliverance of a demoniac in Gadara 5:1-20 (cf. Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39)**

Even though Mark had already reported that Jesus had exorcized many demons, this case was extraordinary.

"Christ, Who had been charged by the Pharisees with being the embodiment and messenger of Satan [Matt. 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15], is here face to face with the extreme manifestation of demoniac power and influence. It is once more, then, a Miracle in Parable which is about to take place. The question, which had been raised by the enemies, is about to be brought to the issue of a practical demonstration."<sup>264</sup>

"This account, more graphically than any other in the Gospels, indicates that the function of demonic possession is to distort and destroy the image of God in man."<sup>265</sup>

5:1 Mark and Luke called this area "the country of the Gerasenes," but Matthew called it the country of the Gadarenes. Gergesa (also referred to as Gersa and Kersa) was a small village about midway on the eastern shore of the lake. Gadara was a larger town six miles southeast of the lake's southern end. This incident apparently happened somewhere near both towns on the southeast coast of the lake. Another town with a similar

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<sup>262</sup>Lane, p. 178.

<sup>263</sup>Edersheim, 1:600.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid., 1:609.

<sup>265</sup>Lane, p. 180.

name, Gerasa (Jarash), stood 37 miles southeast of the lake, too far southeast to qualify as the site of this miracle.

"At the site of Kersa the shore is level, and there are no tombs. But about a mile further south there is a fairly steep slope within forty yards from the shore, and about two miles from there cavern tombs are found which appear to have been used for dwellings."<sup>266</sup>

- 5:2-5 Mark gave many more details describing this man than either Matthew or Luke did. This reflects an eyewitness account and Mark's special interest in demonic activity. Matthew wrote that there were two men, but Mark and Luke mentioned only the more prominent of the two. Mark stressed this man's great physical strength that had progressively increased, evidently due to the demons' increasing hold on him. Now nothing could restrain him. The poor man was miserable in his condition.
- 5:6-7 The way the man related to Jesus shows that the demons within him recognized Jesus as someone superior to them. The demons controlled the man's physical movements and his words. They addressed Jesus as "Son of the Most High God"—recognizing His deity (Gen. 14:18-24; Num. 24:16; Isa. 14:14; Dan. 3:26; 4:2; cf. Mark 1:23-24). "Most High God" is a title used in the Old Testament, mainly by non-Israelites, to denote the God of Israel.<sup>267</sup> The fact that the man knelt before Jesus likewise shows that the demons regarded Jesus as their superior. The demons feared that Jesus would send them to their eternal judgment immediately, something only God could do (Rev. 20:1-3; cf. Matt. 8:29; Luke 8:31). The tormentor appealed ("I implore You") for deliverance from "torment."<sup>268</sup> Ironically, he appealed to Jesus for mercy *in God's name* ("by God"). He probably did this because he knew that Jesus was subject to His Father.
- 5:8 Jesus evidently addressed the leading demon. The Greek imperfect tense can mean that Jesus had been repeatedly commanding the demons to depart, as the NASB and NIV translations imply. However, it can also mean that something was about to follow. In this case, a translation such as the AV, "For He said unto him," is better. Apparently in verse 8, Mark gave us the reason for the demons' request in verse 7, even though Jesus did not allow the demons to depart until verse 13.
- 5:9 These verses resume the conversation from verse 7. A "legion" was 4,000 to 6,000 Roman soldiers.<sup>269</sup> Probably the leading demon used this as a round number to represent thousands of demons (cf. v. 13).<sup>270</sup> The word

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<sup>266</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>267</sup>Cranfield, p. 177.

<sup>268</sup>R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments*, 2:70.

<sup>269</sup>Cranfield, p. 178.

<sup>270</sup>Mann, p. 279.



"legion" also suggests their organization, strength, oppression, and authority over the man they influenced.<sup>271</sup> Probably Jesus asked this question for the disciples' benefit.

5:10 This verse also shows the superiority of Jesus' power (authority), which the demons recognized. It is unclear why the demons wanted to remain in that area of the "country."

5:11-13 Evidently the demons requested permission to enter the swine so they could destroy them. Jesus' permission resulted in everyone seeing the great destructive power and number of the demons, and that the man had experienced an amazing deliverance. Only Mark recorded the number of swine ("about 2,000"). As usual, Mark drew attention to Jesus' awesome power.

"Few animals are so individually stubborn as swine, yet the rush was simultaneous."<sup>272</sup>

"The story of the deliverance of a man becomes the story of the deliverance of a land."<sup>273</sup>

Some interpreters believe the owners of the swine were Jews who disregarded the Mosaic prohibition against eating pork (Lev. 11:7) or were, perhaps, selling pork to Gentiles in the district. Jesus would then have been punishing them by allowing their pigs to perish. However, this explanation is unlikely because of the demographics of the Decapolis region (mostly Gentile), of which this area was a part (cf. Matt. 8:31).

". . . it seems unlikely that the Lord would take such pains to punish a breach of ceremonial law, when He Himself constantly faced the charge of breaking it (Mk. vii. 5)."<sup>274</sup>

5:14-15 The "city" in view was probably Gergesa. The demoniac had formerly been a restless raving maniac, but now he was "sitting" peacefully ("in his right mind"). He had been shamelessly naked (Luke 8:27), but now he "clothed" himself. He had been out of control, but now he controlled his senses and himself. The people's fear arose, partially, from anticipating what Jesus might do with the great power that He obviously possessed.

5:16-17 Perhaps the people "implored" Jesus "to leave their" area, because they reasoned that if He dealt so severely with evil—He would eventually destroy them, too. Rather than turning *to* Him in worship, they turned *from*

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<sup>271</sup>Hiebert, p. 120.

<sup>272</sup>Matthew B. Riddle, "The Gospel According to Mark," in *International Revision Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 60.

<sup>273</sup>Guelich, p. 283.

<sup>274</sup>Cole, p. 99.

Him to the darkness they preferred (cf. John 1:11; 3:19). Mark's account implies that what happened to the pigs disturbed the local population, suggesting that economic loss played a part in their request.

5:18-19 Why did Jesus instruct the man to tell others about "what great things the Lord" had "done for" him, whereas He had told the cleansed leper not to tell anyone (1:44; cf. 5:43; 7:36)? Apparently there was little danger in this Gentile region that the people would create problems for Jesus' mission, as they *did* cause in Jewish territory. We need not understand Jesus' command as a permanent prohibition against the man's following Him. Perhaps this man rejoined Jesus and become a disciple after he bore witness locally. The synonymous use of the names "Lord" (v. 19) and "Jesus" (v. 20) shows that the man regarded Jesus as God (cf. v. 7; Luke 8:39).

Jesus' instructions to this man in a Gentile region would have helped Mark's original Gentile readers to know what was an appropriate response to His deliverance of them.

"Though we are not tortured by the devil, yet he holds us as his slaves, till the Son of God delivers us from his tyranny. Naked, torn, and disfigured, we wander about, till he restores us to soundness of mind."<sup>275</sup>

5:20 The "Decapolis" was a league of 10 Greek cities, all but one of which stood on the east side of the lake. One of these towns was Gergesa. The others were Damascus, Kanatha, Scythopolis, Hippos, Raphana, Pella, Dion, Philadelphia, and Gadara.<sup>276</sup>

People marveled at the man's testimony. That was good as far as it went, but it should have led them to seek Jesus out. Perhaps some of them did.

"Exemplary evangelism is not the point; rather, evangelism serves the Christological point that Jesus' act of power inspired the ex-demoniac to exceed by far the commission that Jesus gave him."<sup>277</sup>

Mark's account of this miracle stressed Jesus' divine power and authority, and these events presented a greater revelation of His person to the disciples than they had previously witnessed. It also provides a model of how disciples can express their gratitude to God for His saving work in their lives.

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<sup>275</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 2:436.

<sup>276</sup>J. McKee Adams, *Biblical Backgrounds*, pp. 150-160.

<sup>277</sup>Gundry, p. 255.

"Furthermore, in the flow of Mark's narrative, this story must be read against the backdrop of the dispute between Jesus and the scribes over his exorcisms in 3:22-27. It vividly describes Jesus as the one in whom 'the Most High God's' sovereign rule was being established through the binding of the 'strong man' (3:27) who through Legion had so powerfully controlled a man that no one else could successfully bind with human fetters (5:3-5)."<sup>278</sup>

**The raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of a woman with a hemorrhage 5:21-43 (cf. Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56)**

This is one of the sections of Mark's Gospel that has a chiasmic structure (cf. 3:22-30; 6:14-29; 11:15-19).

- A The appeal of Jairus for his daughter 5:21-24
- B The healing of the woman with the hemorrhage 5:25-34
- A' The raising of Jairus' daughter to life 5:35-43

In this case, the delay caused by the healing of the woman created a greater problem that Jesus overcame easily. This account of a double miracle further revealed Jesus' identity to His disciples.

"The healing of Jairus's daughter shows that Jesus is the Lord of life, and the healing of the woman with the problem of persistent bleeding shows that He is the Lord of health."<sup>279</sup>

Some commentators believed that Mark did not follow a chronological order of events, but rearranged them to make his theological points.<sup>280</sup> However, all three synoptic evangelists recorded the events in the same order, so perhaps they occurred in this sequence.<sup>281</sup> Mark's account is the fullest of the three.

"The stilling of the storm and the healing of the demonized were manifestations of the absolute power inherent in Christ; the recovery of the woman and the raising of Jairus' daughter, evidence of the absolute efficacy of faith."<sup>282</sup>

5:21 Having withdrawn from Galilee to the southeastern Decapolis region (4:35—5:20), Jesus and His disciples now returned to the northwestern side of the lake and to Galilee. Immediately, a multitude of Jews "gathered around Him" again.

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<sup>278</sup>Guelich, p. 289.

<sup>279</sup>Bailey, p. 76.

<sup>280</sup>E.g., Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 151; Lane, p. 189; and Wessel, p. 660.

<sup>281</sup>Cf. Cranfield, p. 182; Taylor, p. 289; and Hiebert, p. 125.

<sup>282</sup>Edersheim, 1:616.

5:22-24 "Synagogue rulers" were not priests, but lay leaders, who were responsible for the worship services and the synagogue's physical facilities. This honorary title also described distinguished members of the synagogue.<sup>283</sup> As such, "Jairus" (the Greek form of the Hebrew "Jair": "he will give light or awaken" or "he who enlightens"; cf. Num. 32:41; Judg. 10:3) undoubtedly enjoyed much respect in his community. Most healing stories are anonymous, so perhaps Mark included Jairus' name because of its connection with Jesus' miracle of awakening the girl to life (cf. v. 39). "Laying hands on" a sick person for healing associated the power of the healer with the person needing deliverance (cf. 6:5; 7:32; 8:23, 25).

Upon returning to Galilee, Jesus immediately began to serve in response to this urgent emotional plea, but the thronging crowd slowed His progress.

5:25-28 Mark stressed the desperate condition of the woman by recording details of her history that the other evangelists passed over. Uncharacteristically, Mark described the woman's plight with a series of seven participles. She was, before she met Jesus, incurable. She had faith in Jesus' ability to heal her and a belief that she could obtain healing by touching His clothing (cf. 3:10; 6:56). She tried to remain unobtrusive, since her condition rendered her and all who contacted her ritually unclean (Lev. 15:25-27). Perhaps she had come from some distance, since apparently no one in the crowd recognized her, or objected to her being there.

5:29 As soon as (Gr. *euthys*, "immediately") she touched Jesus' garment, she knew that she was whole. The healing was instantaneous, but it happened without Jesus' conscious participation. Such was the power He had.

5:30 Just as quickly (Gr. *euthys*) Jesus perceived that "power . . . had gone" from Him.

"The immediacy of his knowing, the omniscience with which Mark writes about it, the mention of Jesus' name, and its forward position all show the supernaturalness of Jesus' knowledge to be another point of emphasis."<sup>284</sup>

5:31-32 The harshness of the disciples' reply is unique to Mark. Luke wrote that Peter voiced it (Luke 8:45). Probably the disciples were eager to get Jesus to Jairus' house before it was too late. Yet Jesus wanted to speak to the woman, and to assure her that it was her *faith* in Him that had resulted in her healing, not merely her touch. He "looked around," searching the faces in the crowd to discover the person of faith.

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<sup>283</sup>Cranfield, p. 183.

<sup>284</sup>Gundry, p. 270.

"His healing power did not work automatically, like a battery discharging its power when accidentally short-circuited. Jesus perceived in Himself, without any external suggestion, the significance of the woman's touch, and, actively willing to honor her faith, He was immediately conscious of His healing power going toward her. His power, the inherent ability to perform, was always under the control of His conscious volition. His consciousness of that power going forth from Him suggests that His healing ministries cost Jesus much spiritual energy. It would explain why He found it necessary at times to escape the crowds to find time for refreshing through fellowship with the Father."<sup>285</sup>

5:33-34 Jesus did not rebuke her, even though her faith in Him seems to have been mixed with superstition. Yet He wanted to speak to her, lest she conclude that *touching* Him was what cured her. His words were full of spiritual sensitivity and compassion. She had nothing to fear from Him. Perhaps the woman was afraid because she had obtained Jesus' power surreptitiously (stealthily). Perhaps part of her fear was that she had rendered Jesus ritually unclean.<sup>286</sup> Still, we have seen that a typical response to the revelation of Jesus' power was fear (cf. 4:41; 5:15).

This is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus called someone "daughter." The woman's faith in Jesus had not only resulted in her physical healing but also (a *double entendre*) brought her into His spiritual family (cf. Isa. 53:10; Mark 3:35; 7:26; 10:52). Her "faith" was the means whereby she obtained Jesus' help. It expressed belief that Jesus *could* heal her and hope that He *would*.

The phrase "Go in peace" (Heb. *shalom*) was a common way of saying "good-bye" among the Jews (cf. Judg. 18:6; 1 Sam. 1:17).

Shalom ". . . means not just freedom from inward anxiety, but that *wholeness* or *completeness* of life that comes from being brought into a right relationship with God."<sup>287</sup>

It was God's will for this woman to experience healing. Jesus assured her that her healing was complete and permanent with these words: "your faith has made you well." She could now enjoy social interaction and participation in public worship, as well as physical health, since she was clean.

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<sup>285</sup>Hiebert, pp. 129-30. Cf. Cranfield, p. 185.

<sup>286</sup>Mann, p. 286.

<sup>287</sup>Anderson, p. 154.

"From Mark's perspective, the entire incident is a call for radical faith."<sup>288</sup>

5:35 If the disciples had been impatient (v. 31), how much more so must Jairus have been. How his heart must have broken when word reached him that his "daughter" had "died." The people who reported the death of Jairus' daughter regarded Jesus as an ordinary teacher or rabbi. They believed He could only help the living.

"There is no hint of anyone taking it amiss that Jesus did not proceed as fast as He could to Jairus' house; or that He could have dealt with the haemorrhage [*sic*] after the more serious case of the child at death's door. . . . It is quite Palestinian still to do the things that need doing at the psychological juncture."<sup>289</sup>

5:36 Jairus had believed that Jesus could heal his daughter, and he had just observed the result of believing in Jesus (vv. 25-34). His faith, with Jesus' encouragement, enabled him to "believe" (keep believing) that Jesus could still help his daughter. Literally Jesus said, "Stop fearing; continue believing."

5:37 Jesus "allowed" only His inner circle of disciples "to accompany Him" to witness this miracle (cf. Deut. 17:6; Mark 9:2; 14:33). He probably did so to limit popular reaction to it. If the multitudes thronged to Jesus because He healed them, how much more would they seek His physical help if they knew He could raise the dead.

"While raising the dead may be the greatest miracle from our perspective, this miracle comes in a series of miracles involving absolutely hopeless situations."<sup>290</sup>

Why did Jesus select Peter, James, and John—rather than three others of His disciples (cf. 9:2)? Perhaps they had proven to be the most perceptive and or responsive to what He had taught them so far (cf. Matt. 25:19). Or it may have been that Jesus foresaw that they would have leading roles among the apostles in the future.

5:38 Jesus dismissed one crowd, but found another one waiting for Him at Jairus' house.<sup>291</sup> As was customary, paid mourners were already at work: weeping, wailing, singing, playing flutes, and clapping their hands (cf. Jer. 9:17; Amos 5:16).<sup>292</sup> The Mishnah specified that even the poorest husband

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<sup>288</sup>Lane, p. 194.

<sup>289</sup>Eric F. F. Bishop, *Jesus of Palestine*, p. 137.

<sup>290</sup>Guelich, p. 301.

<sup>291</sup>Swete, p. 107.

<sup>292</sup>Cf. H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, p. 568.

had to hire at least two flute players and one female to wail when his wife died.<sup>293</sup> Evidently the little girl's death was so expected that mourners were ready the moment she died.

5:39-40 Jesus meant that she was "asleep" *in death*. He was using the word "sleep" figuratively (cf. Matt. 9:24; John 11:11-14). He meant that though she was dead, her death would be no more permanent than sleep.<sup>294</sup> The observers present, however, took Jesus' words literally, and mocked the Great Physician for His apparent superficial diagnosis. Their reaction proves that the girl was dead. Jesus excluded them and allowed only those whom He wanted to witness the miracle to stay.

5:41 Apparently Jesus took "the hand" of the dead girl in order to associate His power with her healing in the witnesses' minds. He did not need to touch her to raise her. Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-23) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37) had both raised children to life, but they had to exert considerably more effort, and spend more time doing so, than Jesus did. It was probably this healing that led many of the people to identify Jesus with Elijah (6:15). Touching a dead person resulted in ceremonial defilement, but Jesus overcame this with His power, that was both healing and cleansing.

Mark alone recorded Jesus' command in Aramaic and translated it for his Roman readers.

"Mark gives the translation as a contrast with magical formulas so esoteric and nonsensical that they mock would-be translators . . ." <sup>295</sup>

In every instance of Jesus raising the dead in the Gospels, He addressed the dead person directly (cf. Luke 7:14; John 11:43).

"It has been suggested that His very words were those used by the mother each morning to arouse her daughter from sleep." <sup>296</sup>

There is only one letter difference between Jesus' command here and the one Peter uttered when he restored Dorcas to life (Acts 9:40). Peter said, "*Tabitha kum!*" This shows that Jesus continued to exercise His power through Peter after His ascension (cf. Acts 1:1-2).

5:42 When Jesus restored life, recovery was instantaneous (Gr. *euthys*, twice in this verse), not gradual, as was also true with former prophets (cf. 1 Kings 17:19-20; 2 Kings 4:33). Perhaps Mark mentioned the girl's age because

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<sup>293</sup>Mishnah *Ketuboth* 4:4.

<sup>294</sup>Cranfield, p. 189.

<sup>295</sup>Robert H. Gundry, *Mark*, p. 274.

<sup>296</sup>Hiebert, p. 136.

she was 12, and the woman whom Jesus had just healed had suffered with her affliction for 12 years (v. 25). The woman had begun living when she should have died from her incurable condition. The girl had died just when she should have begun living as a young woman. Jesus could—and did—deliver both from death. Everyone present expressed extreme amazement at Jesus' power (cf. 4:41). The Greek word, from *existemi*, literally means they were "out of their minds with great amazement."<sup>297</sup>

5:43 Jesus gave the observers two commands. First, He told them not to tell anyone about the miracle who did not need to know about it. Obviously many people outside the house would have discovered what had happened, but Jesus wanted to avoid all unnecessary publicity, at least immediately, so He could continue His ministry with maximum freedom of movement (cf. 1:43-45). He wanted those present to keep the event as private as possible.<sup>298</sup>

His second command revealed His continuing compassion for the girl in her need. It also clarified that He had restored her to physical life that needed sustaining. He had not resurrected her to a new form of life with an immortal body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-57).

This double miracle (the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the bleeding woman) taught the disciples that Jesus not only had the power to control nature (4:35-41) and demonic spirits (5:1-20), but also death. These were important revelations to those who had exercised some faith in Him. They learned that Jesus was more than a man, and even more than the greatest of the prophets. Undoubtedly God used these revelations to enable the disciples to see that Jesus was the divine Messiah (8:29).

"Faith involved more than simply believing Jesus could perform miracles. No one questioned that in Nazareth. They questioned how he could do what he was doing because of who they 'know' him to be. By implication, therefore, healing faith for Mark in these two stories means more than faith in a miracle worker. Both Jairus and the woman displayed faith that God was somehow at work in Jesus. Therefore, the evangelist uses these stories to underscore the role of faith and its corollary, the person of Jesus as seen in his ministry that highlights the role of faith in these stories."<sup>299</sup>

## **2. Jesus' rejection by the Nazarenes 6:1-6a (cf. Matt. 13:54-58)**

Even though Jesus gave ample evidence that He was more than a mere man (4:35—5:43), those who knew Him best on the physical plane still refused to believe in Him (6:1-6a). This refusal led Jesus to turn increasingly from the multitudes to the training of His disciples (6:6b—8:30).

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<sup>297</sup>Grassmick, p. 126.

<sup>298</sup>Cranfield, p. 191.

<sup>299</sup>Guelich, p. 305.



6:1 Mark mentioned the disciples' presence with Jesus, but Matthew omitted that detail. Mark evidently recorded this incident because it constituted another occasion of discipleship training, a particular concern of Mark's in this section of his Gospel. Jesus visited Nazareth as a rabbi preparing His disciples for their ministry. This was the second rejection in Nazareth that the synoptic writers documented. The first one came when Jesus left Nazareth to establish His base of operations in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13; Luke 4:16-31).

6:2-3 The reaction of the people in this synagogue contrasts with that of Jairus, the ruler of another synagogue (5:22). Mark recorded three questions the observers in Nazareth raised. They wondered "*where*" Jesus got the teaching and the authority that He demonstrated. They asked each other *who* had given Him the "wisdom" He manifested, and they questioned *how* Jesus had obtained His ability to do "miracles." Obviously they had not concluded that His teaching, authority, and miracles came from God.

"In this, they were not unlike our modern scientific age, which is much more concerned with the mechanical question 'how' than the theological 'why'."<sup>300</sup>

The Nazarenes' questions manifested unbelief and hostility. Their personal acquaintance with Jesus' family, and Jesus' former manner of life among them, made it hard for them to think of Him as anything more than a mere man. This is the only place in the New Testament where the writer referred to Jesus as a carpenter. A "carpenter" (Gr. *tekton*) worked with stone and metal, as well as wood.<sup>301</sup> Jesus' critics asked, rhetorically, whether Jesus was not just a common worker with His hands, as most of them were.

"Nothing is more persistent in the pieties of certain kinds of hymns and devotions than the mistaken idea that the Greek ought to be rendered as 'carpenter,' implying a lowly place in contemporary society. The Greek has a wide range of meaning, from shipbuilder to sculptor, but nearly always implies a person of considerable skill and can even be used of a physician. So far from being a village carpenter (Matt 13:55) engaged in making plows and yokes (which any peasant of his time was capable of producing), Joseph may well have been a builder of some competence, traveling over large areas of the country. Against such a background the self-renunciation of Jesus is seen as something far more impressive than the word 'carpenter' would imply.

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<sup>300</sup>Cole, p. 107.

<sup>301</sup>Guelich, p. 310.

"The Aramaic *naggara* ranged in meaning from a maker of furniture to a builder, with many associated skills in between. Such craftsmen were itinerants, as by the time of Jesus they had already been for centuries. In view of the implications of Luke 4:22 and John 6:42, together with the present passage that people in Nazareth did not know Jesus by sight when he first came back after the beginning of his ministry, we must conclude that he had spent little time at Nazareth. The city itself was ideally situated for an itinerant craftsman, who could not only locate his family there but could also travel easily to coastal cities and to towns overlooking the Sea of Galilee."<sup>302</sup>

"It was the common practice among the Jews to use the father's name, whether he were alive or dead. A man was called the son of his mother only when his father was unknown."<sup>303</sup>

Formerly the people of Nazareth had referred to Jesus as Joseph's son (Luke 4:22). Evidently they now called Him "the son of Mary" as a deliberate insult, implying that He was an illegitimate child (cf. Judg. 11:1-2; John 8:41; 9:29). The Jews did not speak insultingly about such a person's birth if they believed he lived a life pleasing to God, but if that person became an apostate, they spoke publicly and unreservedly about his illegitimate birth.<sup>304</sup> Consequently this appellation reflects the belief of the Nazarenes that Jesus was not virgin born and was displeasing to God.<sup>305</sup>

"Sometimes we are too near people to see their greatness."<sup>306</sup>

6:4 Jesus either quoted or invented a proverb to reply to their rejection. It expressed a principle, namely: familiarity breeds contempt. Jesus implied that He was "a prophet," which He was. The people of Nazareth could not even appreciate this aspect of Jesus' character, because they regarded Him as someone just like themselves.

"I think the common colloquialism of the day is apropos here, 'An expert is an ordinary fellow from another town.'"<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>302</sup>Mann, p. 289. See also Barclay, p. 138.

<sup>303</sup>Hiebert, p. 139.

<sup>304</sup>See Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, pp. 207-8, cf. pp. 16-17.

<sup>305</sup>Cf. Cranfield, p. 195.

<sup>306</sup>Barclay, p. 140.

<sup>307</sup>McGee, 4:184.

6:5-6a Mark stressed that Jesus performed miracles in response to faith. Here we see the other side of that coin. The Nazarenes' refusal to believe in Jesus resulted in His not being able to do many miracles among them. "Unbelief" limits God's working (cf. Acts 14:9-10).

"The point of our education ["no miracle"] is not that Jesus was powerless apart from men's faith, but that in the absence of faith he could not work mighty works *in accordance with the purpose of his ministry*; for to have worked miracles where faith was absent would, in most cases anyway, have been merely to have aggravated men's guilt and hardened them against God."<sup>308</sup>

This is the only time Mark said that Jesus was amazed. He marveled that the unbelief of the Nazarenes was as strong as it was. This implies that their decision not to believe was in spite of evidence adequate to lead them to another conclusion. They were morally blameworthy for their unbelief.

"The people of Nazareth represent Israel's blindness. Their refusal to believe in Jesus pictured what the disciples would soon experience (cf. 6:7-13) and what Mark's readers (then and now) would experience in the advance of the gospel."<sup>309</sup>

#### **IV. THE SERVANT'S SELF-REVELATION TO THE DISCIPLES 6:6B—8:30**

The increasing hostility of Israel's religious leaders, and the rejection by the multitudes (3:7—6:6a), led Jesus to concentrate increasingly on training His disciples. This section of Mark's Gospel shows how Jesus did that. While Jesus gave His disciples increasing responsibility for ministry (6:6b-30), the focus of Jesus' instruction was His own identity, which the disciples had great difficulty understanding (6:31—8:30).

"After the 'beginning of the gospel' in 1:1-15, the first half of Mark's Gospel falls rather neatly into three major sections (1:16—3:12; 3:13—6:6; 6:7—8:26). Each section opens with a story about the disciples (1:16-20; 3:1-19; and 6:7-13). Each section winds down with a story about the negative response generated by Jesus' ministry (3:1-6; 6:1-6a; 8:14-21). And each section concludes with a summary statement that recalls for the reader the nature of Jesus' ministry (3:7-12; 6:6b; 8:22-26)."<sup>310</sup>

##### **A. THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE 6:6B-30**

This is another of Mark's "sandwich" or chiasmic sections. The main event is Jesus' sending the Twelve on a preaching and healing mission that extended His own ministry.

<sup>308</sup>Cranfield, p. 197.

<sup>309</sup>Grassmick, p. 127.

<sup>310</sup>Guelich, p. 316.

Within this story, between their departing and their returning, the writer inserted the story of John the Baptist's death. The main feature of that story that interested Mark was Herod Antipas' perception of who Jesus was. The identity of Jesus, which is the heart of this section, becomes the main subject of the sections that follow (6:31—8:30).

**1. The sending of the Twelve 6:6b-13 (cf. Matt. 9:35—11:1; Luke 9:1-6)**

Jesus continued to minister in Galilee. His ministry to the Twelve was an important part of His ministry. It prepared the disciples for further future service. It also anticipated His ministry through them following His ascension. This was the third tour of the Galilean villages that Mark reported (cf. 1:14, 39).

6:6b            This brief transitional statement introduces Jesus twofold ministry, personally and through His disciples. Mark's interest lay in the disciples' training, so he stressed that. Matthew gave a slightly longer explanation of Jesus' personal ministry (Matt. 9:35).

". . . He went round about the villages teaching. This is a wonderful lesson for Christian workers. There are certain men in God's work who do not want to go to a small place to minister. I've actually been criticized by some ministers and Christian workers for going to certain small churches instead of going to the larger ones. My feeling is that our Lord set us a tremendous example here when it says that He went about their villages. Imagine, friends, the Lord of Glory, the Son of God here on this earth ministering in little villages. He could have sent a telegram over to Rome and hired the Colosseum [*sic*] for a big meeting!"<sup>311</sup>

6:7            Jesus "summoned the Twelve" to Himself, and then sent them out as His official representatives (cf. 3:14). In Jesus' culture, a person who was sent (a messenger) was regarded exactly as the person who sent (the master).<sup>312</sup> Jesus was following Jewish custom and wisdom in sending the disciples out "in pairs," which Mark alone mentioned (cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Eccles. 4:9-12). This was primarily to validate the truthfulness of their message by providing two witnesses (cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6).

The Twelve were to preach the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2), and to perform miracles in order to authenticate their message for their Jewish audiences (Matt. 10:1; Luke 9:1-2). Mark only mentioned "authority over" demons, as it was the most powerful demonstration of Jesus' power at work through them. This was a mission that would prepare the Twelve for greater responsibility in Jesus' service later.

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<sup>311</sup>McGee, 4:184-85.

<sup>312</sup>Lane, pp. 206-7.

"Jesus authorized the disciples to be his delegates with respect to both word and power. Their message and deeds were to be an extension of his own."<sup>313</sup>

6:8-9 The Twelve were to take with them no food, no luggage, and no money.

"It was customary both in the east and the west to keep small change in one's girdle ["belt"]."<sup>314</sup>

They were not even to take the usual extra tunic—that Palestinians often used as a blanket at night. The Twelve were to rely on God to provide their needs, including the need for hospitable hosts. The urgency of their mission required light travel, and it prohibited elaborate preparations. They could take a walking stick ("staff"), and they would need "sandals," but they were not to take spares. Apparently Jesus stressed what *not* to take more than what *to* take, in order to deprive the disciples of any sense of self-sufficiency.<sup>315</sup>

Matthew's account reported Jesus forbidding shoes, whereas Mark said He permitted them (Matt. 10:10). Probably a spare pair of sandals was what Jesus forbade. Matthew 10:9-10 and Luke 9:3 forbid taking a staff, but Mark 6:8 allows one. One solution to this apparent contradiction may be that Jesus gave these instructions on more than one occasion.<sup>316</sup> Jesus was training His disciples to *serve*, not to lord it over others or to expect others to serve them.

"The particular instructions apply literally only to this brief mission during Jesus' lifetime; but in principle, with the necessary modifications according to climate and other circumstances, they still hold for the continuing ministry of the Church. The service of the Word of God is still a matter of extreme urgency, calling for absolute self-dedication."<sup>317</sup>

6:10-11 The 12 disciples were normally to stay in the home of a hospitable host, as long as they remained in that particular town, rather than moving from house to house. This would minimize distractions and tend to preserve the good reputation of the disciple, whom others might consider greedy if he moved frequently. Moving to better accommodations for the sake of comfort would also bring shame on the former host.

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<sup>313</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>314</sup>Cranfield, p. 199.

<sup>315</sup>Guelich, p. 322.

<sup>316</sup>See Monte A. Shanks, "An Alternative Solution to an Alleged Contradiction in the Gospels," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:675 (July-September 2012):317-27.

<sup>317</sup>Cranfield, p. 200.

The Jews customarily shook the dust off their clothes and sandals when they reentered Jewish territory from Gentile territory.<sup>318</sup>

"In the culture of the time the gospel was written, Jews made a distinction between Jewish and gentile territory. Jews considered their land to be holy and the gentile land unclean."<sup>319</sup>

Shaking dust off their feet symbolized the defiling effect of contact with pagans. When the Twelve did this, it implied that those who had refused their message were unbelieving, defiled, and subject to divine judgment (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6).

"The shaking off of dust is not to be taken as a curse, but as a witness, intended to lead to a change of heart. The Greek specifically speaks of a warning *to them*, not an adjuration *against* them. Cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6."<sup>320</sup>

"It was a visible sign of acceptance or rejection of the Master and the Father Who sent Him (Mt. x. 40, Lk. x. 16), and therefore an index of the relation in which the inhabitants as a whole stood to the eternal order."<sup>321</sup>

This act would cause those who rejected the message to reconsider their decision.

6:12-13

The Twelve were to do the same three things that Jesus did in His ministry (cf. 1:4, 14-15, 32-34, 39; 3:10). Their mission was an extension of His mission (cf. 16:15-20). Mark did not mention that Jesus sent them only to the Jews. Perhaps he wanted his readers to view themselves as carrying on Jesus' ministry as the Twelve did then (cf. Matt. 10:5-6). The Twelve learned that Jesus' power extended beyond His personal presence, and that God would work through them as He did through Jesus.

"Their coming to a village brought healing and salvation in the most comprehensive terms *because they were his representatives*. Jesus had commissioned them and they came in his name. What Jesus did in his own power as commissioned by God, the disciples did in his power."<sup>322</sup>

Mark alone mentioned the Twelve "anointing" people "with oil." People commonly applied oil for medicinal purposes in Jesus' day (cf. Luke

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<sup>318</sup>Wessel, p. 667.

<sup>319</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 70.

<sup>320</sup>Mann, p. 293.

<sup>321</sup>Plummer, p. 144.

<sup>322</sup>Lane, p. 209.

10:34; James 5:14).<sup>323</sup> This ritual also symbolized God coming on the anointed person, enabling that one to serve Him, and setting the anointed person apart for God's use. This, too, would have special significance for reader disciples who had experienced God's anointing with the Holy Spirit at conversion, and who had a similar ministry in their (and our) day.

This pericope shows Jesus continuing to train His disciples for the ministry that lay before them, and continuing to extend His own ministry of service through them. In their duties, the manner of their service, and their responses to the reactions to their ministry, they were to conduct themselves as the servants of the Servant.

"Hitherto they had been like young children in a family under the care of their parents, or like young birds in a nest sheltered by their mother's wing, and needing only to open their mouths wide in order to get them filled; now they were to become like boys leaving their father's house to serve an apprenticeship, or like fledglings leaving the warm nest in which they were nursed, to exercise their wings and seek food for themselves."<sup>324</sup>

"This participation of the Twelve in Jesus' ministry and its apparent success contributes greatly to the irony in Mark's portrait of the Twelve in this segment of the Gospel (6:7—8:26). On the one hand, it opens with this special mission whose success reported in 6:30 apparently reached to Herod's court (6:14) and led to a relentless response by the crowds (6:31-33). On the other hand, the very Twelve who experienced a special calling and relationship with Jesus and now participate fully in this ministry are seen to lack understanding (6:52; 7:18; 8:14-21) and even reflect a 'hardened heart' (6:52; 8:17-18). This growing irony between the Twelve's special privilege and lack of understanding has its seed in the previous section (e.g., 4:11; cf. 4:13; 4:33-34; cf. 4:41)."<sup>325</sup>

## **2. The failure of Antipas to understand Jesus' identity 6:14-29**

The writer of the second Gospel inserted this account into his narrative about the mission of the Twelve. It is similar to the filling in a sandwich (cf. v. 30). The incident probably happened during the mission of the Twelve just announced. It illustrates the mounting opposition to Jesus, and it provides helpful guidance for disciples of Jesus. Mark's is the fullest of the synoptic records at this point.

### **The varying opinions about Jesus' identity 6:14-16 (cf. Matt. 14:1-3; Luke 9:7-9)**

6:14 "Herod" Antipas was not really a king, "king" being a popular designation rather than an official title in his case. He was the tetrarch (ruler of one of four [political] divisions) who was born in 20 B.C., and ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39, when he was banished to Gaul. Perea

<sup>323</sup>Merrill F. Unger, "Divine Healing," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971):236.

<sup>324</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 113.

<sup>325</sup>Guelich, p. 324.

lay east of the Jordan River and south of the Decapolis. Its northern border was about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and its southern border was about halfway between the northern and southern ends of the Dead Sea. The territory of Ammon lay east of Perea. Mark probably called Antipas a king because that is how the people in his territory spoke of him popularly.<sup>326</sup> It was natural for Mark, who was writing for Romans, to use this title since the Roman government used it to describe all eastern rulers.<sup>327</sup>

The antecedent of "it" (NASB) or "this" (NIV) seems to be the ministry of Jesus' disciples (vv. 7-13). Their ministry focused on the identity of Jesus, which is the subject of this pericope. Interestingly, Jesus sent them on this mission even though their own understanding of His identity was still partial. He wanted them to share what they knew then, even though they would understand more later.

Matthew recorded that Herod had heard "the report (news) concerning Jesus" (Matt. 14:1), and Luke wrote that he heard of "all that was happening" (Luke 9:7). These are complementary, not mutually exclusive descriptions. Herod heard about the ministry that Jesus was carrying on.

People were explaining Jesus' miraculous powers in several different ways. Mark mentioned three. Some said "John the Baptist" had "risen from the dead," and he was the person doing these miracles. John had not performed miracles before his death (John 10:41), so this view may have arisen from misinformation.

"John was a forerunner of Jesus in his birth, ministry, and death. Also the way people identified John the Baptist was as varied as the way they identified Jesus."<sup>328</sup>

6:15-16 Perhaps the view that Jesus was "Elijah" owed its origin to John's description of Jesus as "the Coming One" (Mal. 3:1; 4:5; cf. Deut. 18:15-19). Some people concluded that Jesus was "a prophet" (like one of the Old Testament prophets) because of His preaching and miracle working powers. Herod's view that Jesus was John resurrected to life seems to have originated from his guilty conscience—since he had murdered John. Evidently Herod had not heard about Jesus before he killed John.

### **The death of Jesus' forerunner 6:17-29 (cf. Matt. 14:4-12)**

Verses 17-29 are a flashback account, in which Mark explained how John had died. This is the only story in Mark's Gospel that does not concern Jesus directly.<sup>329</sup> Why did Mark

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<sup>326</sup>Taylor, p. 308.

<sup>327</sup>Bruce, "The Synoptic . . .," 1:380.

<sup>328</sup>Bailey, p. 77.

<sup>329</sup>Taylor, p. 310.



include it? Perhaps he did so because John's death prefigured Jesus' violent end. Mark devoted 14 verses to John's death but only three to his ministry. He really gave two passion narratives: Jesus' and John's.<sup>330</sup>

"Though not directly concerned with Jesus, it is yet relevant to the history of Jesus, the passion of the Forerunner being a pointer to the subsequent passion of the Messiah (cf. ii. 19f.). The parallels between vi. 17-29 and xv. 1-47 are interesting: e.g. Herod's fear of John as *aner dikaios kai hagios* ["a righteous and holy man"] (v. 20) and Pilate's attitude to Jesus (xv. 5, 14); Herodias' implacable hatred of John and the Jewish leaders' implacable hatred of Jesus; Herod's and Pilate's yielding to pressure; the details of the burials of John and Jesus."<sup>331</sup>

Mark showed particular interest in what "King" Herod Antipas, and especially Herodias, did to John.<sup>332</sup> The main reason Mark included this pericope will emerge later (9:13).

6:17-18 Herod Philip I was in fact Herod Antipas' half-brother, not brother.<sup>333</sup> Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, the son of Herod the Great and Mariamne, and therefore the niece of Herod Antipas.<sup>334</sup> It was unlawful for Herod to marry Herodias because their "marriage" was incestuous; it was also adulterous—because Philip was still alive (cf. Lev. 18:16; 20:21)! Antipas had converted to Judaism, so he had placed himself under Mosaic Law.<sup>335</sup>

"We behold in John an illustrious example of that moral courage, which all pious teachers ought to possess, not to hesitate to incur the wrath of the great and powerful, as often as it may be found necessary: for he, with whom there is acceptance of persons, does not honestly serve God."<sup>336</sup>

"Not even the royal house was exempt from the call to radical repentance."<sup>337</sup>

6:19-20 Antipas' passion for Herodias conflicted with his respect for and interest in John. He wanted to maintain both relationships, and tension arose as a result.

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<sup>330</sup>Lane, p. 215.

<sup>331</sup>Cranfield, pp. 208-9.

<sup>332</sup>For discussions of the differences between Mark and Josephus' accounts of John's death, see *ibid.*, pp. 208-9; Taylor, pp. 310-11; or Lane, pp. 215-16.

<sup>333</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 218, for a diagram of the Herodian family tree.

<sup>334</sup>Cranfield, p. 209.

<sup>335</sup>Hiebert, p. 149.

<sup>336</sup>Calvin, 2:222.

<sup>337</sup>Lane, p. 219.

"Kingliness changed places: the subject did not fear the sovereign; the sovereign feared the subject."<sup>338</sup>

Antipas could live with this tension, but Herodias could not, so she sought to kill her rival. Antipas evidently protected John from Herodias, the latter day Jezebel. John was "righteous" in his relations with other people, and "holy" in his relationship to God. The perplexity the king felt undoubtedly arose over his conflicting affections for Herodias and John. Sometimes unrepentant sinners are curious about spiritual matters and spiritual people. This seems to have been true of Antipas. Probably the king and John conversed whenever Herod visited the Machaerus fortress, east of the Jordan River, where John was a prisoner. Its site in southern Perea, south of the north end of the Dead Sea, overlooked that sea. This was probably the site of this whole event.<sup>339</sup>

"Herod was awed by the purity of John's character, feared him as the bad fear the good."<sup>340</sup>

6:21-23 Finally Herodias was able to trick her husband into getting rid of her nemesis. "Salome" was Herodias' daughter by Philip. There is some difference of opinion as to her age, some scholars believing that she would have been in her mid-teens at this time,<sup>341</sup> and others holding that she would have been about 20.<sup>342</sup> Her dance was undoubtedly lascivious.<sup>343</sup>

"Solo dances in those days in such society were disgusting and licentious pantomimes. That a princess of the royal blood should so expose and demean herself is beyond belief because those dances were the art of professional prostitutes. The very fact that she did so dance is a grim commentary on the character of Salome, and of the mother who allowed and encouraged her to do so."<sup>344</sup>

The phrase "up to half of my kingdom" is figurative, meaning "at great personal sacrifice" (cf. 1 Kings 13:8; Esth. 5:3; 7:2). Antipas could not have given away half of his kingdom because he lacked the authority to do so.

"There is also a certain likeness between Esther's accomplishment of the destruction of Haman and Salome's of that of John. Perhaps the story of Salome reminded Mark

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<sup>338</sup>Morison, p. 152.

<sup>339</sup>Lane, p. 216; Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, pp. 146-48.

<sup>340</sup>Swete, p. 123.

<sup>341</sup>E.g., Lane, p. 221.

<sup>342</sup>E.g., Mann, p. 297.

<sup>343</sup>Lane, p. 221; Mann, p. 297.

<sup>344</sup>Barclay, p. 153.

of Esther, with the result that he used some of the language of LXX Esther."<sup>345</sup>

6:24-25 Women were not present at such banquets as observers. Consequently Salome had to leave the banquet hall to confer with her mother. The daughter apparently shared her mother's hatred for John the Baptist, rather than Herod's respect for him. She hurried back to Herod with her request before he might change his extravagant offer. Perhaps she asked for John's head "on a platter" to humiliate him further, comparing John to an animal—slain and prepared for dinner.

6:26-28 The only other time Mark used the Greek word *perilupos*, translated "very sorry" or "greatly distressed," was in 14:34 where it describes Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. This rare usage shows the extent of Antipas' anxiety over the dilemma Salome's request created for him. His pride got him in trouble, as Pilate's did later. Both of these rulers sacrificed a righteous and holy man on the altar of their personal popularity.

The Greek word *spekoulatora*, translated "executioner," is a Latinism reflecting the Roman influence on Mark's Gospel. It refers to a bodyguard of Herod's. The fact that John's "head" finally went to Herodias shows that she was the person responsible for his death. However, her husband gave the order to execute him, so he was also culpable. In Jesus' case, the Jewish religious leaders called for His death, as Herodias had done, and Pilate, like Herod, gave the official order for execution.

6:29 The parallels between John's burial and Jesus' are also striking (cf. 15:42-47). John died alone; his disciples were not with him. The same was true of Jesus, with the exception of His disciple John and some of His female disciples. Herod gave John's disciples permission to bury John's corpse, as Pilate permitted Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus. The disciples of each man gave their teacher an honorable burial in a tomb.

This pericope shows that people who preach repentance, and point to Jesus as the Messiah, can expect: opposition, persecution, imprisonment, and perhaps a martyr's death. This is a comfort for disciples who suffer for their witness for Jesus. It does not relieve them of their suffering or hold out the hope of escape, but it does enable them to see that they are in the best of company. This is some encouragement. Historically martyrs have found strength in remembering that they are part of a large company who have shared the sufferings of their Savior.

### **3. The return of the Twelve 6:30 (cf. Luke 9:10)**

This verse marks the conclusion of the apostolic mission of the Twelve that the writer introduced in verses 7-13. With that phase of Jesus' training of the Twelve completed, He moved on to the next stage.

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<sup>345</sup>Cranfield, p. 212.

This is the only time Mark called the Twelve "apostles" (Gr. *apostoloi*, lit. sent ones). There is not any good textual evidence for its presence in 3:14. The 12 apostles now returned to the One who had sent them out, and "reported to Him" regarding what had transpired. Mark used "apostles" in the general sense of authorized representatives or agents (cf. Acts 14:14; et al.), rather than as a technical title (cf. Eph. 2:20; et al.).

"This agent operates in the name of the one having given the authorization. Therefore, the term 'apostles' and their action of reporting to Jesus demonstrate the Twelve's dependent relationship to Jesus. Their mission was an extension of his mission."<sup>346</sup>

These men, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, later became the official "apostles." They evidently presented their report to Jesus somewhere in Galilee, possibly near Capernaum.

### **B. THE FIRST CYCLE OF SELF-REVELATION TO THE DISCIPLES 6:31—7:37**

Mark arranged selected events in Jesus' training of His disciples to show how He brought them to a deeper understanding of who He was, and to a deeper commitment to Himself. Jesus led them through two similar series of experiences to teach them these lessons. He had to do it twice because the disciples were slow to learn.

#### **1. The feeding of the 5,000 6:31-44 (cf. Matt. 14:13-21; Luke 9:11-17; John 6:1-13)**

Mark's account of this miracle plays an important role in his Gospel. The unusually long introduction provides the setting for this miracle. It stresses Jesus' humanity, and the miracle itself demonstrates His deity. Mark later referred to this miracle twice (6:52; 8:17-21), showing that the disciples did not learn what they should have from it. This meal on the mountainside contrasts with the feast in Antipas' fortress that Mark just described (vv. 17-29). It shows the simplicity of Jesus' provision for a vast multitude—compared to Herod's sumptuous and selfish banquet, that resulted in the death of a righteous and holy man.<sup>347</sup> There is also an emphasis in this section of the Gospel on how Jesus cares for His own.

6:31 This verse does not appear in any of the other Gospels. Jesus provided "rest" for His busy servants, by leading them out to a lonely area of wilderness (Gr. *eremos*), where the crowds—that were now greater than ever—were not as likely to follow (cf. 1:35). This place was near Bethsaida Julius on the northeast side of the lake (cf. Luke 9:10; John 6:1). It is interesting that Mark did not record Jesus' evaluation of the disciples' work, but mentioned His *consideration* for them as workers.

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<sup>346</sup>Guelich, pp. 338-39.

<sup>347</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, p. 227.

"For continued effectiveness, every worker must now and then stop to take a breath and relax a little."<sup>348</sup>

6:32-34 "Many" people anticipated where Jesus was heading with His disciples in a large "boat," probably a fishing boat (Gr. *plouion*). They were able to skirt the northern end of the lake "on foot," and meet the boat when it landed. Instead of feeling frustrated, Jesus felt compassion for the multitudes. He saw them as sheep lacking a shepherd who would provide for their needs (cf. Num. 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 18:16; Ezek. 34:5). As David had done, Jesus provided for His sheep in a remote wilderness area (John 10:1-21; cf. Ezek. 34:23-25). He began to teach them, and apparently did so for many hours (v. 35). Teaching was their greatest need, though healing was what they craved.

"The fact that we have six accounts of Jesus' feeding a multitude in the gospels (two in Mk, two parallels in Mt., one in Lk. And one in Jn) indicates that the early Church regarded the feeding(s) as being among the greatest and most luminous for faith of the mighty works of Jesus."<sup>349</sup>

6:35-36 The disciples assumed that Jesus wanted the people to provide their own suppers. They reminded Jesus of the time ("already quite late") so He could dismiss them. Jesus had something else in mind. He wanted to teach the disciples and the multitudes to look to Him for their needs. He was the ultimate source of all they needed.

"The extended conversation of Jesus with his disciples concerning bread is the distinctive element in the Marcan account of the feeding of the multitude."<sup>350</sup>

Bread is the pervading motif of 6:14—8:30.<sup>351</sup>

6:37 Jesus suggested that the disciples themselves feed the people, because He wanted them to realize their inability to do so. The word "you" is emphatic in the Greek text. Having admitted their inability, Jesus' ability would make a greater impression on them. It would teach them that He was different from them. The disciples' response shows that they had not yet learned to look to Jesus for all their needs. Instead of asking Him to provide what the people needed, they calculated the cost of the food and concluded that they could not afford to pay for it. "Two hundred denarii" was the equivalent of an entire year's wages for a day laborer (cf. Matt. 20:2).

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<sup>348</sup>Hiebert, p. 156.

<sup>349</sup>Cranfield, p. 216.

<sup>350</sup>Lane, p. 228.

<sup>351</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

6:38 Jesus asked them "how many loaves" of bread they had, because He would use what they had to feed the multitude. Normally Jesus uses what His disciples have to meet the needs of others. While the loaves were inadequate, they were still essential elements in this miracle. While disciples need to realize the inadequacy of their resources, they also need to understand that it is those resources, as inadequate as they are, that Jesus uses. The barley "loaves" in view were small and flat (cf. John 6:9). One person could eat several of them in one meal.<sup>352</sup> The "two *small* fish" (Gr. *opsaria*) were probably salted and dried, and were commonly eaten, bones and all, with bread as a relish.<sup>353</sup>

6:39-40 Mark alone noted the "green grass," thus dating this miracle in the late winter or early spring.<sup>354</sup> John dated it more specifically as near Pentecost, which fell in late March or early April (John 6:4). Hoehner dated this Pentecost at April 13-14, A.D. 32.<sup>355</sup> In the summer, much of the grass turns brown in Palestine, though even then green grass could have been found in sheltered places and near the lake.<sup>356</sup>

The orderly division of the people at least facilitated the distribution of food. The Greek phrases *symposia symposia* (v. 39) and *prasiai prasiai* (v. 40) picture the people spread out on the hillside like several garden plots. This organization may reflect the student-teacher relationship that the rabbis fostered by seating their students in rows.<sup>357</sup> This seems farfetched to me. Another suggestion is that Jesus intended this arrangement to recall Israel camping in the wilderness (cf. Exod. 18:21).<sup>358</sup> The reader should then view Jesus as the second Moses, and the crowd as the new people of God.<sup>359</sup> This view has some attractive elements. However, most of those present were probably unbelievers.

6:41 By praying, Jesus gave God thanks for ("blessed") the food and reminded the people that it came from Him. Giving thanks before meals was a common Jewish and early Christian practice. Jesus "blessed" God for giving the food. He did not bless the food itself. "Looking up toward heaven" further clarified that it was *God* to whom He was praying, though looking down while praying was customary. The bread was probably "finger-thick, plate-shaped loaves."<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>352</sup>Wessel, p. 673.

<sup>353</sup>Edersheim, 1:682.

<sup>354</sup>Barclay, p. 159.

<sup>355</sup>Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, p. 143.

<sup>356</sup>Mann, p. 302.

<sup>357</sup>P. Carrington, *According to Mark*, p. 136.

<sup>358</sup>Guelich, p. 341.

<sup>359</sup>Lane, pp. 229-30.

<sup>360</sup>Guelich, p. 342.

Mark did not record how Jesus performed the miracle, though evidently the multiplication happened in Jesus' hands. He stressed that it was Jesus who did it. This was the most important point to him. Jesus met the needs of people in innumerable creative ways. It is important for disciples to focus on the source of the provision, God, rather than the means and methods He uses to provide. By thanking God for the food, and then providing it miraculously for the people, Jesus was presenting evidence that He was God. Thoughtful individuals in the crowd remembered God's miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness (John 6:14), and realized that Jesus was God's Servant who delivered what God provided; i.e., He was "a second Moses."

Jesus served the people through the disciples, who presented what He had provided to the multitudes. The disciples served as waiters. This is the work of servant disciples. This was another lesson in discipleship.

"So, too, He can take, bless and break our lives, to be a blessing to the spiritually hungry multitudes in the world around us (cf. Mk. xiv. 22, the Last Supper)."<sup>361</sup>

6:42-44

The abundance and adequacy of Jesus' provision were obvious in the amount of food scraps that remained uneaten. The "baskets" (Gr. *kophinoi*), "twelve full" ones, were large wicker types, though there was not much edible food left over. Some authorities believe *kophinoi* describes small baskets, but most believe they were large. Jesus provides generously, but He does not provide so extravagantly that there is needless waste.

"It is possible to conclude that the leftovers gave each disciple enough food for his own use. When we put the will of God first, He will care for our needs (Matt. 6:33) and provide our daily bread."<sup>362</sup>

This miracle revealed the person of Jesus to the multitudes, but it was its effect on the disciples that Mark stressed. As noted, this miraculous event contained many lessons about discipleship, as well as revelations of Jesus' identity.

## **2. Jesus' walking on the water and the return to Galilee 6:45-56**

Jesus now returned from the northeast coast of the lake to its northwest coast.

### **The walking on the water 6:45-52 (cf. Matt. 14:22-33; John 6:14-21)**

This miracle followed the feeding of the 5,000 by just a few hours. Both miracles were important parts of Jesus' discipleship training program for the Twelve. Earlier Jesus had

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<sup>361</sup>Cole, pp. 114-15.

<sup>362</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1654.

calmed the sea with a command from His *mouth* (4:35-41). Here, He used His *whole body* to walk on top of the sea.

6:45 The feeding of the 5,000 evidently happened on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee, south of "Bethsaida Julias." This town stood immediately east of the place where the Jordan River empties into the lake on its northern coast. Some of the town may have been on the western side of the Jordan.<sup>363</sup>

Evidently Jesus sent His disciples to a different "Bethsaida," near Capernaum, by boat (cf. John 6:17). Peter, Andrew, and Philip were evidently from this other Bethsaida (John 1:45; 12:21), and Peter and Andrew's home was in Capernaum (Mark 1:29). So the two villages must have been very close together, perhaps even connected.<sup>364</sup> "The boat" was the one they had used to travel in earlier that day (v. 32). God had appeared to Israel from a mountain (Deut. 33:2; Hab. 3:3), and now Jesus appeared to His disciples after being on a mountain with God in prayer.<sup>365</sup>

6:46 This is the second of the three crises, all at night, that moved Jesus to pray, that Mark recorded (cf. 1:35; 14:32-36). Evidently the desire of the multitudes—to take Jesus by force to make Him king—drove Him to pray (Gr. *proseuchomai*, cf. John 6:15). This was another temptation to secure Israel's leadership without the Cross. References to Jesus praying always show His humanity and His dependence on His Father. The mountain contrasts with the shore where Jesus left the disciples.

"As in 1:35, Jesus' praying may recommend him as a godly person, not a criminal worthy of crucifixion; but there is no indication that he prays for power to work miracles. According to Mark, that power already resides in Jesus."<sup>366</sup>

6:47-48 The disciples had evidently reached Bethsaida Julias, but Jesus had not yet come to them (John 6:17). The disciples had then turned their boat toward Capernaum (cf. John 6:17). Perhaps Mark implied that Jesus had supernatural vision.<sup>367</sup> Others have suggested that it would have been easy for Jesus to see the disciples from His prayer site on the hilltop, since they would have been only a few miles from where He was praying. Perhaps the moon illuminated the lake.

The disciples were "in the middle of the lake (sea)," in the sense that they were quite far from the coastline. The "fourth watch of the night"—by Roman reckoning, which Mark followed—would have been between 3:00

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<sup>363</sup>Hiebert, p. 164.

<sup>364</sup>Edersheim, 2:3-4.

<sup>365</sup>Guelich, p. 349.

<sup>366</sup>Gundry, p. 335.

<sup>367</sup>Ibid., p. 336.



and 6:00 a.m. (The Jews divided the night into three watches.<sup>368</sup>) Jesus intended to pass beside the disciples, perhaps to reassure them (cf. Exod. 33:19, 22; 34:6; 1 Kings 19:11; Mark 6:50).

"Mark relates that 'He would have passed by them [*sic*, them],' affecting strangeness, as we understand it, out of delicate consideration for their weakness. He knew what He would be taken for when first observed; and therefore He wished to attract their attention at a safe distance, fearing lest, by appearing among them at once, He might drive them distracted [*insane*]."<sup>369</sup>

Another explanation is that Jesus intended to pass by them because He wanted the disciples to call to Him for help (cf. Luke 24:29).<sup>370</sup>

"I have some good news for you, Christian friend. 'He saw them toiling in rowing ['straining at the oars,' v. 48].' He sees you. He knows your problems. You don't have to send up a flare to let Him know. He already knows."<sup>371</sup>

Even though Jesus had been praying, He had not forgotten or forsaken His disciples. He was probably praying for them.

". . . instead of a story about Jesus' rescue of his disciples who are distressed but not in danger (cf. 4:35-41), this is an epiphany story about Jesus' self-revelation to his own followers."<sup>372</sup>

"Whenever the master is absent from the disciples (or appears to be so, as in Ch. 4:35-41), they find themselves in distress. And each time they experience anguish it is because they lack faith (Chs. 4:35ff.; 6:45ff.; 9:14ff.)."<sup>373</sup>

6:49-50 Mark noted that "all" the disciples "saw" Jesus, and they all thought He was a phantom (Gr. *phantasma*). Jesus told them to "take courage" and stop fearing (cf. Isa. 41:10, 13-14; 43:1; 44:2). Some interpreters believe the reference to Jesus passing by them (v. 48) and His words, "It is I," indicate a theophany (cf. Exod. 3:14; 33:19, 22; 1 Kings 19:11; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 51:12; 52:6). Undoubtedly the clause at least indicates self-identification.

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<sup>368</sup>Cranfield, p. 226.

<sup>369</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 133.

<sup>370</sup>Ryrie, p. 111; Cole, p. 116.

<sup>371</sup>McGee, 4:188.

<sup>372</sup>Guelich., p. 350.

<sup>373</sup>Lane, p. 235.

". . . Jesus' walking on the water (6:45-52) connotes that Jesus treads where only God can walk [Job 9:8; cf. Ps. 77:19; Isa. 43:16] and designates Jesus by the same expression (*ego eime* [I am]) that is used for God's self-disclosure to Moses (Exod 3:14 LXX)."<sup>374</sup>

"Consequently, as the concluding story of the miracle collection, it provides the answer to the 'Who is this?' question posed by the disciples after Jesus stills the storm in the opening story of the collection (4:41)."<sup>375</sup>

6:51 Mark omitted the record of Peter walking on the water (Matt. 14:28-31). This seems unusual if Peter influenced Mark's writing. Perhaps Peter "was reluctant to picture himself in such a unique and spectacular incident."<sup>376</sup>

Another miracle happened (cf. 4:35-41). "The wind" died down ("stopped") as soon as Jesus stepped "into the boat." This "astonished" (Gr. *existanto*, cf. 2:12; 5:42) the disciples further.

6:52 Here is the reason the disciples reacted as they did in this series of miracles. Mark alone recorded it, probably as a result of Peter's preaching. The disciples had "not" learned ("gained any insight") from the feeding of the 5,000 ("the loaves")—that Jesus was God. Their collective mind was not open to this possibility.

"For Mark, this is a major lesson about disciples that stands at the heart of his Gospel. The event is a test, because once Jesus gets into the boat, they arrive quickly on the shore."<sup>377</sup>

### Healings near Gennesaret 6:53-56 (cf. Matt. 14:34-36)

Jesus returned to the northwest area of the Sea of Galilee coast from the predominantly Gentile area where He had been recently.

". . . the literal storm on the water was succeeded by a spiritual storm on the land, equally sudden and violent, and not less perilous to the souls of the twelve than the other had been to their bodies."<sup>378</sup>

6:53 "Gennesaret" was the name of both a town and the plain on which the town stood.<sup>379</sup> The region was the northwest coast of the lake. It was so

<sup>374</sup>Edwards, p. 223.

<sup>375</sup>Guelich, p. 351.

<sup>376</sup>Hiebert, p. 167.

<sup>377</sup>Bock, p. 218.

<sup>378</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 130.

<sup>379</sup>For Josephus' description of the countryside, see *The Wars . . .*, 3:10:8.

prominent because of its agricultural richness that another name for the Sea of Galilee was the Sea of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).<sup>380</sup> It was an area of dense population.

6:54-56 These verses summarize Jesus' ministry in many towns on many days before His next withdrawal to Phoenicia. Mark stressed the immense popularity of Jesus and His generous healing of multitudes of "sick" people. "Cured" (v. 56) is literally "saved" (Gr. *sozo*). The sick experienced deliverance from their infirmities and restoration to physical soundness. That is the salvation in view.

### **3. The controversy with the Pharisees and scribes over defilement 7:1-23 (cf. Matt. 15:1-20)**

This confrontation played an important part in Jesus' decision to withdraw from Galilee again (v. 24; cf. 2:1—3:6). Along with mounting popularity (6:53-56) came increasing opposition from the Jewish religious leaders. This section is essentially another block of Jesus' teaching. It revealed Jesus further and continued the preparation of the disciples for what lay ahead of them. In Mark's narrative, the words "unclean" (vv. 2, 5, 15, 18, 20, 23) and "tradition" (vv. 3, 5, 8, 9, 13) are key.

#### **The religious leaders' objection 7:1-5**

7:1-2 For a second time, Mark recorded a delegation of religious leaders coming from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus (cf. 3:22). The writer clarified what "ceremonially impure" hands were—"that is, unwashed"—for his Gentile readers. The "scribes" and "Pharisees" were not objecting because the disciples were eating with dirty hands, but because they had not gone through the accepted purification rituals before eating with their hands.

7:3-4 These verses do not appear in Matthew's parallel account. They explain Pharisaic tradition for those unfamiliar with it, such as Mark's original Gentile readers. In Jesus' day, "the Jews" communicated "the traditions of the elders" *orally*, from generation to generation. About A.D. 200, the rabbis completed compiling these into the Mishnah, which became the basis for the Talmud (ca. A.D. 425). The Pharisees customarily washed themselves after visiting the marketplace, in order to rid themselves of the defilement that contact with Gentiles produced. Most Jews regarded breaking these traditions as sin.<sup>381</sup>

"Indeed, a Rabbi who had held this command in contempt was actually buried in excommunication."<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>380</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 3:10:8.

<sup>381</sup>See Barclay, pp. 166-69, for a good explanation of ceremonial uncleanness.

<sup>382</sup>Edersheim, 2:10.

7:5 The critics asked Jesus for an explanation of His disciples' conduct because, as their teacher, He was responsible for them. They suspected that the disciples' failure to wash properly indicated that Jesus disregarded all the traditions of the elders. *Walking* is a Hebrew figure of speech meaning habitual conduct (e.g., Gen. 5:24; Ps. 1:1). It occurs frequently in John's Gospel and in Paul's epistles.

### Jesus' teaching about the source of authority 7:6-13

In replying, Jesus did not explain or justify His disciples' conduct. Instead He addressed the issue of the source of religious authority (vv. 6-13) and the nature of defilement (vv. 14-23).

7:6-7 Jesus boldly called His critics "hypocrites." They professed to honor God with their behavior, but they really did not honor Him in their hearts. What "Isaiah" said about the hypocrites in his day fit these critics exactly. They stressed human "precepts" to the exclusion of principles.

"Jesus calls the opponents 'hypocrites' (*hupokriton*), a word in classical Greek that means 'to play a part,' an 'actor.' It does not carry the moral overtone of fraud that our English word does today. Rather it refers to the discrepancy in the behavior of one who unconsciously has alienated oneself from God, an 'ungodly' person . . . by one's actions . . ." <sup>383</sup>

7:8-9 Jesus differentiated the commands of God from the traditions of men. The rabbis had built a fence around the law—by erecting their "dos" and "don'ts"—to prevent the Israelites from breaking the law. However, rather than protecting it, their legalistic requirements distorted and even contradicted the law. This is always the problem that accompanies attempting to legislate obedience to God's Word. Legalism involves making laws that God has not made and treating them as equally authoritative as God's Word. The Pharisees had even abandoned God's commandments in favor of their oral traditions that came from men. Jesus rejected the authority of the oral law.

7:10-13 Jesus cited an example of how His critics used human traditions to "set aside" divine imperatives. They professed to honor "Moses," through whom God commanded the Israelites to "honor" their "parents," and threatened disobedience with death (Exod. 20:12; 21:17). Honoring parents manifests itself in financial support and practical care if necessary.

Mark interpreted the word "*corban*," a gift devoted to God, for his Gentile readers.<sup>384</sup> This word is Greek, but it transliterates a Hebrew word that the Jews used when they dedicated something to God. Jewish tradition

<sup>383</sup>Guelich, p. 366.

<sup>384</sup>See also Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1:22.

permitted people to declare something they owned as *dedicated to God*.<sup>385</sup> This did not mean that they had to give it to the priests, or even give up the use of it themselves. However, it freed them from giving it to someone else—even a needy parent.<sup>386</sup>

"History reveals that the Jewish religious leaders came to honor their traditions far above the Word of God. Rabbi Eleazer said, 'He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come.' The *Mishna*, a collection of Jewish traditions in the *Talmud*, records, 'It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.' But before we criticize our Jewish friends, perhaps we should examine what influence 'the church fathers' are having in our own Christian churches. We also may be guilty of replacing God's truth with man's traditions."<sup>387</sup>

Jesus claimed the authority to reorder social relationships. He said a son's responsibility to provide for his parents superseded the legal option of *corban*.<sup>388</sup> Perhaps Christians can give too much to the Lord's work, if they fail to discharge their personal responsibilities by donating that money.

"Someone told me some time ago that his father was in the hospital and his mother was sick but that he had some money set aside as a church contribution. When I inquired further, he said his parents were really in dire need and would have to accept charity if he didn't help them. So I told him that his responsibility was to them. We get some strange, pious notions today."<sup>389</sup>

Note that Jesus equated what Moses said (v. 10) with the Word of God (v. 13). He also attributed Mosaic authorship to the Torah, something many liberal modern critics of the Bible deny. Jesus' enemies failed to recognize the difference between inspired and uninspired instruction. The "you" in verse 11 is in the emphatic first position in the Greek text, indicating a strong contrast between God's view and the critics'. They had not only rejected God's Word (v. 9), but they had even invalidated it, that is, robbed it of its authority (v. 12). Mark included Jesus' words that indicated this was only one example, of how these Pharisees and scribes

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<sup>385</sup>See Guelich., p. 369, for an example.

<sup>386</sup>Cranfield, p. 237.

<sup>387</sup>Wiersbe, 1:134.

<sup>388</sup>Edwards, p. 224.

<sup>389</sup>McGee, 4:213.

had voided, by their traditions, the authority of what God had revealed (v. 13).

"We must have a care that we never allow rules and regulations to paralyse [*sic*] the claims of charity and love."<sup>390</sup>

### **Jesus' teaching about the true nature of defilement 7:14-23**

Jesus continued His response to the critics by focusing on the particular practice that they had objected to (v. 5). The question of what constituted defilement was very important. The Jews had wandered far from God's will in this matter because of their traditions.

7:14-15 [16] What Jesus had to say was so important that He urged "the crowd" present to "listen" carefully to His words (cf. 4:3). His response so far had been to His critics primarily.

Verse 15 states the general principle. It clarifies what does not and what does cause uncleanness. Food does not, but thoughts do (cf. Isa. 29:13). Obviously Jesus was speaking morally and spiritually, not medically and physiologically. Jesus clarified the intent of the Mosaic laws regarding clean and unclean food (Lev. 11; Deut. 14). The Jew who ate unclean food became unclean because he or she disobeyed God's Word, not because the food made him or her unclean.

"In essence the saying enunciates the principle that only *persons* can be unclean, not *things*."<sup>391</sup>

Verse 16 is of questionable authenticity. Later copyists may have added it as a result of reading 4:9 and or 4:23. It may be genuine since many early manuscripts contain it. Most modern translators have judged it a later addition to the text.

7:17 Jesus had finished His response to His critics and His teaching of the multitude. He went into "the house" nearby with His disciples. There they asked Him a question that indicated they had not understood what He meant. What He had said was revolutionary when He said it. They probably could not believe that He really meant what He had said. In Mark's Gospel, a house was a common setting where Jesus taught His disciples privately (cf. 9:28, 33; 10:10).

7:18-19 The disciples had heard and seen enough to have been able to understand Jesus' meaning. Their "hardness of heart" is a prominent theme in 6:31—8:26 (cf. 6:52; 8:14-21).

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<sup>390</sup>Barclay, p. 174.

<sup>391</sup>Mann, p. 316.

Mark interpreted the significance of Jesus' teaching for his Gentile readers. Mark meant that Christians need not observe the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law (cf. Rom. 14:14; Gal. 2:11-17; Col. 2:20-22). This was a freedom that Jewish Christians struggled with for many years during the infancy of the church (cf. Acts 10; 11; 15). Later revelation clarified that Jesus terminated the entire Mosaic Law as a code (Rom. 10:4; et al.).

"In vv 6-13 Jesus equated the Mosaic law [*sic* Law] with God's Word and scolded the Pharisees for nullifying God's Word with their tradition. Now Jesus himself is nullifying God's Word with regard to food. But it is the prerogative of Jesus as God's Son to change the Law. Such a change does not count as human tradition, for Jesus' word is divine."<sup>392</sup>

"This statement ["Thus He declared all foods clean"] clearly has its eye on a situation such as developed in the Pauline mission churches in which questions of clean and unclean foods (cf. Acts 10:9-16; 11:5-10 and see Rom 14:13ff.) and idol-meats became live issues (as we know from I Cor 8:10). This chapter in Mark 7 is perhaps the most obvious declaration of Mark's purpose as a Christian living in the Graeco-Roman world who wishes to publicize the charter of Gentile freedom by recording in the plainest terms Jesus' detachment from Jewish ceremonial [*sic* ceremony] and to spell out in clear tones the application of this to his readers."<sup>393</sup>

If Peter did influence Mark's writing, it is interesting that the disciple who struggled with unwillingness to abandon the dietary laws should have spoken out so strongly for their termination. Mark apparently got the material for his Gospel mainly from Peter's sermons, as mentioned earlier. Thus it appears that Peter finally learned this lesson.

"These ceremonial regulations in the law had a function as symbolically teaching the reality and importance of *moral* purity. They demanded an external separation which pointed to the need for an inner heart condition of separation unto God. But these external regulations in themselves did not convey the purity of heart to which they pointed. They were the shadow and not the substance (Heb. 10:1). When they found their fulfillment in Christ, these ceremonial foreshadowings became obsolete."<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>392</sup>Gundry, p. 356.

<sup>393</sup>Martin, p. 220.

<sup>394</sup>Hiebert, p. 181.

"In effect Jesus was saying that *things* cannot be either unclean or clean in any real religious sense of the term. Only *persons* can be really defiled; and what defiles a person is his own actions, which are the product of his own heart."<sup>395</sup>

7:20-23 Jesus repeated and became more specific so the disciples would understand Him. The list of sins proceeds from six actions to six attitudes (cf. Rom 1:29-31; Gal. 5:19-23). Matthew's record included only six sins. "Evil thoughts" are the ground out of which the evil actions and attitudes grow. The order in the text is true to life. Sin proceeds from the heart (human nature) to the thoughts (human mind) to actions (human deeds).

This controversy with the Pharisees and the scribes was a factor that led Jesus to withdraw from Galilee a third time (cf. 4:35-36; 6:31-32).

#### **4. Jesus' teaching about bread and the exorcism of a Phoenician girl** **7:24-30 (cf. Matt. 15:21-28)**

Jesus increased His ministry to Gentiles as He experienced increasing rejection from the Jews. This third withdrawal from Galilee took Jesus outside Palestine for the first time. Mark also recorded Jesus doing more things outside of Galilee, and fewer things within Galilee, than the other evangelists. By pointing this out, Mark helped his readers realize that ministry to Gentiles was God's will, in view of Israel's final rejection of Jesus. One writer believed the point of this story was simply that Jesus could heal.<sup>396</sup> But this seems shortsighted. Mark included three events that occurred outside Palestine and one following Jesus' return.

There is a logical connection between this section and the one that precedes it (7:1-23). Jesus had explained why He did not observe the traditional separation from defiling associations. Now He illustrated that by going into Gentile territory. This contact would have rendered Him ceremonial unclean according to the Jews' traditions.

"The previous incident shows Jesus wiping out the distinction between clean and unclean foods. Can it be that here, in symbol, we have Jesus wiping out the difference between clean and unclean people?"<sup>397</sup>

7:24 Mark normally began a new paragraph with the Greek word *kai* ("and"). Here he used *de* ("and" or "now"). This difference indicates a significant change in the narrative. The hostility of Israel's leaders led Jesus to correct them "and" to leave Galilee for ministry elsewhere.

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<sup>395</sup>Barclay, pp. 175-76.

<sup>396</sup>R. S. Sugirtharajah, "The Syrophoenician Woman," *The Expository Times* 98:1 (October 1986):13-15.

<sup>397</sup>Barclay, p. 180.



The New Testament writers often spoke of Phoenicia as "the land (region) of Tyre (and or Sidon)," because they were the two notable cities of the region. Tyre stood on the Mediterranean coast about 40 miles northwest of Capernaum. Jesus went there to be alone with the disciples. Nevertheless His fame accompanied Him, and He was not able to remain *incognito*. Josephus described the people of this region as follows:

". . . they are known to have born [*sic*] the greatest ill will toward us . . ." <sup>398</sup>

7:25-26 "Syrophoenician" combines the terms Syrian and Phoenician. Phoenicia was a part of the larger Roman province of Syria, which also included all of Palestine—Galilee, Samaria, Perea, Judea, Idumea, and other regions.<sup>399</sup> Other Phoenicians lived elsewhere, since they were a great seafaring and commercial people. For example, the Libyo-Phoenicians lived in North Africa.<sup>400</sup> "Syrophoenician" specifically distinguished the Phoenicians of Syria from the Carthaginians.<sup>401</sup>

The woman who heard about Jesus and sought Him out was a Gentile. A demon was afflicting her young daughter (cf. v. 30). Her persistent request for help demonstrated her faith in Jesus. She believed Jesus could heal her if He would do so.

7:27-28 Jesus probably conversed with the woman in the Greek language, which was common in that area. The woman conceded that the Jews had a prior claim on Jesus' ministry. Nonetheless if the little pet dogs (Gr. *kynarion*) get the table scraps, then she felt she had a right to a crumb from Jesus' table. She implied that the Gentiles need not wait to receive Jesus' blessings until a later time. They could feed when "the children" did, namely, during Jesus' ministry. A little Gentile blessing would not deprive the Jews of what God wanted them to have.

"The Gentiles are not called 'dogs' but 'doggies,' not outside scavengers, but household companions."<sup>402</sup>

"This 'title' of 'Lord' that consistently comes on the lips of 'believers' in Matthew occurs only this one time with confession overtones in Mark and sets the stage for Jesus' concluding remark and his offer of help to the woman."<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>398</sup>Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1:13.

<sup>399</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, pp. 1656-57.

<sup>400</sup>Wessel, p. 682.

<sup>401</sup>Cranfield, p. 247.

<sup>402</sup>Plummer, p. 189.

<sup>403</sup>Guelich, p. 588.

7:29-30 The woman's answer had revealed a quick wit and humility, but it was her persistent faith that Jesus rewarded (cf. Matt. 15:28).

"In contrast to the tradition of the elders Jesus [authoritatively] embraces the alienated of the Mosaic and rabbinic tradition: a leper (1:40-45), tax collectors and sinners (2:13-17), and even unclean Gentiles, including a Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30)."<sup>404</sup>

The woman's departure for home without Jesus also shows her faith. This is the only instance of Jesus healing from a distance—without a vocal command—that Mark recorded. As such, it demonstrates the great power of Jesus working for this woman's need. The healing was instantaneous, as usual. Perhaps one of the disciples accompanied the woman and reported what Mark wrote in verse 30.

This incident would have sparked special interest for Gentile readers. It shows that Jesus rewards Gentile faith as well as Jewish faith. Jesus had come to deliver both Gentiles and Jews (10:45).

### **5. The healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment 7:31-36**

Mark was the only evangelist to record this miracle. He apparently included it in his Gospel because it is another instance of Jesus healing a Gentile. This particular miracle is also significant because it prefigured Jesus opening the spiritual ears of His disciples. From 6:31, the beginning of the second withdrawal and return, to 7:37, Jesus had been revealing Himself with increasing clarity to the disciples but with little response. A repetition of some of these lessons followed, culminating in the disciples' confession of Jesus as the divine Messiah (8:1-30).

7:31 Jesus took a circular route, first traveling north toward Sidon, which stood about 20 miles north of Tyre, and then eventually back to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. He penetrated deep into Gentile territory. The Decapolis region was also primarily Gentile (cf. 5:1-20). Evidently Jesus looped around northern Palestine and approached the Sea of Galilee from the north or east. This trip may have taken several weeks or even months.<sup>405</sup>

7:32 The Greek word describing this man's speech impediment, *mogilalos*, is a rare one. It occurs only here in the New Testament, and only in Isaiah 35:6 in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Its presence there is significant because Isaiah predicted that Messiah would loose the tongues of the dumb when He came (cf. v. 37).

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<sup>404</sup>Edwards, p. 224.

<sup>405</sup>Blunt, p. 192.

"Defective speech usually results from defective hearing, both physically and spiritually."<sup>406</sup>

7:33 Jesus had personal contact with this man, as He did with so many others He healed, which Mark stressed. Jesus apparently did what He did to help the man place his trust in Himself.

"The laying on of hands would of itself have been sufficiently efficacious, and even, without moving a finger, he might have accomplished it by a single act of his will; but it is evident that he made abundant use of outward signs, when they were found to be advantageous. Thus, by touching the tongue with spittle, he intended to point out that the faculty of speech was communicated by himself alone; and by putting his fingers into the ears, he showed that it belonged to his office to pierce the ears of the deaf."<sup>407</sup>

"These symbolic acts, common enough among Greek and Jewish healers, suggest to the sufferer the possibility that he might be cured."<sup>408</sup>

Jesus may have spat on the ground first, and then "touched" the man's "tongue" with His finger. Both acts would have told the man that Jesus intended to do something about his tongue and mouth.

". . . spittle supposedly had a therapeutic function in both the Greco-Roman (e.g., Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28.4.7; Tacitus, *Hist.* 6.18; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 7) and the Jewish world (Str-B, 2:15-17)"<sup>409</sup>

7:34-35 "Looking up to heaven" and sighing were also acts intended to communicate with the man. By looking up, Jesus associated the coming healing with God. By sighing or groaning, He conveyed His compassion for the man and the fact that the healing involved spiritual warfare.<sup>410</sup> This was an unusually difficult miracle, and even Jesus had to take special measures to perform it.

"No one tells us so much about the emotions of Jesus as Mark does."<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>406</sup>Grassmick, p. 136.

<sup>407</sup>Calvin, 2:271-72. Cf. Gundry, p. 383.

<sup>408</sup>Mann, p. 323.

<sup>409</sup>Guelich, p. 395. Str-B is H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*.

<sup>410</sup>Cranfield, p. 252.

<sup>411</sup>Barclay, p. xix.

Jesus spoke in Aramaic since this was the language that was common in Palestine (cf. 5:41). Probably the man could read Jesus' lips. Jesus' healing was again instantaneous. Not only could the man now speak, but he spoke without any defect. Jesus' elaborate use of means to heal this man would have minimized the possibility of magic and focused attention on Him as the Healer.

7:36 Another command to keep the miracle quiet went unheeded (cf. 1:44; 5:43).

"The conduct of the multitude is a good example of the way in which men treat Jesus, yielding him all homage, except obedience."<sup>412</sup>

"Jesus' role once known always draws a crowd in Mark."<sup>413</sup>

"The difficult conflicts . . . lie not with demons, for Jesus has authority from God to destroy them, nor does Jesus struggle much in conflict with nature, for Jesus has authority over it. The difficult conflicts arise with people, for Jesus has no authority to control them; people choose and nothing can be forced upon them. . . . He can successfully order a deaf-mute to hear and talk, but he cannot make him keep quiet or stop others from listening to him. Furthermore, he cannot make his disciples understand nor can he constrain the authorities to stop opposing him."<sup>414</sup>

### **6. The preliminary confession of faith 7:37 (cf. Matt. 15:29-31)**

Mark expressed the crowd's amazement with a strong word that appears only here in the New Testament: *hyperperissos*. It means "extremely overwhelmed" (cf. 1:22; 6:2; 10:26; 11:18). Their statement that Jesus did everything "well" recalls Genesis 1:31, where Moses wrote that God saw that everything that He had created was good. The restoration of hearing to the deaf and speaking to the dumb was the work of God (cf. Isa. 35:3-6). Mathew recorded that Jesus healed many other people with various afflictions at this time (Matt. 15:29-31).

### **C. THE SECOND CYCLE OF SELF-REVELATION TO THE DISCIPLES 8:1-30**

The disciples had not yet understood the lessons that Jesus sought to teach them. Mark constructed his Gospel to show that in His discipleship training, Jesus repeated His lessons in order to train the disciples. One writer noticed the following repetitive parallel structure in this section of the Gospel.<sup>415</sup>

<sup>412</sup>Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 139.

<sup>413</sup>Guelich, p. 397.

<sup>414</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 78.

<sup>415</sup>Lane, p. 269.

6:31-44	Feeding of the multitude	8:1-9
6:45-56	Crossing of the sea and landing	8:10
7:1-23	Conflict with the Pharisees	8:11-13
7:24-30	Conversation about bread	8:14-21
7:31-36	Healing	8:22-26
7:37	Confession of faith	8:27-30

### **1. The feeding of the 4,000 8:1-9 (cf. Matt. 15:32-38)**

This miracle repeated the lesson of the feeding of the 5,000—for the disciples who had not learned what they should have from the former miracle (vv. 17-21).<sup>416</sup>

"Mark clearly understood that there were two occasions when Jesus miraculously fed a multitude."<sup>417</sup>

<b>JESUS' TWO MIRACULOUS FEEDINGS</b>			
5 loaves and 2 fishes	Matt. 14:17, 19; Mark 6:38, 41; Luke 9:13, 16; John 6:9	7 loaves and a few fish	Matt. 15:34, 36; Mark 8:5-7
12 baskets of fragments	Matt. 14:20; Mark 6:43; Luke 9:17; John 6:13	7 baskets of fragments	Matt. 15:37; Mark 8:8
5,000 men plus women and children	Matt. 14:21; Mark 6:44; Luke 9:14; John 6:10	4,000 men plus women and children	Matt. 15:38; Mark 8:9

8:1-3 Jesus and His disciples were still in the Decapolis region east of the lake. "Three days" had passed and the crowds were now hungry, having exhausted the provisions they had brought with them. Perhaps Jesus waited three days to see if the disciples would ask Him to feed this crowd as He had fed the former one (6:31-44). They did not. Jesus' "compassion" for the multitude led Him to articulate their plight. Even with this cue, the disciples did not ask Jesus to meet the need. Even the similar surroundings did not jog the disciples' memories.

8:4 Why did the disciples not catch on? Probably several months had passed since Jesus fed the 5,000. People tend to forget even great events. Moreover, depending on Jesus rather than relying on self is a very difficult lesson to learn, especially when one has a limited perception of who Jesus

<sup>416</sup>See E. Schuyler English, "A Neglected Miracle," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):300-5.

<sup>417</sup>Lane, p. 272.

is. Furthermore, Jesus' occasional reluctance to perform miracles may have discouraged the disciples from asking Him for help.<sup>418</sup> Their question revealed their blindness. Rather than thinking about sending the crowds away, they despaired of finding enough bread to satisfy everyone in that wilderness (Gr. *eremon*, cf. 6:32). At least they referred their question to Jesus this time (cf. 6:37).

8:5 Jesus asked them the same question He had voiced before He fed the 5,000 (6:38). Even this did not remind the disciples to trust Jesus to provide for their need.

8:6-7 Mark explained exactly what Jesus did, and with greater precision than Matthew did (Matt. 15:36). This reflects his typical interest in detail.

"Comparing Jesus' prayers offered before these two feeding miracles shows that the first included the Jewish blessing of looking toward heaven (6:41), whereas the second was a simple thanksgiving (8:6)."<sup>419</sup>

8:8-9 Jesus' provision was again typically adequate, and abundant, but not excessive. The type of basket mentioned (Gr. *spuris*) was large enough to carry a man (cf. Acts 9:25).

Some critics of the Bible have argued that Matthew and Mark told the story of one miraculous feeding twice and made mistakes that account for the differences in the accounts.<sup>420</sup> However, the differences between the two stories are so great that most readers believe Jesus fed two different groups of people, on two separate occasions.

Another debatable point is whether this crowd was Gentile, since the location was primarily Gentile, and the former crowd was Jewish, in view of its location. Probably there were more Gentiles present on this occasion and more Jews on the other. This points to a mixture of Jews and Gentiles that Jesus helped and that believed on Him, prefiguring the mixed composition of the church and the kingdom.

## **2. The return to Galilee 8:10 (cf. Matt. 15:39)**

Jesus and the disciples had returned to Galilee by boat after they had fed the 5,000 (6:45-56). They did the same thing after feeding the 4,000. The exact location of "Dalmanutha" is unknown, but it must have been near Magadan (Magdala?) on the west side of the lake (Matt. 15:39).

"Magadan was the name of a town, while Dalmanutha in Aramaic meant 'the harbor.' Thus Dalmanutha was the harbor of Magadan and was located near Capernaum."<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>418</sup>Cranfield, p. 205.

<sup>419</sup>Bailey, p. 80.

<sup>420</sup>E.g., Gould, p. 142.

<sup>421</sup>J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, pp. 246-47.

### **3. Conflict with the Pharisees over signs 8:11-13 (cf. Matt. 16:1-4)**

Matthew's account of this incident is fuller than Mark's. Probably Mark just summarized it, to parallel 7:1-23, and so advance his theme of discipleship training.

8:11 Matthew noted that the Sadducees accompanied the Pharisees (Matt. 15:1). They came out from Jerusalem again just to argue, not to learn. They asked Jesus to provide some confirmation of His divine authority and trustworthiness. They wanted an immediate, public, definitive proof that God was with Him (cf. 11:30). They had previously concluded that His power came from Satan (3:22). The miracles that Jesus performed did not convince them. They were not requesting another one of these, but a different type of verification—perhaps similar to those that God gave the Israelites at Mt. Sinai to authenticate Moses as His servant. They did this to subject Jesus to a trial (Gr. *peirazo*) that would reveal His true character. They hoped to expose Him as a phony.

"'Sign' (*semeion*) consistently differs in Mark from 'wonders' or 'miracles' (*dunameis*). Nowhere in the Synoptics does 'sign' refer to a 'miracle' or is a miraculous event called a 'sign.' . . . They sought a 'sign' in the OT Jewish sense, a confirmation or authentication of Jesus' ministry."<sup>422</sup>

". . . the Synoptists use *semeion* to denote an outward compelling proof of divine authority . . ."<sup>423</sup>

Probably the Pharisees wanted Jesus to give them indisputable proof that God confirmed Jesus' credibility.<sup>424</sup>

"The Pharisees were progressive, a party among, though not of, the people. Their goal was that Israel should become the righteous nation of the covenant. To this end they taught compliance with the 'tradition of the elders,' an oral code of conduct effectively adapting the law of Moses to later times and changing demands."<sup>425</sup>

8:12 The Greek word translated "sighing deeply" is *anastenazo*.

"It describes Jesus' grief and disappointment when faced with the unbelief of those who, because of their spiritual privileges, ought to have been more responsive to him."<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup>Guelich, p. 413.

<sup>423</sup>Cranfield, p. 257.

<sup>424</sup>Guelich, p. 414.

<sup>425</sup>Kingsbury, pp. 63-64.

<sup>426</sup>Wessel, p. 688. Cf. Gundry, p. 402.

"His spirit" refers to Jesus' human spirit. The contemporary Jews who opposed Jesus constituted the "generation" to which He referred. He refused to give the type of sign they requested, because the evidence that He had presented was more than adequate to convince an open-minded person. Jesus distinguished between miracles (Gr. *dynamis*) and signs (Gr. *semeion*) by using the second word here. He had given plenty of miracles to bolster faith. He would not give "a sign" to those bent on disbelieving. From this, Mark's readers were to learn that Jesus' miracles were ample proof of His deity.

8:13 Jesus again left the presence of unbelievers (cf. 4:35; 7:24). He acted in keeping with His pronounced judgment. He departed for the northeast coast of the lake. From now on, Jesus' ministry focused more on His disciples than on the public.

This incident was and is a lesson to disciples on the importance of accepting the evidence that Jesus has given concerning His supernatural person.

#### **4. Jesus' teaching about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod 8:14-21** **(cf. Matt. 16:5-12)**

This pericope parallels and recalls Jesus' teaching about the children's bread, when He cast the demon out of the Phoenician girl (7:24-30). In both cases, leavened bread metaphorically represented teaching. The Gentile woman wanted Jesus' teaching, and so presented a positive example for the disciples. The Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus' teaching, and at the same time advanced the *false* teaching (leaven), which Jesus warned His disciples to avoid.

8:14 The "one loaf" of bread recalls the two miraculous feedings of the two crowds. A shortage of bread should have been no great concern to the disciples, in view of Jesus' supernatural powers.

8:15 Jesus used "the leaven" in the loaf of bread as an object lesson: to illustrate the pervasive corrupting teaching "of the Pharisees" and "of Herod." *Leaven* was a common metaphor for an invisible, pervasive, corrupting influence in both Jewish and Hellenistic circles.<sup>427</sup> The teaching of the Pharisees was that Jesus received His authority from Satan rather than from God (3:22; cf. 7:8-13). It was a denial of His role as God's anointed Servant, Messiah.

The teaching of Herod Antipas, what he believed and articulated, was likewise that Jesus was not the Messiah. Herod told others that Jesus was just John the Baptist come back to life (6:14-16). The Pharisees and Herod, though so different from each other in many respects, promoted the same heretical view that Jesus was not the Messiah, much less divine. In

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<sup>427</sup>Lane, p. 280; *The Nelson* . . . , p. 1658.



short, this leaven was *unbelief*. This attitude, like leaven, had started to permeate the general population.

Another view is that the yeast of the Pharisees was their hypocritical, self-righteous traditionalism; and the yeast of Herod was his spirit of imperial pride.<sup>428</sup> Still others view the yeast of the Pharisees as false and inconsistent piety, and the yeast of Herod as godlessness.<sup>429</sup>

8:16 The disciples' interest in the problem of lack of food sharply contrasts with Jesus' fervent concern over unbelief (cf. vv. 12, 15). Spiritual truth failed to impress them because they had minds that were not open to it (v. 17).

8:17-21 Jesus strongly rebuked His disciples for their lack of spiritual understanding (cf. Isa. 6:9-10; Jer. 5:21; Ezek. 12:2). In view of the two miraculous feedings they had witnessed, they should have understood who He was. They did "remember" the facts (vv. 19-20), but they did not "understand" their significance (v. 21). As God had provided bread abundantly for the Israelites in the wilderness, Jesus had provided bread abundantly for them in another wilderness. The conclusion should have been obvious. Jesus was the Prophet that Moses had predicted would come after him and supersede him. He was the divine Messiah.

"His rebuke was not because of their failure to grasp the meaning of His warning (v. 15), but at their failure to understand the meaning of His presence with them."<sup>430</sup>

It was extremely important that the disciples perceive who Jesus was. Without that perception, they could not enter into a proper relationship with Him that was realistic and fulfilling. Jesus' use of questions forced them to interact with the implications of what they had heard and seen.

"In this way, Mark appears to say that being an 'insider,' even a 'disciple,' did not guarantee that one 'understood' or perceived the significance of Jesus and his ministry."<sup>431</sup>

The incident ends with a question but no answer. To paraphrase: "Do you *still* not understand—even after I explained it to you?" This was an indication that the disciples *even then* did not grasp what Jesus had explained. Mark leaves the reader hanging. The answer is of utmost importance. Peter finally verbalized it in verse 29. However, the reader of this Gospel already knows the answer because of what Mark previously wrote.

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<sup>428</sup>Bailey, p. 80.

<sup>429</sup>E.g., Cranfield, p. 261.

<sup>430</sup>Grassmick, p. 138.

<sup>431</sup>Guelich, p. 427.

### **5. The healing of a blind man near Bethsaida 8:22-26**

Mark is the only evangelist who recorded this miracle. It corresponds to the healing of the deaf man with the speech impediment (7:31-36), the only other miracle that Mark alone recorded. This is the only miracle in Mark that was not instantaneous; it happened gradually. Sight is a common metaphor for understanding. The disciples should have seen the deaf man as a picture of themselves, unable to comprehend what Jesus said. This blind man also represented them in their inability to understand what Jesus showed them (cf. v. 21). Jesus could and would make them whole, as He healed these two physically limited men.

8:22 As mentioned above, Bethsaida Julius stood on the northeast shore of the lake (cf. 6:45). Evidently friends of the "blind man" led him to Jesus.

". . . here is the great Gospel warrant for intercessory prayer to God on behalf of others."<sup>432</sup>

8:23-24 "Our Lord's action here is significant. Having abandoned Bethsaida to judgment (Mt. 11:21-24), He would neither heal in that village nor permit further testimony to be borne there (v. 26). The probation of Bethsaida as a community was ended, but He would still show mercy to individuals."<sup>433</sup>

Jesus may have led the man out of Bethsaida so He could establish a personal relationship with him (cf. 5:35-43; 7:31-37), and or perhaps to avoid publicity (cf. v. 26). The man's willingness to follow Jesus demonstrated some faith. This was evidently one of only three miracles that Jesus did in private that Mark recorded. In all three cases, some disciples were present, as witnesses.

The English translations permit a rather unpleasant interpretation of what Jesus did, namely, spitting in the man's face and placing His hands on his head or shoulders. The Greek text encourages us to interpret the data differently. Probably Jesus applied a small quantity of His spittle to the man's eyes with His fingers. This action would have made it clear to the blind man that Jesus was restoring his vision. In other words, Jesus used the saliva to aid the man's faith, not as a healing agent.<sup>434</sup> Perhaps the saliva told the man that this healing came out of Jesus' mouth (cf. Gen. 1:3, 6, et al.). However, Edersheim claimed that:

". . . the use of saliva was a well-known Jewish remedy for affections of the eyes."<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>432</sup>Cole, p. 132.

<sup>433</sup>*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1059.

<sup>434</sup>Burdick, p. 1005.

<sup>435</sup>Edersheim, 2:48.

Jesus asked the man, "Do you see anything?" to get him to state what he saw for the disciples' benefit. Evidently the man had lost his vision; he appears not to have been blind from birth. He knew what "trees" looked like. Blindness from disease was and still is common in many Middle Eastern countries.

8:25 Why did Jesus heal the man gradually in stages? Perhaps He did so to show that He could heal in any manner He chose.<sup>436</sup> Perhaps the man was fearful, and Jesus healed him as He did to accommodate his needs.<sup>437</sup> Perhaps He did so to illustrate for the disciples that He chose to give spiritual perception one step at a time. Perhaps He wanted to present Himself as the Great Physician. Perhaps this was an unusually difficult miracle, so the method of healing magnified Jesus' power.<sup>438</sup> Probably Jesus had more than one reason.

"Is this miracle paradigmatic of Jesus' struggle with the disciples? Is Jesus' earthly ministry stage one, during which time Jesus must contend with the disciples who are at once committed to him but afflicted with incomprehension? Is the time following Easter stage two, when Jesus shall have led the disciples, like this man, to 'see everything clearly'?"<sup>439</sup>

These three stages of this man's blindness are typical of the spiritual blindness from which Jesus delivers believers. First, believers are completely blind to spiritual truth, in their unsaved state. Second, they now "see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12, AV). Third, they will see clearly when they see the Lord "face to face" ("know fully," NASB; 1 Cor. 13:12).<sup>440</sup>

Mark was careful to record that the man "looked intently" (NASB). Human responsibility played a part in this healing as does gaining spiritual understanding. Nevertheless it is God who is ultimately responsible for the perception. Perhaps Jesus healed the man's optic nerve completely at first, but, as with children, the man had to learn to focus on objects. So Jesus touched the man's eyes a second time, which gave him the ability to see clearly.<sup>441</sup>

"The primary focus of this story, however, is on the man's total healing. The disciples show themselves to be in need of the second touch, and the story bespeaks their

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<sup>436</sup>Calvin, 2:285.

<sup>437</sup>Alexander Maclaren, "St. Mark," in *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, 8:326.

<sup>438</sup>Gundry, p. 418.

<sup>439</sup>Kingsbury, p. 102.

<sup>440</sup>McGee, 4:195-96.

<sup>441</sup>Pentecost, *The Words . . .*, p. 248.

experiencing it. A time must come when they see all things distinctly."<sup>442</sup>

8:26 Probably Jesus gave this order to safeguard His mission (cf. 1:44-45; 5:43; 7:36). The man appears to have lived somewhere other than in Bethsaida.

"Thus, 8:26 imposes no secrecy concerning the miracle or the means by which Jesus has effected it, much less a messianic secret (for his identity as the Christ has not entered the picture). Rather, this verse carries a demonstration of healing: the man can now see to go home without needing people to take him there as he did need them to bring him to Jesus (v. 22)."<sup>443</sup>

With this miracle, Jesus fulfilled another aspect of messianic prophecy. The divine Messiah would open blind eyes (Isa. 35:5-6). Old Testament writers claimed that it is God who gives sight to the blind (Ps. 146:8; Isa. 29:18). The conclusion should have been obvious: Jesus is the God-man.

<b>BLIND PEOPLE WHOM JESUS HEALED IN PROBABLE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)</b>	
Many blind people in Galilee	Luke 7:21
A man who was demon-possessed, blind, and dumb in a synagogue in Galilee	Matt. 12:22
Two blind men in Galilee	Matt. 9:27-34
Many blind people in Galilee	Matt. 15:30-31
A blind man in Bethsaida	Mark 8:22-23
A man blind from birth in Jerusalem	John 9:1-41; cf. 11:37
Two blind beggars near Jericho, one of whom was Bartimaeus	Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43
Some blind people in the temple precincts	Matt. 21:14

**6. Peter's confession of faith 8:27-30 (cf. Matt. 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-21)**

The healing of the deaf man with the speech impediment resulted in a confession of Jesus' greatness that fell short of identifying Him as God (7:37). The healing of the blind

<sup>442</sup>Guelich, p. 436.

<sup>443</sup>Gundry, p. 419.

man was the incident that God used to open the disciples' eyes to the biblical messianic identity of Jesus that Peter articulated.

Mark further highlighted the cause and effect relationship between these last two events by structuring the pericopes similarly. First, he presented the circumstances (vv. 22, 27). Second, he described partial sight and understanding (vv. 23-24, 28). Third, he recorded the giving of sight and understanding (vv. 25, 29). Fourth, he noted Jesus' command to remain silent (vv. 26, 30).<sup>444</sup>

"Mark has placed at the center of his narrative the recognition that Jesus is the Messiah. The pivotal importance of this moment is indicated by the fact that already in the first line of the Gospel the evangelist designates Jesus as the Messiah. Yet between Ch. 1:1 and Ch. 8:29 there is no recognition of this fact in spite of a remarkable sequence of events which demanded a decision concerning Jesus' identity. . . .

"The recognition that Jesus is the Messiah is thus the point of intersection toward which all the theological currents of the first half of the Gospel converge and from which the dynamic of the second half of the Gospel derives. In no other way could Mark more sharply indicate the historical and theological significance of the conversation in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi."<sup>445</sup>

8:27-28 Jesus and His disciples continued traveling north from Bethsaida toward "Caesarea Philippi," where Herod Philip lived, that stood about 25 miles away. The disciples confessed their belief that Jesus was Lord ("the Christ") near the place where the pagans confessed that Caesar was "Lord." Jesus asked the first question in verse 27, with a view toward asking the second question in verse 29. In Mark, Jesus' questions often led to new teaching (cf. 9:33; 12:24, 35). The popular answers to Jesus' first question all reflect an inadequate view of Him. They assigned Jesus a preparatory role, but failed to recognize His consummative role. Evidently few people believed that Jesus was the Messiah, so the disciples did not even mention that possibility.

8:29 Jesus stressed "you" when He asked this question. He wanted to know whom the disciples, in contrast to the multitudes, believed He was. "Peter" spoke for the disciples. The other disciples evidently agreed with his statement and made no objection. This is the first time in Mark that Peter acted as spokesman for the Twelve. Yet from this time on, Peter was the prominent representative of the other disciples. Peter's name appears twice before in Mark, and 16 times after this incident. It occurs five times before this incident in Matthew and 18 times after, four times before in Luke and 16 times after, and four times before in John and 29 times after.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup>Wessel, p. 692.

<sup>445</sup>Lane, pp. 288, 289. Cf. Cranfield, p. 271.

<sup>446</sup>Hiebert, p. 203, footnote 3.

". . . Peter's name, 'Rock,' is ironic, for he thinks he is like a rock. He happens to be the opposite of what his nickname suggests, for he falls asleep and later falls apart under the incriminating remarks of a maid of the High Priest."<sup>447</sup>

"Christ" is the English transliteration of the Greek *christos* that translates the Hebrew *masiah* meaning "anointed one." Originally this Hebrew term had a broad meaning and included anyone anointed by God, including priests, kings, and prophets. Later in the Old Testament it came to have the technical meaning of the divine Davidic king who would appear to deliver Israel and establish a worldwide kingdom (Ps. 110:1; Dan. 9:25-26). In Mark, Jesus rarely used this term Himself (cf. 9:41; 12:35; 13:21), and He never used it of Himself. Probably He avoided it because of its political connotations and the popular misunderstanding of it, but Jesus accepted the title when others applied it to Him (cf. 14:6-62; John 4:25-26).

". . . the title . . . was particularly fitted to express his true relation both to the OT and to the people of God. . . the title, applied to Jesus, designates him as the true meaning and fulfillment of the long succession of Israel's anointed kings and priests, the King and Priest . . .; the Prophet anointed with the Spirit of God, who fulfills the long line of Israel's prophets, and the One in whom the life of the whole nation of Israel finds its fulfillment and meaning, in whom and for whose sake the people of Israel were, and the new Israel now is, the anointed people of God."<sup>448</sup>

The timing of this question in Jesus' ministry was very important. The disciples had believed that Jesus was the Messiah from the beginning of their contact with Him (John 1:41, 51). However, their understanding of the Messiah then was the traditional one of their day, namely, that of a political leader. The multitudes likewise failed to understand that Jesus was much more than that. The religious leaders were becoming increasingly antagonistic. The disciples were about to receive new revelation regarding Jesus that would have costly implications for them. Therefore it was necessary for them to confess Jesus' identity clearly and unmistakably now.

Why did Mark only record that Peter said, "You are the Messiah," rather than his complete statement, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16)? Mark's emphasis throughout his Gospel was on Jesus' humanity, as we have seen. By omitting the last part of Peter's statement, Mark did not mean that Peter failed to acknowledge Jesus' deity. This is precisely what Peter was confessing. However in Mark, the term

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<sup>447</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 60.

<sup>448</sup>Cranfield, pp. 270-71. See Bateman, pp. 537-59.

"Messiah" includes the concept of deity, as it does in the Old Testament. Earlier when the disciples said they had found "the Messiah," before Jesus called them to be His disciples, they used the title in the popular way (John 1:41, 51). Mark did not record those statements. He presented the disciples using the term "Messiah" in its true biblical meaning for his Gentile readers.

"For the Christians of Rome who read Mark, the confession 'You are the Messiah' was precisely their profession of faith . . ." <sup>449</sup>

Peter's confession constitutes a high-water mark in the disciples' understanding of, and commitment to, Jesus. They still had much to learn about the significance of Jesus being *the* Messiah that the Old Testament promised, and all of its implications. Nevertheless now, Jesus could build on their faith and commitment.

". . . Jesus' identity is progressively unveiled in three stages, though only from the standpoint of the reader. . . .

"The first stage in the progressive disclosure of Jesus' identity is the confession of Peter on behalf of the disciples (8:27-30)." <sup>450</sup>

8:30 Probably Jesus instructed ("warned") the disciples "to tell no one about Him" for at least three reasons. First, such an announcement would have hindered His mission. Second, the disciples would not have been able to cope with the questions and opposition such an announcement would generate. They still held many popular misconceptions about Israel's Messiah that Jesus needed to correct. Jesus proceeded to continue preparing them so they could represent Him effectively. Third, Jesus wanted privacy for predicting His passion and resurrection.

"At the center of his Gospel Mark placed Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah. Up to this point the underlying question had been, 'Who is He?' After Peter's declaration on behalf of the Twelve, Mark's narrative is oriented toward the Cross and the Resurrection. From now on the underlying double question was, 'What kind of Messiah is He, and what does it mean to follow Him?' This crucial passage is the point to which the first half of the book leads and from which the second half proceeds." <sup>451</sup>

<sup>449</sup>Lane, p. 292, n. 67. Cf. 1 John 5:1.

<sup>450</sup>Kingsbury, p. 43. Cf. 10:46—11:11 (and 12:35-37); and 11:12—15:39.

<sup>451</sup>Grassmick, pp. 138-39.

## **V. THE SERVANT'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM 8:31—10:52**

Having comprehended Jesus' true identity, the disciples next turned south with Jesus and headed from Caesarea Philippi toward Jerusalem. This section of the Gospel traces that journey, and stresses Jesus' preparation of His disciples for His coming death and resurrection.

"It is no coincidence that the narrator frames the journey to Jerusalem with two healing stories about blindness [8:22-26; 10:46-52], for the journey surely seems dominated by Jesus' urgent efforts to deal with the disciples' blindness to the things of God."<sup>452</sup>

Mark structured his narrative around three predictions of Jesus' passion that He gave the disciples. Each unit begins with a prediction followed by the disciples' reaction. Then follow lessons that Jesus taught them about discipleship. Until now, Mark reported Jesus speaking in veiled terms (cf. 2:20; 4:33-34). From this point on, He spoke more clearly to both the disciples and the multitudes.

"This openness is theologically significant within the larger context of Jesus' messianic self-revelation in the Gospel of Mark. It points beyond Jesus' hiddenness, which reaches its climax on the cross, to his revealed glory. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus the secret of the Kingdom is thoroughly veiled as well as gloriously revealed. Mark exposes this tension, which is inherent in the gospel, through the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' sober teaching throughout Chs. 8:31—10:52."<sup>453</sup>

### **A. THE FIRST PASSION PREDICTION AND ITS LESSONS 8:31—9:29**

In this section, Mark recorded Jesus' first clear prediction of His passion (8:31), the disciples' reaction to it (8:32-33), and several lessons on discipleship (8:34—9:29).

#### **1. The first major prophecy of Jesus' passion 8:31-33 (cf. Matt. 16:21-23; Luke 9:22)**

8:31 Jesus' clear revelation of His coming suffering, death, and resurrection resulted from Peter's confession of faith. The disciples were now ready to receive what would have been completely incomprehensible—if they still viewed Jesus then as only a political Messiah.

Jesus referred to Himself as "the Son of Man," a biblical messianic title (Dan. 7:13-14; cf. Mark 2:10, 28). This was by far the favorite term that Jesus used to describe Himself in the Gospels. It appears 81 times. In its Old Testament usage, this title presented Messiah as coming in glory—but also suffering and dying. This title was not as popular as "Messiah," so

<sup>452</sup>Rhoads and Michie, pp. 126-27.

<sup>453</sup>Lane, p. 294.



when Jesus used it, people unfamiliar with the Old Testament often did not know what He meant. "Son of Man" was also an idiom in Jesus' day, that most people would have understood as a circumlocution for "I"—adding to the curiosity when Jesus used it.<sup>454</sup>

Here Jesus revealed that the Son of Man "must" (Gr. *dei*) suffer, because of God's purpose. Most Jews of Jesus' day believed that Messiah would establish His kingdom without suffering and dying.

"The necessity arises, first, from the hostility of men; secondly, from the spiritual nature of his work, which made it impossible for him to oppose force to force; and thirdly from the providential purpose of God, who made the death of Jesus the central thing in redemption [Isa. 52:13—53:12]."<sup>455</sup>

The three groups that would reject Jesus made up the Sanhedrin. The "elders" were its lay members. They were men of wealth and were the leaders of aristocratic families. The "chief priests" were the ranking priests and were mostly Sadducees. They occupied a hereditary office and supervised the temple and the sacrificial system. The chief priests included Annas, Caiaphas, and the leaders of the 24 divisions of the priesthood. The "scribes," or "teachers of the Law," were the approved interpreters of the Law, and they were mostly Pharisees. They were the theologians and lawyers of Judaism who were "experts" in Israel's "laws." Together these three groups formed a united front as opponents of Jesus.

Jesus also announced His resurrection "after three days." Mark's readers would have understood this phrase as synonymous with "on the third day" (cf. Hos. 6:1-2; Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22). With every announcement of His coming death, Jesus included the promise of His resurrection, though the disciples failed to grasp this hope.

"Verse 31 is particularly important because it is the only explanation in Mark's Gospel of 'the messianic secret.' Jesus did not want his messiahship to be disclosed because it involved suffering, rejection, and death. Popular expectations of messiahship would have hindered, if not prevented, the accomplishment of his divinely ordained (*dei*, 'must') messianic mission."<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>454</sup>Ibid., p. 297. See Cranfield, pp. 272-77, for a discussion of the views concerning its meaning and a bibliography.

<sup>455</sup>Gould, p. 153.

<sup>456</sup>Wessel, p. 696. For further discussion of the "messianic secret," see Lowery, pp. 74-76.

8:32 Until now, Jesus had only hinted at His sufferings (cf. 2:20; 4:33-34; 7:14-15, 17-23). The disciples were unprepared for this clear revelation that Messiah would suffer, die, and rise again. Peter understood it but refused to accept it. He could not reconcile this view of Messiah with the popular one. The word Mark chose to describe Peter's rebuke is a strong one (Gr. *epitimao*). It is the same one he used to describe Jesus silencing demons (cf. 1:25; 3:12). Peter reacted with "an air of conscious superiority."<sup>457</sup> He probably "took" Jesus "aside" to avoid appearing to rebuke the Lord in the presence of the other disciples.<sup>458</sup>

"It is often assumed that the suggestion that the Messiah would suffer must have been shocking to Peter. Perhaps it was rather the suggestion that he would suffer after rejection by the authorities of Israel that called forth Peter's rebuke. The idea of the Messiah suffering a glorious martyrdom at the hand of Israel's foes may not have been altogether strange to him . . ."<sup>459</sup>

8:33 Jesus spoke His rebuke for the other disciples as well as for Peter. This indicates that Peter was speaking for them. Jesus addressed Peter as "Satan," because He recognized Satan as the ultimate (and immediate) source of Peter's suggestion (cf. Matt. 4:10). Peter's words had opposed God's will in favor of the popular messianic idea.

**2. The requirements of discipleship 8:34—9:1 (cf. Matt. 16:24-28; Luke 9:23-27)**

Jesus now proceeded to explain to His disciples that suffering would not only be His destiny but theirs too.

"The fact that suffering is an expected and characteristic feature of being a follower of Jesus Christ is a consistent theme in the Gospels, as well as in the entire New Testament. This is especially clear from the center section of Mark's Gospel, framed around the cyclical announcements of the inevitable and impending death of Jesus and his corollary calls to discipleship. Woven into the cycles is also the recurring theme of the frequent misunderstandings of the disciples."<sup>460</sup>

8:34 Jesus now addressed "the crowd," as well as "His disciples," because the requirements are the same for anyone who contemplates discipleship. Some in the crowd were thinking about becoming Jesus' disciples but had not yet made up their minds.

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<sup>457</sup>Swete, p. 180.

<sup>458</sup>Cranfield, p. 279.

<sup>459</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>460</sup>Mark L. Bailey, "A Biblical Theology of Suffering in the Gospels," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 163.

"He stated two requirements which, like repent and believe (cf. 1:15), are bound together."<sup>461</sup>

One, a negative requirement, is self-denial, replacing one's own preferences and plans with God's priorities and program.<sup>462</sup>

"To deny oneself is to disown, not just one's sins, but one's self, to turn away from the idolatry of self-centredness [*sic*]."<sup>463</sup>

The other, a positive requirement, is following Jesus faithfully and publicly—even though that would mean shame, suffering, and perhaps physical death (cf. 1:17-18; 2:14; 10:21, 52).

Four explanatory clarifications follow, each introduced by "for" (Gr. *gar*, vv. 35-38) plus an encouragement (v. 38). They are appropriate warnings for present disciples and those considering discipleship. For believers, they apply to the loss of reward, and for unbelievers, to the loss of eternal life, i.e., the salvation *they could have had*. Both types of people were in Jesus' audience when He said this.

8:35

Jesus used the word "life" (Gr. *psyche*) in two ways in this verse. The translation of this Greek word as "soul" here has caused some people to conclude that Jesus was only warning about the loss of salvation. He was not. In its first occurrence in each clause, "life" refers to one's physical life. In the second part of each clause, "it" means the essential person (the soul/spirit) that continues to exist beyond the grave. Likewise, "lose" has two meanings. In the first clause, "lose it" means the loss of *reward* for believers, and the loss of *salvation* for unbelievers. In the second clause, "loses his life" means loss of physical life—which can include physical suffering, loss of health and or well-being, or literal death.

Jesus meant that if a person wants to retain control of his or her life now, he or she will suffer the loss of something more valuable in the future. Conversely, if a person will relinquish control of his or her life to follow God's will faithfully, he or she will gain something of greater ultimate worth.<sup>464</sup>

"The calm assertion, 'for my sake,' reflects Christ's consciousness of His unique supremacy which justly claims the absolute allegiance of His disciples. *And the gospel's*, added only in Mark (cf. 10:29), points to the message

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<sup>461</sup>Grassmick, p. 140.

<sup>462</sup>See Michael P. Green, "The Meaning of Cross-Bearing," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:558 (April-June 1983):117-33.

<sup>463</sup>Cranfield, p. 281.

<sup>464</sup>See Narry F. Santos, "Jesus' Paradoxical Teaching in Mark 8:35; 9:35; and 10:43-44," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:625 (January-March 2000):15-25.

which he accepts and propagates at the cost of himself. The two form two sides of one great reality. Christ is known to us only through the gospel, and our adherence to the gospel means our loyalty to Him."<sup>465</sup>

"In the second half of Mark 'the gospel' always denotes the message announced by the Church, of which Jesus is the content (Chs. 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9), precisely as in Ch. 1:1."<sup>466</sup>

8:36-37 The *psyche* in these verses means the essential person (soul/spirit). It is foolish to preserve one's comforts now, because by doing so one sacrifices something of much greater value—that God would otherwise give him or her. The "whole world" includes: earthly possessions, position, pleasure, and power—all that the world can provide. Verse 37 stresses the irrevocable nature of the choice.

8:38 "Whoever" means unbelievers or believers (cf. v. 34). For unbelievers living when the Son of Man returns to set up His kingdom, Jesus being "ashamed before" His "Father" will result in their loss of salvation. For believers living then, it will mean their loss of reward. This is the first explicit reference in Mark to Jesus' return in glory (though 4:21-22 and 30-32 contain veiled references). Being ashamed of Jesus, rejecting His claims, has serious consequences.

". . . this conflict between Jesus and the disciples on the way to Jerusalem exemplifies the clash between the values of the disciples and those of Jesus."<sup>467</sup>

". . . why should you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus? (1) Because you will save your life for eternity even though you lose it now. Here is a savings account with better returns than you ever dreamed of (v 35). (2) because your life is much more valuable than the whole world; so do not be gulled into making a foolish deal (v 36). (3) because once you have lost your life, there is no buying it back, no matter how much you offer. The opportunity to invest in futures is now; do not let it slip by (v 37). (4) because when the tables are turned on this hostile world, when the glorious Son of man comes with the approval of God his Father and with the holy angels as his army, you will want to be on his side, not on the world's side [v. 38]."<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>465</sup>Hiebert, p. 209.

<sup>466</sup>Lane, p. 309.

<sup>467</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 91.

<sup>468</sup>Gundry, pp. 439-40.

9:1 This verse is the positive truth about the coming kingdom, whereas 8:38 expressed the negative. It concludes Jesus' solemn warnings in this pericope on an encouraging note. Some standing in that mixed audience would not experience death before they saw a preview of the kingdom that the Son of Man would establish after He came in glory (8:38; cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-19). Those individuals were Peter, James, and John (vv. 2-8). Another view, but a less likely one, is that Jesus was referring to His coming death and resurrection.<sup>469</sup>

This pericope should warn unbelievers and believers alike. It is also an encouragement to become a disciple of Jesus and to follow Him faithfully. The choice involves eternal loss or gain. This section would have been a special encouragement for Mark's original readers who faced the choice of undergoing persecutions and trials for faithful commitment or abandoning their life of discipleship. Suffering and temporary loss would be Jesus' portion, and that would also be the destiny of His disciples. However, His faithful followers would eventually experience glory and blessing, as He would.

### **3. The Transfiguration 9:2-8 (cf. Matt. 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36)**

This event not only fulfilled Jesus' prediction in verse 1, but it also confirmed what Peter had confessed in 8:29. Despite Jesus' coming death (8:31-32), it assured His disciples of eventual glory (8:38). Jesus had just finished addressing a wide audience (8:34). Now He spoke to a very narrow one (v. 2).

"... a turning point, indeed a crisis, in the narrative is reached when Jesus announces his passion. In the minds of most, talk of death surely implied defeat and failure of mission. What is needed is a convincing and dramatic indication that Jesus continues to be God's agent of redemption. The transfiguration serves this purpose. It is intended to reassure Mark's readers that the necessity of Jesus' death does not result from a withdrawal of heavenly favor."<sup>470</sup>

"The transfiguration scene develops as a new 'Sinai' theophany with Jesus as the central figure."<sup>471</sup>

9:2-4 Mark's account is almost identical to Matthew's here. He added that Jesus' garments became whiter than any human "launderer" could make ("whiten") them. This reflects an eyewitness's testimony if nothing else. Perhaps the reference to six days followed by revelation should recall Exodus 24:15-16. Moses was on Mt. Sinai for six days and then God revealed Himself on the seventh. This is the most precise timeline in Mark's Gospel before the passion story. It also connects this fulfillment with Jesus' prediction in verse 1. In the Old Testament, the glory of God

<sup>469</sup>Cole, p. 140.

<sup>470</sup>Evans, p. 38.

<sup>471</sup>Lane, p. 317.

was represented with bright light. Mark placed Elijah in the prominent position before Moses (v. 4), probably because he was to be Messiah's forerunner (Mal. 3:1; 4:5).

Why did Jesus select Peter, James, and John to witness the Transfiguration, rather than some other disciples? Probably He did so because He was training them for leadership among the other disciples and for the church. Another view is that He chose them because they were the weakest of the disciples and needed special encouragement.<sup>472</sup>

9:5-6 Mark explained Peter's blunder in verse 5 in verse 6. He did it more fully than Luke did. Matthew did not give a reason for Peter's words. Again Peter opposed Jesus' sufferings and death, though he was not fully aware of what he was doing (cf. 8:32). He evidently believed that Jesus was going to set up His kingdom immediately (cf. Acts 1:6).

9:7-8 A "cloud" frequently pictured God's presence and protection in the Old Testament (e.g., Exod. 16:10; 19:9; 24:15-16; 33:1; 40:34-38; Num. 9:15-22; 1 Kings 8:10-11, Isa. 4:5). Probably the cloud enveloped and concealed Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, rather than simply overshadowing them.<sup>473</sup> The heavenly "voice" assured the disciples that, even though the Jews would reject Jesus and the Romans would execute Him, He was still pleasing to the Father (cf. 1:11).<sup>474</sup> It also helped these disciples understand Jesus' superiority over the greatest of God's former servants (cf. Deut. 18:15; Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1). They disappeared, but Jesus remained—indicating the end of their ministries, in contrast to Jesus' continuing ministry. Listening to Jesus in the fullest sense means obeying Him.

This revelation should encourage every disciple of Jesus. The Son of Man's humiliation will give way to His glorification. He will certainly return to earth and establish the kingdom that the biblical prophets predicted. The faithful disciple can anticipate a glorious future with Him as surely as the beloved Son could look forward to that kingdom (cf. 8:35).

#### **4. The coming of Elijah 9:9-13 (cf. Matt. 17:9-13)**

The appearance of Elijah on the mountain led to a discussion of his role as Messiah's forerunner. This conversation developed as the disciples followed Jesus down the mountain.

9:9 Jesus again commanded secrecy to avoid being mobbed (cf. vv. 15, 25; 1:34, 43-44; 3:11-12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30). William Wrede developed the view that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah and that the early church

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<sup>472</sup>McGee, 4:198.

<sup>473</sup>Cranfield, p. 292.

<sup>474</sup>Plummer, p. 215.

originated that idea.<sup>475</sup> Mark, he argued, invented incidents in which Jesus commanded secrecy about His messiahship to resolve this contradiction. Most conservative scholars have rejected this theory because the evidence for Jesus' messiahship is pervasive in all the Gospels.

If the multitudes heard about this demonstration of Jesus' glory, it would only fuel the fires of popular messianic expectation that created pressure for Jesus to depart from God's will. This is the last command to maintain secrecy in this Gospel. It is also the only one with a time limit. The people the disciples would soon tell the transfiguration story to would only understand it after Jesus arose from the dead. With His resurrection behind them, they could appreciate the fact that He would return in glory to establish the messianic kingdom.

- 9:10 The Old Testament taught a resurrection of the dead (Ps. 16; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; cf. John 11:24), but the disciples could not harmonize that revelation with Jesus' statement that He would rise three days after He died (8:31). The whole idea of Messiah dying was incomprehensible to them.
- 9:11 Rather than asking for clarification about the resurrection issue, the disciples raised questions about the larger problem of Messiah dying. If Jesus was the Messiah and He would die, what did the scribes' teaching about Elijah being the forerunner of Messiah mean (Mal. 3:1-4; 4:5-6)? They taught that he would turn the hearts of the people back to God (cf. Mal. 4:6), but Elijah had not appeared and most of the people had not repented.
- 9:12 Jesus affirmed the scribes' interpretation of the prophecy about Elijah. He went on to explain that that interpretation did not invalidate what He had just predicted about His own sufferings and shameful rejection (Ps. 22; Isa. 52:13—53:12).
- 9:13 The disciples thought Elijah still had to come, but Jesus explained that he had come. His enemies had done to him what the Old Testament recorded. Jesus was speaking of John the Baptist (Matt. 17:13). The Old Testament passage to which Jesus referred was 1 Kings 19:1-3 and 10. There Ahab, and especially Jezebel, swore to kill Elijah. They "wished" to execute him. This is exactly what "King" Herod Antipas, and especially Herodias, really did to John the Baptist. Now we see why Mark recorded the story of John's death (6:17-29). It was to show that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecies about Elijah coming.

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<sup>475</sup>William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*. See Cranfield, pp. 78-79, for refutation of Wrede's theory.

"In this case Scripture had foretold the future not by prophecy but by a type. The fate intended for Elijah (I Kings xix. 2, 10) had overtaken John."<sup>476</sup>

Evidently Mark did not mention John the Baptist as the fulfillment of this prophecy, as Matthew did, because his identity is obvious to the careful reader. The fulfillment was not complete, however, because someone will come in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way before Messiah's second coming (Mal. 4:5; cf. Rev. 11).

This discussion clarified for the disciples, and for Mark's readers, how Jesus' messiahship harmonized with Old Testament prophecy that seems to contradict it. Disciples of Jesus must have no doubts about His being the Son of Man, especially since they can anticipate testing through suffering for their faith. The importance of strong faith comes through in the next incident that Mark narrated.

**5. The exorcism of an epileptic boy 9:14-29 (cf. Matt. 17:14-20; Luke 9:37-43a)**

This is the last exorcism that Mark recorded. His narration of this story includes more detail than either Matthew or Luke's. The disciples' lack of glory in this story contrasts with Jesus' glory in the Transfiguration.

- 9:14-15      Mark did not explain the reason for the crowd's great amazement (Gr. *exethambethesan*) at seeing Jesus. Since Jesus had forbidden Peter, James, and John from speaking about the Transfiguration, it is unlikely that some glorious afterglow caused the crowd's reaction. Probably the nine disciples' failure to cast out the demon, followed by Jesus' personal appearance, produced their extreme response (cf. 10:32).
- 9:16-18      Perhaps Mark alone recorded Jesus' question, in order to stress His humanity. The result of the demons' activity again shows their destructive purpose (cf. 5:1-5). Jesus had given His disciples power to cast out demons (3:15), and they had done so successfully earlier (6:13). This boy showed the symptoms of epilepsy because of the demons' affliction.
- 9:19          The "unbelieving generation" included the father and the crowd. The nine disciples could not exorcize the demon because of their weak faith (cf. v. 29). Jesus' first rhetorical question expressed frustration that His presence with them had not resulted in greater faith (cf. 4:40; 6:50, 52; 8:17-21). His second question reveals the heavy load that their unbelief placed on Him (cf. 3:5; 8:12).

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<sup>476</sup>Swete, p. 194.



"Mark probably wanted his own audience to take a warning against unbelief in Jesus, unbelief caused by the scandal of the Crucifixion."<sup>477</sup>

9:20-22 Mark's unique record of Jesus' third "How long?" question shows His compassion. A demon had afflicted the boy for several years. Evidently the failure of the nine disciples had weakened the father's confidence in Jesus to help his son.

9:23-24 The father thought the crucial question was whether Jesus could heal the boy. Jesus explained that it was really whether the father *could* believe that Jesus *could* heal him. This pinpointed the father's understanding of who Jesus was (cf. 1:40). The issue was not how strongly the father believed Jesus *would* heal his son.<sup>478</sup> This is an important distinction. Modern "faith healers" usually stress the amount of trust that the person coming for help has, rather than the *object* of that trust. Later, Jesus revealed that the disciples' failure to heal the boy resulted from lack of trust in Him, too (v. 29).

"One who has faith will set no limits to the power of God."<sup>479</sup>

"But the faith that has such mighty results will submit to the will of God in making its petitions. Faith-prompted prayer asks in harmony with the will of God."<sup>480</sup>

The father voiced his confidence in Jesus, imperfect as it was, and asked Jesus to strengthen his faith.

"He declares that he *believes* and yet acknowledges himself to have *unbelief*. These two statements may appear to contradict each other but there is none of us that does not experience both of them in himself."<sup>481</sup>

He was an unbelieving believer, namely, a believer whose faith was weak.

"No better illustration of the doctrine of justification of faith could be found than the man's words here."<sup>482</sup>

9:25-27 Jesus acted quickly to avoid greater publicity.

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<sup>477</sup>Gundry, p. 489.

<sup>478</sup>Cranfield, p. 303.

<sup>479</sup>Rawlinson, p. 124. See also Ryrie, p. 133.

<sup>480</sup>Hiebert, p. 223. Cf. John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; and 1 John 5:11-15.

<sup>481</sup>Calvin, 2:325.

<sup>482</sup>Cole, p. 147.

"Addressing the spirit as deaf as well as dumb heightens the difficulty of the exorcism which Jesus is performing and may carry some irony in that a deaf spirit should not be able to hear his command to come out—but he *makes* it hear."<sup>483</sup>

". . . the accumulation of the vocabulary of death and resurrection in verses 26-27, and the parallelism with the narrative of the raising of Jairus' daughter [5:39-42], suggest that Mark wished to allude to a death and resurrection. The dethroning of Satan is always a reversal of death and an affirmation of life."<sup>484</sup>

9:28-29 Evidently the nine disciples were ineffective, because they believed that the power to cast out demons, that Jesus had given them, was now inherent in (part of) themselves. It was not. It was still God's power, and it came directly from Him. Therefore they needed to acknowledge their dependence on *Him*, for power, in order to be successful.

"Experience can teach, but it cannot empower."<sup>485</sup>

Jesus' prayer life reflected even *His* dependence on the Father. Some cases require more spiritual power than others, and some demons are stronger than others (Matt. 12:45). Probably later copyists added "and fasting" because fasting often accompanied earnest prayer in the early church, as it did in Israel.<sup>486</sup>

This incident taught the disciples that they needed to serve God in constant conscious dependence on Him that expresses itself in prayer. "Prayer" is a discipline that reminds disciples of, and expresses their dependence on, God. It also reinforced their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, who would defeat Satan, and so is worthy of glory, as the Transfiguration witnessed.

## **B. THE SECOND PASSION PREDICTION AND ITS LESSONS 9:30—10:31**

For a second time, Jesus told His disciples of His coming death and resurrection (cf. 8:31), and again they failed to understand what He meant (cf. 8:32-33). Jesus responded by teaching them additional lessons on discipleship (cf. 8:34—9:29).

### **1. The second major prophecy of Jesus' passion 9:30-32 (cf. Matt. 17:22-23; Luke 9:43-45)**

Jesus and the disciples probably left the region of Caesarea Philippi and Mt. Hermon, or wherever they were now, and proceeded farther south toward Jerusalem through Galilee.

<sup>483</sup>Gundry, p. 491.

<sup>484</sup>Lane, p. 334.

<sup>485</sup>Ryrie, p. 134.

<sup>486</sup>Cranfield, p. 305.

In view of what lay ahead in Jerusalem, Jesus again prepared them by telling them that He would suffer execution and experience resurrection.

9:30 Jesus' public ministry in Galilee was over. He wanted to pass through that area without further distractions from the multitudes.

9:31 Jesus was concentrating on teaching His disciples during this phase of His ministry. Here He revealed to them for the first time that someone would deliver Him up or hand Him over (Gr. *paradidotai*) to His enemies. Ultimately God did this, but Judas was the human agent that brought His will to pass. Probably there is an intended contrast between "Son of Man" and "men" in this verse.

". . . in a fallen world men had become so hostile to God that when, as the culmination of his plans for their salvation, he sent to them the Man, their Saviour and ultimate model, they regarded and treated him as their worst enemy. Men and the Son of Man stood on opposite sides in God's eschatological battle against the powers of evil."<sup>487</sup>

Mark recorded Jesus saying that He would rise of His own power (active voice). Matthew said Jesus spoke of being raised (passive voice, Matt. 17:23). Probably Jesus said both things in the course of His teaching. This verse probably summarizes instruction that Jesus gave the disciples as they walked.<sup>488</sup>

9:32 The disciples did not understand because God withheld understanding from them (Luke 9:45). Initially, God may have appeared to be working at cross purposes with Himself, revealing through Jesus and concealing by hardening the disciples' hearts. The solution seems to be that God was working with the disciples as He had worked with the multitudes through Jesus' parables. If so, the disciples' ignorance was a result of divine blindness that their unbelief produced. Their willingness to remain in ignorance and not ask Jesus to clarify His statement is the evidence of their unbelief. Mark implied that all they gained from this revelation was a sense of sorrow (Matt. 17:23).

Similarly, *we* manifest a form of unbelief when *we* fail to seek clarification of biblical revelation that we find confusing.

"The disciples' fear is understandable, for the death of their master may eventuate, even require, the death of the disciples. Jesus himself had made this clear enough in 8:34-

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<sup>487</sup>Plummer, p. 222.

<sup>488</sup>Bruce, "The Synoptic . . .," 1:404.

37. But perhaps their greatest fear concerns the impending fate of their beloved Rabbi."<sup>489</sup>

"The human mind has an amazing faculty for rejecting that which it does not wish to see. . . . Men still accept the parts of the Christian message which they like and which suit them, and refuse to understand the rest."<sup>490</sup>

## **2. The pitfalls of discipleship 9:33-50**

Jesus next taught His disciples lessons dealing with the dangers that threatened their effectiveness as His disciples. These were the desire for greatness, the folly of a sectarian attitude, and failure in self-discipline. They would suffer as He would. Moreover their suffering would threaten their unity with Jesus and with one another.

"Jesus warned against the spirit of elitism that can exist within a ministry team and between ministry teams. The answer to elitism from within is to have a servant's heart, and the answer to elitism toward outsiders is to recognize the unity of the family of God that transcends smaller groups of ministry."<sup>491</sup>

### **The desire for greatness 9:33-37 (cf. Matt. 18:1-5; Luke 9:46-48)**

9:33-34 Jesus returned "to Capernaum," evidently after several months of absence. This was His last recorded activity there. Rather than discussing Jesus' coming death and resurrection, the disciples had been arguing about their own futures in the kingdom. Their silence was probably a result of shame.

"Does the favor shown to Peter, James, and John, in selecting them to be eye-witnesses of the prefiguration of the coming glory, imply a corresponding precedence in the kingdom itself? The three disciples probably hoped it did; the other disciples hoped not, and so the dispute began."<sup>492</sup>

9:35 By seating Himself, Jesus assumed the traditional position of a rabbi. He taught them that greatness in His kingdom depends on sacrificial service. All three synoptic evangelists recorded His words, indicating the importance of this lesson.

"The spirit of service is the passport to eminence in the Kingdom of God, for it is the spirit of the Master Who Himself became *diakonos panton* ["servant of all"]."<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>489</sup>Evans, pp. 57-58.

<sup>490</sup>Barclay, pp. 227-28.

<sup>491</sup>Bailey, in *The New . . .*, p. 84.

<sup>492</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 200.

<sup>493</sup>Swete, p. 205.

The Greek word for servant, *diakonos*, describes someone who serves willingly. It does not describe the servile status of such a person, which *doulos* (slave) suggests. The desire to excel need not be unspiritual (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1). However, it must include willingness to put the welfare of others before selfish interests.<sup>494</sup>

9:36-37 "Just as by sitting he [Jesus] took the authoritative posture of a teacher, so he makes the child take the reverential posture of standing, as befits one who will turn out to represent all children who believe in Jesus (see v 42 . . .)." <sup>495</sup>

A child was the least significant person in Jewish and in Greco-Roman culture.<sup>496</sup> By using "a child" as His object lesson, Jesus was saying that service involves caring about people, even insignificant people such as children. The same Aramaic word means both "child" and "servant."<sup>497</sup>

"Jesus was one of the first ever to see how essentially precious any person is, particularly a young child. A concern for children was not invented by the welfare state: it goes back to the teaching of Jesus."<sup>498</sup>

Jesus proceeded to compare the humblest of His disciples to the child (cf. v. 42). This was the focus of Jesus' teaching that Matthew recorded (cf. Matt. 18:3-14).

### **The folly of a sectarian attitude 9:38-42 (cf. Matt. 18:6-7; Luke 9:49-50)**

9:38 This is the only place where the synoptic writers mentioned John speaking out alone. John spoke for the other disciples in the house (v. 33).

Evidently the exorcist was a believer in Jesus, though not one of the Twelve, or possibly not even one who spent much time following Jesus around. He evidently commanded demons to leave the people they afflicted by using Jesus' name. The Twelve apparently did not mind that this man claimed Jesus' authority to exorcize demons. They objected to his actions because Jesus had not commissioned him to do so. He had the Twelve (3:14-15). Perhaps his success and the recent failure of the nine disciples irritated them further. In view of what Jesus had just said about receiving little children, John wondered if the Twelve had done right in rebuking the man. They had tried to protect Jesus' honor by rebuking him (cf. Num. 11:26-29).

<sup>494</sup>See Santos, pp. 20-23, 25.

<sup>495</sup>Gundry, p. 509.

<sup>496</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "pais," by Albrecht Oepke, 5(1967):636-54.

<sup>497</sup>Lane, p. 340.

<sup>498</sup>Moule, p. 75.

"It is striking . . . that after each of the three major prophecies of the passion the evangelist inserts the response of one of the three disciples who were closest to Jesus: Peter (Ch. 8:32f.), John (Ch. 9:38), and James, with John (Ch. 10:35-37). Mark shows in this way that even the most privileged of the disciples failed to understand what the passion signified for their life and mission."<sup>499</sup>

"John is not now what he will be, but differs from his future self, as much as an orange in its second year differs from the same orange in its third final year of growth. The fruit of the Spirit will ultimately ripen in this disciple into something very sweet and beautiful; but meantime it is green, bitter, and fit only to set the teeth on edge."<sup>500</sup>

9:39-40 Jesus did not mind that the man was casting out demons by invoking His name. Since the man had such respect for Jesus, he would not "soon" speak against Him. By casting out demons, he showed that he was not against Jesus. Jesus expressed the opposite truth in Matthew 12:30: "He who is not with Me is against Me." There is no neutral ground regarding one's orientation to Jesus. Jesus' point was that the disciples should not view the exorcist as an antagonist—just because he was not part of their group. He was doing God's will and would not oppose them.

"Contrary to the disposition of many modern Christians, who often have rigid doctrinal requirements and expectations, Jesus appears remarkably ecumenical and accepting."<sup>501</sup>

"Jesus avoided forcing men precipitously into a position in which they had to make a final decision about him and used delayed-action methods of teaching in order to give them as much time as possible in which to decide. So long as the critical point has not been reached the principle of Mk ix. 40 holds, and the attitude of the disciple toward those who have not yet decided is to be that of recognizing in the unbeliever of today the possible believer of tomorrow . . ."<sup>502</sup>

9:41 The connecting idea with what precedes is the "name." Not only would the exorcist receive God's blessing, but anyone who does anything to help another person using even the name of a disciple of Jesus would receive

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<sup>499</sup>Lane, p. 342.

<sup>500</sup>Bruce, *The Training* . . . , p. 231.

<sup>501</sup>Evans, p. 66.

<sup>502</sup>Cranfield, p. 311.

His reward. This help extends to the almost insignificant act of giving "a cup of" cold "water" to some thirsty person. This act was much less helpful than delivering from demonic affliction.

This is one of the rare occasions when Jesus used the title "Messiah" of Himself. His use of it here makes the lesson even more forceful. The person giving the cup of cold water might have only a superficial understanding of Jesus. Nonetheless, if that person offered simple hospitality to one of Jesus' disciples—"because" he was a disciple of "Messiah"—that one would receive God's blessing.

9:42 This verse gives the other side of the idea just expressed. Anyone who discouraged a disciple of Jesus from following Him faithfully could expect severe treatment from God. Probably Jesus used the little child present to illustrate or represent a childlike disciple (vv. 36-37; cf. Matt. 18:3-14). Jesus referred to a large donkey-driven "millstone" (Gr. *mylos onikos*), not a small one that people turned by hand (Gr. *mylos*). The Romans had so drowned some insurrectionists in Galilee (cf. Acts 5:37), and a group of the Galileans had so dealt with some of Herod's supporters.<sup>503</sup> The disciples had probably heard about these events.

"This brief incident stands as a firm rebuke to the spirit of sectarianism. It condemns that exclusive attitude which insists that only those who carry on their work in harmony with our own views and practices can be accepted as really doing God's work. If they demonstrate that they are on God's side in the war with Satan, even though their views may be imperfect, they must not be condemned for such work or regarded with abhorrence."<sup>504</sup>

"Just as The Twelve's receiving and serving child-believers will counteract pretensions to grandeur, so the Twelve's letting the independent exorcist carry on his ministry apart from themselves will counteract those same pretensions."<sup>505</sup>

"In summary, the independent exorcist is not to be hindered, (1) because suspecting fellow believers outside one's close circle underestimates the number of people loyal to Jesus (v 39b); (2) because a sense of rivalry makes believers fail to recognize their friends (v 40); and (3) because receiving a messenger of the gospel brings salvation to a quondam [former] unbeliever (v 41), whereas causing even a child who believes in Jesus to sin brings judgment on the believer who causes the sin (v 42)."<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>503</sup>Lane, p. 346; Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum* 1:67; Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 14:15:10.

<sup>504</sup>Hiebert, p. 231.

<sup>505</sup>Gundry, p. 510.

<sup>506</sup>Ibid., p. 513.

John evidently learned this lesson well, as evidenced by the frequent references to loving one another that appear in his writings.

### **Failure in self-discipline 9:43-50 (cf. Matt. 18:8-14)**

Jesus' proceeded to elaborate on the importance of disciples dealing radically with sin in their lives. He had just warned about leading other disciples astray. Now He cautioned against being led astray oneself.

"Seducing simple souls is disastrously easy work; but still more easy is seducing oneself, by letting the body lead the spirit astray."<sup>507</sup>

9:43-48 Jesus compared the members of the human body to the agents of sinful activities. He did not want His disciples to perform *physical* surgery, but *spiritual* surgery, to excise the sin within themselves. The language is hyperbolic, but Jesus described real sins. The threefold repetition highlights the importance of the warning (cf. Rom. 6:12-13).

"It was not a Palestinian custom to refer to an abstract activity but to the specific member of the body which is responsible for it. For this reason Jesus speaks of the offending hand, foot and eye, all members which have highly important functions to fulfill."<sup>508</sup>

"As a surgeon does not hesitate to cut off a gangrenous hand to save a life, so evil and destructive practices, though precious to us as a very part of our lives, must be sacrificed to save the soul [person]."<sup>509</sup>

"Hell" translates the Greek word *gehenna*, the transliteration of the Hebrew phrase *ge hinnom* (lit. "Valley of Hinnom"). This valley, just south of Jerusalem, is where apostate Jews formerly offered human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (cf. Jer. 7:31; 19:5-6; 32:35). King Josiah terminated this practice and converted the site into a city dump where rubbish burned constantly (2 Kings 23:10). The fire never went out at Jerusalem's *gehenna*, and the worms that fed on the garbage never died off.

"Unquenchable fire" must mean *eternal*.<sup>510</sup> External "fire" and internal "worms" are Old Testament pictures of destruction (cf. Isa. 66:24). Thus *gehenna* became a picture of the place of eternal punishment (Enoch 27:2;

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<sup>507</sup>Plummer, p. 226.

<sup>508</sup>Lane, pp. 347-48.

<sup>509</sup>Hiebert, p. 232.

<sup>510</sup>Lenski, p. 408.



90:26), not annihilation.<sup>511</sup> The word *gehenna* appears 12 times in the New Testament, and in all but one of these occurrences Jesus spoke it (i.e., James 3:6).

Disciples should take prompt and decisive action against anything that might lead them away from their allegiance to Jesus. Physical temptations come through the hands (what we do), the feet (where we go), and the eyes (what we see) primarily. Disciples who are believers will suffer the loss of rewards in the kingdom if they do not exercise self-discipline. Disciples who are unbelievers will experience eternal damnation if they fail to do so.

Verses 44 and 46 are absent in important early manuscripts. Probably scribes added them later to fill out the parallelism in the passage. They repeat verse 48.

9:49 This verse evidently alludes to Leviticus 2:13 (cf. Exod. 30:35; Ezek. 43:24). The "everyone" in view could refer to unbelievers who enter hell. Unbelievers are the immediate antecedent of this verse. As salt preserves food, so God will preserve them forever in torment.<sup>512</sup> A variation of this view is that unbelievers must pass through purification to be saved.<sup>513</sup>

A second interpretation is that "everyone" refers to believers living in a hostile world. Jesus' believing disciples were those to whom He addressed these words. As the Old Testament priests salted the animal sacrifices, so God will season His living sacrifices with fiery trials to purify their faith (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12).<sup>514</sup>

A third interpretation is that "everyone" refers to every person, unbelievers and believers alike.<sup>515</sup> God will subject everyone to fiery trials. He does this to believers and unbelievers alike during their earthly lives (James 1:1-18). He will also do this to believers' works when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ (cf. Matt. 25:14-46; 1 Cor. 3:10-15). He will do this to unbelievers when they stand before Him at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). This seems to me to be the best interpretation. It takes "everyone" literally and is consistent with other revelation. The point is that everyone should realize that divine testing is an inevitable part of life.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>511</sup>See Robert A. Peterson, "Does the Bible Teach Annihilationism?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:621 (January-March 1999):13-27.

<sup>512</sup>Burdick, p. 1008.

<sup>513</sup>Cf. Evans, p. 73.

<sup>514</sup>Hiebert, p. 234; Lane, p. 349; Lenski, pp. 410-11; Cranfield, pp. 315-16; Taylor, p. 413; Cole, p. 224.

<sup>515</sup>E.g., Bock, p. 242; *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1661.

<sup>516</sup>H. A. W. Meyer, "Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospels of Mark and Luke," in *Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, pp. 120-23, listed 15 different interpretations.

Since this verse appears only in Mark, it must have had special significance for the original readers. If they were Roman Christians, it would have encouraged them to realize that the fires of persecution were part of their calling. Everyone will experience trials (cf. James 1:1-18). We sometimes say that "into every life a little rain must fall." We could change that a little and say that "into every life a little salt of testing must fall."

9:50 Jesus continued to use "salt" as a figure for testing. He said that tests from God, as salt on food, are "good" for us. Salt preserves food, prevents decay, and enhances flavor. The trials that God allows people to experience should have similar beneficial effects on them (cf. James 1:2-4). However, if salt becomes bland, it will not achieve its desired results (cf. Matt. 5:13).

Likewise, if God's trials lose their "bite"—that is, if we become insensible and unresponsive to the self-discipline that He is seeking to teach us, by hardening our hearts—these trials can cease to benefit us. Therefore we must "have salt in" ourselves, namely, accept the trials that God sends us that demand self-discipline, rather than rejecting them. Furthermore we must live peacefully "with one another," rather than becoming sectarian (v. 38) or self-seeking (v. 34).

Another less probable view, I think, of what Jesus meant by the figure of "salt" follows. This view connects with references in a more distant context.

"It seems likely that the saltiness of the salt stands for that for which the disciples are to be prepared to lose their lives (viii. 35), and of which they are not to be ashamed (viii. 38), i.e. the gospel, Jesus' words, Jesus himself."<sup>517</sup>

This command concludes this section of instruction that deals with the enemies of disciple fidelity (9:33-50).

### **3. Lessons concerning self-sacrifice 10:1-31**

Jesus gave this series of lessons south of Galilee in Perea and Judea, not in Galilee. Another contrast is the audience. He gave the preceding instruction to the disciples in a house, but He gave this teaching to the multitudes and the disciples in the open air.

#### **The transition from Galilee to Judea 10:1 (cf. Matt. 19:1-2)**

Though Mark did not record it, Jesus gave His disciples much additional instruction as they traveled from Capernaum in Galilee toward Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 8:19-22; 18:15-35; Luke 9:51—18:14; John 7:2—11:54). Evidently Jesus departed from Capernaum and

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<sup>517</sup>Cranfield, p. 316.

journeyed through Samaria to Jerusalem. Then He proceeded east across the Jordan River into Perea, which lay east and north of the Dead Sea. From there He returned to Jerusalem again. Leaving Jerusalem Jesus visited the tribal territory of Ephraim, traveled farther north into Samaria, headed east into Perea, and returned to Jerusalem a third time. The following ministry took place during this last loop in Perea and Judea.<sup>518</sup>

### Jesus' instruction about marriage 10:2-12 (cf. Matt. 19:3-12)

10:2 This teaching grew out of the Pharisees' attempt to trap Jesus. The incident occurred in Perea, Herod Antipas' territory. Perhaps the Pharisees wanted to get Jesus to explain His view of divorce because they suspected it was the same as John the Baptist's. John had lost his head literally because of his views on marriage. Probably Jesus' critics hoped that He would also antagonize the Roman ruler with His views. The form of their question implied they thought that Jesus was against divorce for any reason.

The Pharisees all believed that the Old Testament permitted Jewish men to divorce their wives and to remarry (Deut. 24:1-4). Jewish wives could not divorce their husbands. The Pharisees disagreed among themselves on the grounds for divorce. Followers of Rabbi Shammai believed Moses meant the only ground was fornication: any sexual sin. Rabbi Hillel's disciples held that anything a wife did that displeased her husband constituted legitimate grounds for divorce.<sup>519</sup>

10:3 Jesus responded in rabbinic fashion with another question. He asked the Pharisees what Moses, the authority whom they all professed to recognize, taught. Jesus sent them to God's Word, rather than debating traditional interpretations that the Pharisees treated as authoritative.

10:4-5 The Pharisees viewed Moses' permission as God's desire, but Jesus viewed it as a divine concession.

"A distinction has to be made between that which sets forth the absolute will of God, and those provisions which take account of men's actual sinfulness and are designed to limit and control its consequences. Whereas the Ten Commandments (in this connection Exod. xx. 14) and such passages as the verses quoted in vv. 6-8 represent God's absolute command, Deut. xxiv. 1 is a divine provision to deal with situations brought about by men's *sklerokardia* [hardness of heart] and to protect from its worst effects those who would suffer as a result of it. (Much that is contained in the O.T. falls within the category of such provisions.)"<sup>520</sup>

<sup>518</sup>Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects . . .*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>519</sup>See Mann, pp. 386-87, for summaries of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopalian, and Protestant interpretations of this teaching.

<sup>520</sup>Cranfield, p. 319.

10:6-8 Jesus contrasted the Pharisee's view of marriage with God's view of it. God instituted marriage.

"In Gen 2:24, 'for this cause' did not refer to God's making the first human beings 'male a female,' but to God's making Eve out of Adam's rib. The reason for a man's leaving his father and mother, cleaving to his wife, and becoming one flesh with her was not sexual, then. It had to do with Eve's origin in Adam: since woman came from man, man should unite himself with woman to recapture their original unity."<sup>521</sup>

Marriage involves the physical union of a male and a female that results in a uniquely close relationship, a "one flesh" relationship (Gen. 2:24). "One flesh" is a Semitic expression that means "one."<sup>522</sup> This relationship is closer than even the parent-child relationship. Furthermore it continues throughout the rest of the husband's and wife's lives.

"The words are taken [by Jesus] as though they are those of God himself."<sup>523</sup>

"The import of all this is that marriage from its very nature and from the divine institution by which it is constituted is ideally indissoluble. It is not a contract of temporary convenience and not a union that may be dissolved at will."<sup>524</sup>

"While the spiritual element is vitally important in marriage, the emphasis here is that marriage is a *physical* union: the two become one *flesh*, not one spirit. Since marriage is a physical union, only a physical cause can break it—either death (Rom. 7:1-3) or fornication (Matt. 5:32; 19:9)."<sup>525</sup>

10:9 Jesus drew a conclusion from what the Scriptures, that He just quoted, revealed. It is therefore wrong for man to break a bond that God has fashioned. Thus Jesus did not side with either school of rabbinic interpretation. He affirmed God's ideal in marriage, namely: no divorce.

10:10-12 The disciples wanted clarification of Jesus' view, so they asked Him for it in private. Mark recorded His straightforward reply. Neither husband nor

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<sup>521</sup>Gundry, pp. 531-32.

<sup>522</sup>Wessel, p. 711.

<sup>523</sup>Mann, p. 391.

<sup>524</sup>John Murray, *Divorce*, p. 29.

<sup>525</sup>Wiersbe, 1:144.

wife should divorce their partner and remarry someone else. To do so constitutes committing adultery against the spouse.

Verse 12 is unique in Mark. Under Roman law a wife could divorce her husband, but under Jewish law she could not.<sup>526</sup> There were exceptions, however, as in the case of Herodias who had divorced Philip to marry Antipas (6:17-18). Herod the Great's sister also divorced her husband.<sup>527</sup> Jesus viewed all divorce followed by remarriage as constituting adultery no matter who initiated it. Divorce is wrong, but divorce followed by remarriage is worse.

"The new element in this teaching, which was totally unrecognized in the rabbinic courts, was the concept of a husband committing adultery against his former wife. According to rabbinic law a man could commit adultery against another married man by seducing his wife (Deut. 22:13-29) and a wife could commit adultery against her husband by infidelity, but a husband could not be said to commit adultery against his wife. . . . This sharp intensifying of the concept of adultery had the effect of elevating the status of the wife to the same dignity as her husband and placed the husband under an obligation of fidelity."<sup>528</sup>

Mark's omission of the exception clause that Matthew included was also due to his audience (cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9). He did not want to draw attention to the exceptional case because to do so would weaken the main point, namely, that people should not divorce. Divorce was very common in the Greco-Roman world. Apparently Matthew included Jesus' permission to divorce for fornication, because the subject of how to deal with divorce cases involving marital unfaithfulness was of particular interest to the Jews, his primary audience.

### **Jesus' instruction about childlikeness 10:13-16 (cf. Matt. 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17)**

The simple trust in Jesus, that the children in this pericope demonstrated, contrasts with the hostility of the Pharisees in the previous paragraph. Another thought connection is the progression from discussing marriage to discussing children.

10:13-14 Mark's account of this incident is very similar to Matthew's. However, Mark alone noted that Jesus became "indignant" (Gr. *eganaktesen*) when He learned that "the disciples" were discouraging those who "were bringing" the "children (Gr. *paidia*) to Him." This is the only time that the

<sup>526</sup>Nineham, p. 266, footnote.

<sup>527</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 15:7:10.

<sup>528</sup>Lane, p. 357.

Gospel writers used this strong verb of the Lord (cf. Matt. 20:24; 21:15; 26:8; Mark 10:41; 14:4; Luke 13:14; 2 Cor. 7:11). This is another indication of the evangelist's interest in Jesus' humanity (cf. 1:25, 41, 43; 3:5; 7:34; 8:12; 9:19). Jesus had formerly commanded His disciples not to forbid the exorcist who cast out demons in Jesus' name (9:39). The disciples were abusing their authority by excluding some people from coming to Jesus: those outside their circle, and those regarded generally as unimportant.

"The Greek *paidia* can indicate any child from infancy to about twelve years of age."<sup>529</sup>

"The Kingdom 'belongs' to children in the sense that children appreciate a gift as an absolute, something which they are aware they cannot have worked [for] to deserve."<sup>530</sup>

10:15 This verse occurs in Mark and Luke (Luke 18:17), but Matthew recorded Jesus' similar statement on another occasion (Matt. 18:3). It expands Jesus' words in verse 14. Jesus' point was that people must receive things associated with "the kingdom of God" as children receive things, namely, with trust, humility, obedience, and dependence on Himself. Personal ability and effort do not determine one's reception of God's best gifts, but a proper orientation to Jesus does.

"To receive the kingdom as a little child is to allow oneself to be given it, because one knows one cannot claim it as one's right or attempt to earn it."<sup>531</sup>

"We tell the children to behave like adults, but Jesus tells the adults to model themselves after the children!"<sup>532</sup>

10:16 Mark also wrote that Jesus "took" the children "in His arms" and blessed them fervently (Gr. *kateulogei*). This was the act of a father in Jewish life (cf. Gen. 27:38). This Greek word appears only here in the New Testament. The disciples viewed the children as individuals unworthy of Jesus' attention, but Jesus saw them as important in their own right and possessing important qualities that adults need to cultivate. Mark recorded eight times that Jesus touched someone, and in each case the effect was beneficial (cf. 1:41; 3:10; 5:28, 41; 6:56; 7:32; 8:22; 10:13).

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<sup>529</sup>Mann, p. 396.

<sup>530</sup>Ibid.

<sup>531</sup>Cranfield, p. 324.

<sup>532</sup>Wiersbe, 1:145.

"Jesus does not merely touch the children, which in v 13 was the stated purpose of those bringing them to him; he embraces them. In 9:36 Jesus had taken a child into his arms. The embrace is a public demonstration of children's acceptance and value in the kingdom."<sup>533</sup>

"This was the overflowing of Jesus' divine love for children. It was this experience that the disciples in their insensitivity were preventing the children from having and Jesus from giving! No wonder Jesus was indignant."<sup>534</sup>

### **Jesus' instruction about wealth 10:17-31**

A question from a man in the crowd initiated this incident. Then Jesus proceeded to instruct His disciples following up the encounter. The position of this section in Mark's Gospel is significant. It occurs after Jesus' teaching about the importance of receiving the kingdom with trust and humility (vv. 13-16), and it precedes Jesus' third prediction of His passion (vv. 32-34). The young man thought he could obtain the kingdom with works and self-assertion, not as a little child. Jesus' following call to commitment set up His passion announcement.

#### **The encounter with the rich young ruler 10:17-22 (cf. Matt. 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23)**

10:17 Mark tied this incident into what immediately preceded more closely than the other evangelists did. He wanted his readers to see this young man as expressing exactly the opposite of what Jesus had just taught His disciples. The "man" was a "rich" (v. 22) *young* (Matt. 19:20) *ruler* (Luke 18:18). His approach to Jesus was unusually earnest and respectful, but he viewed eternal life as something one must earn.

"Such a form of address [i.e., "Good Teacher"] would be very rare in the Judaism of Jesus' time, though the use of the word 'good' as applied to God is common in the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 118:1, 1 Chron 16:34, 2 Chron 5:13), and in general the Jewish view was that God alone may be fitly described as 'good,' and by contrast no one else is 'good' (cf. Rom 7:18)."<sup>535</sup>

Matthew wrote that he asked what he should do to get or obtain (Gr. *scho*) eternal life, but Mark and Luke said that he used the term "inherit" (Gr. *kleponomeo*).

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<sup>533</sup>Evans, p. 94.

<sup>534</sup>Wessel, p. 714.

<sup>535</sup>Mann, p. 399.

"*kleponomeso* ["inherit"] reflects Jewish usage, which spoke of 'inheriting' eternal life."<sup>536</sup>

The man clearly did not believe that he had eternal life and wanted to learn what he needed to do to get (or earn) it. This is remarkable, since many Jews believed that they had eternal life simply because they were the children of Abraham. Probably Matthew recorded the exact word he used (the *ipisissima verba*) and Mark and Luke interpreted what he meant (the *ipisissima vox*). It was important for Matthew to tell his original Jewish readers that the young man was talking about getting something that he did not possess.

Mark and Luke wrote for Gentiles, for whom "inheriting" clarified what was in the rich young ruler's mind. This inquirer was talking about getting something that he—as a Jew—thought that he had a right to obtain because of his ethnic relationship to Abraham.

"In the rich young ruler's mind entering heaven, inheriting eternal life, and having eternal life were all the same thing, and all meant 'go to heaven when I die.' Jesus neither affirms or denies this equation here. He understands that the young man wants to know how to enter life, or enter the kingdom."<sup>537</sup>

- 10:18 The man had a superficial understanding of goodness. Jesus' response confronted the man with the implications of trying to do some good work to earn eternal life and calling Jesus "good." Was he ready to respond to Jesus' instructions as to God's Word?
- 10:19 The Old Testament taught that if a person kept the Mosaic Law he would live (Deut. 30:15-16). This was theoretically possible but practically impossible. Jesus reminded the man of what the law required by citing five commands in the second table of the Decalogue. The commands Jesus mentioned are easily verifiable in conduct. Mark alone recorded the prohibition against defrauding, which was evidently a particular type of stealing pertaining to the wealthy.<sup>538</sup>
- 10:20 The man's superficial understanding of God's standards became apparent in his claim that he had "kept all" those commandments from his "youth up." He regarded obedience simply as external conformity without internal purity (cf. Phil. 3:6). This was the natural implication and consequence of the Pharisees' teaching. At age 12, a Jewish boy became a "son of the

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<sup>536</sup>Cranfield, p. 327.

<sup>537</sup>Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 65. Cf. William E. Brown, "The New Testament Concept of the Believer's Inheritance" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984).

<sup>538</sup>Plummer, p. 239.



covenant" (Heb. *bar miswah*, from which comes Bar Mitzvah). The Jews regarded themselves as responsible for their obedience to the Law from that age on.<sup>539</sup> It is probably that the man meant he had observed the Law from the age of 12.

"That man possesses the ability to fulfill the Commandments of God perfectly was so firmly believed by the Rabbis, that they spoke in all seriousness of people who had kept the whole Law from A to Z."<sup>540</sup>

10:21 Only Mark recorded that Jesus loved the rich young ruler when he replied as he did. Evidently the man had sincerely tried to earn eternal life by obeying the law. His superficial understanding of what God required was more his teachers' fault than his own.

Jesus put His finger on what kept this man from having eternal life. He expressed it in the terms that the man had been using, namely, doing something. He was trusting in his wealth, wealth he probably viewed as evidence that his good works made him acceptable to God. The Old Testament taught that God normally blessed the righteous with physical prosperity (e.g., Job 1:10; 42:10; Ps. 128:1-2; Isa. 3:10).

This young politician needed to abandon that essentially self-confident faith, and he needed to trust in and follow Jesus. He had also made wealth his god rather than God. His reluctance to part with it revealed his idolatry. By selling all he had, giving it to the poor, and following Jesus—he would confess his repudiation of confidence in self and affirm his trust in Jesus. Then he would "have treasure in heaven," something that would last forever.

"Evidently Jesus sensed that there was in this particular case—probably obvious from the young man's dress—an almost insuperable obstacle by way of attachment to wealth."<sup>541</sup>

Today many people consider themselves good because they have lived a moral life and have not committed gross sins. Some believe that all they need to do is a little more good and God will accept them. They fail to see that they are totally bankrupt spiritually and that even their good deeds are as filthy rags in God's sight. They need to cast themselves on God's mercy, trust in what He has done for them in Christ rather than in their own goodness, and begin following the One who loved them and gave Himself for them. Such was the case with the rich young ruler.

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<sup>539</sup>Mishnah *Berachoth* 2:2.

<sup>540</sup>Strack and Billerbeck, 1:814, quoted by Cranfield, p. 329.

<sup>541</sup>Mann, p. 401.

10:22 Abandoning his physical security and trusting in Jesus was too great a risk to take. The rich young ruler's wealth brought him sorrow instead of joy. This is the only time in the Gospels when someone called to follow Jesus did not do so. It is also the only time when someone is said to have gone away from the Lord's presence sad.<sup>542</sup>

**Jesus' teaching concerning riches 10:23-31 (cf. Matt. 19:23-30; Luke 18:24-30)**

Jesus used the previous incident to teach His disciples about riches. Matthew's account is the fullest.

10:23 The case of this unbeliever had important significance for Jesus' believing disciples. Rather than being a preview of divine eternal blessing, wealth ("things one possesses"; Gr. *kremata*) could be a barrier to obtaining it. Jesus did not envy the rich, as most of His contemporaries did. He pitied them.<sup>543</sup> Wealth does not exclude a person from the kingdom, but it gives him a handicap.

"In the O.T. there are two main attitudes toward riches: one regarding them as the sign of God's favour, a reward for goodness, the other identifying the poor with the pious, the rich with the ungodly. Jesus' attitude to the rich, as shown in this verse, is startlingly fresh. He neither covets their wealth, nor hates them. Instead he pities them—for the rich man is to be pitied because of his specially great temptations and the frightening handicap in relation to the kingdom of God under which he labours. It is so easy for him to feel a false security and rely on his possessions and become so taken up with them that he forgets what is infinitely more important."<sup>544</sup>

10:24 This verse is unique to Mark. The disciples' amazement arose from the popular belief that riches were a result of God's blessing for righteousness. They thought riches were an advantage, not a disadvantage in one's relationship with God. Only here in the Gospels did Jesus address the disciples as "children" (Gr. *tekna*). Their amazement revealed their spiritual immaturity.

The longer textual reading at the end of verse 24 gives the sense of Jesus' statement, but it was probably not a part of the Gospel originally. The shorter statement is perfectly true as it stands, and accounts partially for the disciples' second amazement (v. 26). Jesus' statement in verse 25 also helps us understand their added surprise.

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<sup>542</sup>Cole, p. 163.

<sup>543</sup>Hiebert, p. 249.

<sup>544</sup>Cranfield, p. 331.

- 10:25-26 One writer paraphrased Jesus' proverb as follows.
- "It is easier to thread a needle with a great big camel than to get into the kingdom of God when you are bursting with riches."<sup>545</sup>
- The camel was the largest beast of burden in Palestine. The needle Jesus referred to was a common sewing needle (Gr. *hraphis*). Jesus was using hyperbole. The disciples reacted with amazement because they thought that wealth indicated righteousness (cf. Job, Abraham, Solomon).
- 10:27 Jesus' point was that salvation is totally God's work (cf. Jon. 2:9; Eph. 2:8-9). It is humanly impossible to obtain it on the basis of achievement or merit. But God can enable anyone to realize his or her complete dependence on Him and turn to Him for salvation.
- 10:28 Peter, speaking for the other disciples, was still thinking in physical rather than spiritual terms. He turned the conversation back to the subject of giving up all to follow Jesus (v. 22). The rich young ruler had refused to forsake all and follow Jesus, but the disciples had done just that. "We" is emphatic in the Greek text. Mark did not record the rest of Peter's statement: "What then will there be for us?" (Matt. 19:27). Mark did not need to. The implication is clear enough from Peter's statement without his question.
- 10:29-30 Jesus graciously did not rebuke Peter's selfishness but rewarded his self-sacrifice with a promise. Disciples who follow Jesus wholeheartedly can anticipate three things. First, God will give them more in kind spiritually of what they have sacrificed physically. Second, they will receive persecution as Jesus' disciples. Only Mark mentioned this, undoubtedly for his original persecuted readers' benefit. Commitment to discipleship means "persecutions" as well as rewards. Third, faithful disciples will enjoy their eternal life to an extent that unfaithful disciples will not (cf. John 10:10; 17:3).<sup>546</sup>
- "God takes nothing away from a man without restoring it to him in a new and glorious form."<sup>547</sup>
- The present age refers to the inter-advent era, and the age to come refers to the messianic kingdom.
- 10:31 The "first" in rank and position in this age, such as the rich young ruler, "will be last" in the next. Conversely, "the last" in this age, such as the Twelve apostles, will be "first" in the next. These words summarized

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<sup>545</sup>Moule, p. 80.

<sup>546</sup>See Dillow, pp. 135-36.

<sup>547</sup>Lane, p. 372.

Jesus' teaching on discipleship on that occasion and in this section of Mark's Gospel (vv. 1-31). This was a saying that Jesus used at other times as well during His ministry (cf. Matt. 20:16; Luke 13:30). Here, these words also warned Peter against looking for immediate physical rewards for his self-sacrifices (cf. Matt. 20:1-16).

All three of the lessons on discipleship, that Mark recorded in this section of his Gospel, dealt with self-sacrifice (10:1-31). The lessons that Jesus taught following His first passion prediction dealt mainly with future glory (8:31—9:29). Those He taught following His second passion prediction concerned present suffering primarily (9:30—10:31).

### **C. THE THIRD PASSION PREDICTION AND ITS LESSONS 10:32-52**

This is the last time that Jesus, as He approached Jerusalem, told His disciples He would die and rise again. Each time, Jesus gave them more information than He had given before. The first time, the disciples reacted violently (8:32). The second time, they did not understand what He meant, and were afraid to ask Him for an explanation (9:32). Now, the third time, Mark recorded no reaction to Jesus' announcement, except that an argument about who would be the greatest in the kingdom followed immediately. Clearly the disciples did not comprehend what was coming, because they continued to focus increasingly on the coming physical kingdom and their roles in it. Nevertheless Jesus continued to teach them lessons of discipleship that they needed.

#### **1. The third major prophecy of Jesus' passion 10:32-34 (cf. Matt. 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34)**

10:32 Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Jerusalem from somewhere in Perea or Judea. They had not yet passed through Jericho (vv. 46-52). Jesus' position "ahead of them," in typical rabbinic fashion, suggests His determination to go to Jerusalem in spite of His coming death there (cf. 14:28; 16:7). His attitude probably accounted for some of the disciples' amazement. Other disciples, following farther behind, were "fearful" because of what Jesus had said lay ahead there. Jesus turned to give the Twelve further information about His coming passion.

10:33-34 The following chart shows the greater detail of this prediction and the fulfillment in the passion narrative—compared with the previous two predictions.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>548</sup>Adapted from Taylor, p. 436.

		<b>First prediction 8:31—9:29</b>	<b>Second prediction 9:30—10:31</b>	<b>Third prediction 10:32-52</b>	<b>Passion narrative 14:1—15:47</b>
1.	Handing over to the Sanhedrin		9:31	10:33	14:53
2.	Condemnation by the Sanhedrin	8:31		10:33	14:64
3.	Handing over to the Romans			10:33	15:1
4.	Mocking, spitting, and scourging			10:34	14:64; 15:15, 16-20
5.	Execution	8:31	9:31	10:34	15:24, 37
6.	Resurrection	8:31; 9:9	9:31	10:34	16:1-8

Since there is such a remarkable correspondence between these predictions and their fulfillment in the passion narrative, some commentators believed Jesus could not have predicted them.<sup>549</sup> Still, even apart from His divine foresight, Jesus could have anticipated what awaited Him in Jerusalem. He knew the depth of the religious leaders' antagonism, and He understood the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah's career (cf. Ps. 22:6-8; Isa. 50:6; 52:13—53:12). The antecedent of "they" in verse 34 is probably "the Gentiles" in verse 33.

"'Jerusalem' is a place of danger and condemnation to death [in Mark]. Jesus' enemies are at home here, and from here scribes and Pharisees come to Galilee to attack him and his disciples. And the 'Temple,' the house of God's presence and the seat of the religious authorities' power, is a place of intense conflict: Prior to his passion, Jesus' last great confrontation with the religious authorities occurs here."<sup>550</sup>

## **2. Jesus' teaching about serving 10:35-45 (cf. Matt. 20:20-28)**

This pericope parallels 9:30-37. Both sections deal with true greatness, and both follow predictions of Jesus' passion. This second incident shows the disciples' lack of spiritual perception, and their selfishness, even more than the first one. Before we conclude that the disciples were particularly stupid, in not understanding what Jesus had just predicted, we need to remember the culture in which they lived. In their culture, events were more important than time, as is true of most eastern cultures. They were so focusing on the upcoming event of the inauguration of the kingdom, as they thought, and their places in

<sup>549</sup>E.g., Nineham, p. 278.

<sup>550</sup>Kingsbury, p. 4.

it, that the time of Jesus arrest, death, and resurrection did not make an impression on them.

10:35-37 James and John's request seems almost incredible. They wanted Jesus to give them "whatever" they requested: *carte blanche*. When asked what that might be, they explained that they wanted the positions of highest honor in Jesus' messianic kingdom. The person who sat on a ruler's "right" hand side enjoyed the highest assigned position, and the person who sat on his "left," the second highest.<sup>551</sup> These brothers obviously believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and they thought He was going to establish His kingdom soon, probably when they reached Jerusalem.

Matthew wrote that their mother, Salome, the sister of Jesus' mother, voiced their request for them (Matt. 20:20). Mark put the words in their own mouths, because the request came from their hearts, even though Salome spoke them. Perhaps they thought their family connection with Jesus justified their request. James and John were Jesus' cousins (cf. Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). Frequently rulers appointed close family members to important government positions.

"This narrative contains a bright mirror of human vanity; for it shows that proper and holy zeal is often accompanied by ambition. . . . They who are not satisfied with himself alone, but seek this or the other thing apart from him and his promises, wander egregiously from the right path."<sup>552</sup>

10:38-40 Those who share Jesus' honor in the kingdom must also share His sufferings in this age. The "cup" often is a symbol of trouble and suffering in the Old Testament (Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15-28; 49:12; 51:7; Ezek. 23:31-34; Hab. 2:16; Zech. 12:2; cf. Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6), though sometimes it represents joy (Ps. 23:5; 116:13). Likewise baptism, being under water, pictures inundation with trouble (Job 22:11; Ps. 18:16; 69:1-2, 15; Isa. 43:2).

James and John confidently (and unwittingly) affirmed that they could endure all the trouble and suffering, that Jesus would have to endure, because they did not understand what He had predicted about His passion. In their desire for prominence, they were willing to promise Jesus anything. They would indeed experience a measure of suffering themselves, as Jesus' *disciples*, but not as much as Jesus would have to endure. James was the first apostle to experience martyrdom (Acts 12:2), and John may have been the last.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>551</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 6:11:9. Cf. 1 Kings 2:19; and Ps. 110:1.

<sup>552</sup>Calvin, 2:417.

<sup>553</sup>See Lane, p. 381, footnote 87; and Mann, pp. 412-13.

"The Authorized Version suggests the idea that the bestowal of rewards in the kingdom is not in Christ's hands at all. That, however, is not what Jesus meant to say; but rather this, that though it is Christ's prerogative to assign to citizens their places in His kingdom, it is not in His power to dispose of places by partiality and patronage, or otherwise than in accordance with fixed principles of justice and the sovereign ordination of His Father."<sup>554</sup>

"Jesus' answer once again displays his supernatural knowledge."<sup>555</sup>

10:41-44 The jealous reaction of the other disciples shows that selfish ambition also motivated them.<sup>556</sup> Jesus had to repeat His teaching about greatness because the disciples had not learned its lesson (9:33-37).<sup>557</sup>

Rule and authority in the kingdom come by faithful and humble service in the present age.<sup>558</sup> The disciples needed to concentrate on present service rather than future honor. The godless world focuses on the benefits of position. Disciples of Jesus should concentrate on qualifying for honor. The godless ("rulers of the Gentiles") even exercise authority prematurely by "*lording* it over" others. Disciples should voluntarily place themselves under others to help them. A slave (Gr. *doulos*) was sometimes one who voluntarily sacrificed his or her rights to serve others (cf. Luke 22:24-30)—most slaves, however, were not voluntary servants. The Greek word signifies subjection, but not necessarily bondage.

Notice that Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for wanting to be great in the kingdom. This ambition is good. He corrected them for focusing on self-centered goals rather than on altruistic goals, and He clarified the method for obtaining greatness.

"The idea is this: earthly kingdoms are ruled by a class of persons who possess hereditary rank—the aristocracy, nobles, or princes. The governing class are those whose birthright it is to rule, and whose boast it is never to have been in a servile position, but always to have been served. In my kingdom, on the other hand, a man becomes a great one, and a ruler, by being first the servant of those over whom he is to bear rule."<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>554</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 286.

<sup>555</sup>Gundry, p. 577.

<sup>556</sup>Cf. Cole, p. 170.

<sup>557</sup>See Santos, pp. 23-25.

<sup>558</sup>See idem, "The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):452-60.

<sup>559</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, pp. 290-91.

"Here is the paradox of the Kingdom of God. Instead of being lords, its great ones become servants, and its chiefs the bond-servants of all."<sup>560</sup>

10:45 Even the Son of Man had to follow the rule that Jesus just explained. He is the great example of it. His incarnation was not that of a potentate whom others had to serve, but that of a Servant who met the needs of others.

His service extended to giving "His life" as "a ransom" (Gr. *lytron*, cf. Matt. 20:28). In *koine* Greek (the common Greek of the New Testament world), this word often described the money paid for the release of slaves. In the New Testament, it has a narrower, more theological meaning, namely: *release* or *redemption*. The only two occurrences of this word in the New Testament are in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45. The Exodus is the great Old Testament instance of this redemption and release.

"For" (Gr. *anti*), used in Mark only here, means "instead of" or "in place of," not "on behalf of," a clear reference to substitution (cf. Matt. 2:22; Luke 11:11; 1 Pet. 3:9).<sup>561</sup>

"Many" (lit. "the many") contrasts with the one life (Gr. *psyche*) of Jesus given as a payment (cf. 14:24). One Man's act affected many others (cf. Isa. 53:11-12). "Many" does not mean "some *in contrast to* all." While Jesus' death benefits *everyone* in one sense, and only *the elect* in another sense, that was not the point of Jesus' contrast here. Jesus took the place of everyone else by paying the penalty for their sins.

This verse is not only the climax of this pericope (vv. 35-41), but it is the key verse of Mark's Gospel. It summarizes the ministry of Jesus as the Suffering Servant of the Lord, Mark's particular emphasis.<sup>562</sup> Here it constituted another announcement of Jesus' coming death, but it added the purpose for His dying not previously revealed.

"This verse contains the clearest statement of the object of Christ's coming found in the gospels. But this theological declaration was made to enforce a practical truth for everyday conduct."<sup>563</sup>

That John finally got the message is clear from what he wrote in 1 John 3:16: "He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

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<sup>560</sup>Gould, p. 202.

<sup>561</sup>Moulton and Milligan, p. 46; Cranfield, p. 343.

<sup>562</sup>See John C. Hutchison, "Servanthood: Jesus' Countercultural Call to Christian Leaders," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:661 (January-March 2009):53-69.

<sup>563</sup>Hiebert, p. 261.



<b>CONTRASTS BETWEEN A HELPER AND A SERVANT</b>	
<b>A Helper</b>	<b>A Servant</b>
A helper helps others when it is convenient.	A servant serves others even when it is inconvenient.
A helper helps people that he or she likes.	A servant serves even people that he or she dislikes.
A helper helps when he or she enjoys the work.	A servant serves even when he or she dislikes the work.
A helper helps with a view to obtaining personal satisfaction.	A servant serves even when he or she receives no personal satisfaction.
A helper helps with an attitude of assisting another.	A servant serves with an attitude of enabling another.

### **3. The healing of a blind man near Jericho 10:46-52 (cf. Matt. 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43)**

Mark probably included this incident in his Gospel because it illustrates how Jesus would open the spiritual eyes of His disciples that were still shut (cf. 8:22-26). This is the last healing miracle that Mark recorded.

"This second account of the blind being healed (see 8:22-26 for the first account) concludes this central section of Mark (8:27—10:52) and serves as 'bookends' of this section. Recorded as they were and where they were may be suggestive of the trouble the spiritually blind disciples were having in grasping the need for the death of Christ and the need for faithfulness in taking a stand for Christ in the midst of opposition.

"This passage is the only place in Mark where someone called Jesus 'Son of David.' That Jesus accepted this title and healed the man is evidence that He affirmed the truth that He is indeed the Messiah."<sup>564</sup>

10:46 "Jericho" stood about five miles west of the Jordan River and six miles north of the Dead Sea.

Scholars have attempted to harmonize this account with the other two in the Synoptics. A few believe that the accounts represent three separate events. Some believe there were two healings, one as Jesus entered Jericho (Luke 18:35) and another as He left Jericho (Matt. 20:29; Mark 10:46). Still others believe there was only one healing, and it happened somewhere between old Jericho and the new Jericho that Herod the Great had built one mile southwest of the old city.<sup>565</sup> I prefer this view since the three accounts are quite similar.

<sup>564</sup>Bailey, p. 87.

<sup>565</sup>E.g., Zane C. Hodges, "The Blind Men at Jericho," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:488 (October-December 1965):319-30.

"The old city was in ruinous state by the first century, but the new city had been rebuilt by Herod the Great as the location of his winter palace, and by the time of this incident it was a place of great beauty."<sup>566</sup>

Another view is that the beggars approached Jesus as He entered the city, but He healed them as He departed from it. The various descriptions of what happened argue against this theory.

Mark was the only evangelist to record the more prominent of the two beggars' names. This is in harmony with his interest in individuals and detail. Perhaps Mark's original readers knew Bartimaeus.

10:47-48 The two descriptions of Jesus in these verses reveal the faith of Bartimaeus. The crowds simply described Jesus as "the Nazarene." Bartimaeus had obviously heard about Jesus and had concluded that He was the Messiah. "Son of David" is a messianic title (cf. 11:9-10; 12:35-37; 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24). Even though Bartimaeus lacked physical sight, he saw more clearly *who Jesus was* than the multitudes who could see. His cry for mercy from Jesus expressed the attitude of trust, humility, and dependence that Jesus had been teaching His disciples to maintain.

"Presumably, Jesus did not silence the beggar (in contrast to Ch. 8:30) because he is at the threshold of Jerusalem where his messianic vocation must be fulfilled. The 'messianic secret' is relaxed because it must be made clear to all the people that Jesus goes to Jerusalem as the Messiah, and that he dies as the Messiah."<sup>567</sup>

10:49-50 Jesus responded again to the faith of a believer. Bartimaeus' response verified his belief that Jesus could help him. Mark's details emphasize Jesus' compassion and the beggar's conviction.

10:51-52 Jesus' question allowed Bartimaeus to articulate his faith, and through it Jesus made personal contact with him. "Rabboni" is an emphatic personal form of "rabbi," and means "my Lord and Master" (cf. John 20:16). It occurs only here in Mark. Jesus healed Bartimaeus instantly with a word, attributing his healing to his faith. His faith was its means, not its cause. The Greek word translated "made well" or "healed" is *sesoken*, meaning "saved."

"What was happening in the man's body was really, we may presume (ver. 47, 48), but the outward picture of what had happened in his soul."<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>566</sup>Mann, p. 421.

<sup>567</sup>Lane, p. 387.

<sup>568</sup>Morison, p. 301.

"The second stage in the progressive disclosure of Jesus' identity [to the reader] centers on his Davidic sonship (10:46—11:11; 12:35-37). . .

"What is noteworthy in this scene is that Bartimaeus, a person of great faith, appeals to Jesus as the Son of David. By granting Bartimaeus his request for sight, Jesus in effect accepts for himself the title Son of David. Moreover, he also shows how he fulfills the end-time expectations associated with David. He does so not by donning the helmet of a warrior king but by using his authority to heal and in this way to save."<sup>569</sup>

Bartimaeus responded appropriately, and "*began* following" Jesus "immediately," at least "on the road" to Jerusalem—if not as a disciple.

"Bartimaeus has been transformed from a helpless man who was going nowhere to a restored man who sets out on the road of discipleship."<sup>570</sup>

"He began with need, went on to gratitude, and finished with loyalty—and that is a perfect summary of the stages of discipleship."<sup>571</sup>

This incident sets the stage for the climax of Mark's story. Jesus had finished His journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Some people, like Bartimaeus, were believing on and following Jesus. Others, like the religious leaders, did not believe. Conflict in Jerusalem was inevitable.

"Bartimaeus pictured discipleship clearly. He recognized his inability, trusted Jesus as the One to give him God's gracious mercy, and when he could 'see' clearly he began to follow Jesus."<sup>572</sup>

## **VI. THE SERVANT'S MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM CHS. 11—13**

The rest of Jesus' ministry, as Mark recorded it, took place in and around Jerusalem. Chapters 11—13 present Jesus' ministry before His passion. It consisted of Jesus' formal presentation to the nation (11:1-26), His teaching in the temple area (11:27—12:44), and His eschatological discourse to the disciples (ch. 13). Mark presented these events as occurring on three successive days. Jesus entered Jerusalem each morning and then withdrew to Bethany each evening (cf. 11:11-12, 19-20). Mark may have compressed

<sup>569</sup>Kingsbury, p. 45. Cf. 8:27-30; and 11:12—15:39.

<sup>570</sup>Evans, p. 134.

<sup>571</sup>Barclay, p. 272.

<sup>572</sup>Grassmick, p. 155.

these events and they may really have occurred during a longer period of time, namely, between the feasts of Tabernacles and Passover.<sup>573</sup> However, all four evangelists give the impression that they all happened during one week (cf. John 12:1, 12-15), and this has been the interpretation of the church since the fourth century.<sup>574</sup>

### **A. JESUS' FORMAL PRESENTATION TO ISRAEL 11:1-26**

Mark chose to record four events: the Triumphal Entry (11:1-11), the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14), the cleansing of the temple (11:15-19), and the lesson of the cursed fig tree (11:20-25). These events happened on three successive days (Monday through Wednesday) as the writer noted.

#### **1. The Triumphal Entry 11:1-11 (cf. Matt. 21:1-17; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19)**

This is only the second incident that all four evangelists recorded, the other being the feeding of the 5,000 (cf. 6:30-44). This fact reflects its importance. Mark's account of this event gives much detail, indicating its eyewitness source. It does not stress Jesus' messiahship greatly. Mark presented Jesus as a humble servant of God and the people.

11:1a Mark described Jesus' approach from Jericho generally. He would have come to "Bethany" ("place of unripe figs"), and then Bethphage ("place of young figs"), traveling from the east. These villages stood on the southeastern slope of Mt. Olivet, approximately two miles east of Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives stands about 2,600 feet above sea level, just east of Jerusalem. The Kidron Valley separates it from the city. The heights of Mt. Olivet provide a splendid view of the temple area.

11:1b-3 The "village opposite" was evidently Bethphage, the one the disciples would have encountered after leaving Bethany for Jerusalem. The "colt" was a young donkey. The Mosaic Law specified that an animal devoted to a sacred purpose had to be one that had not been used for ordinary purposes (Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3). Jesus told the disciples to bring both the colt and its mother to Him (Matt. 21:2). The "Lord" is simply a respectful title here, possibly referring to Jesus, whom the owner may have met previously or knew about. If the owner was a believer in Jesus, "Lord" may have had a deeper meaning for him. Other views are that the "Lord" here refers to God, or to the owner of the animal.<sup>575</sup> Nowhere else in his Gospel did Mark (or Matthew) use "Lord" as a name for Jesus.

The colt was unbroken, and Jesus was able to ride on it comfortably. These facts suggested that Jesus was the sinless Man who was able to

<sup>573</sup>Lane, pp. 390-91.

<sup>574</sup>See Appendix 1, "A Harmony of the Gospels," at the end of my notes on Matthew for the events of Holy Week in chronological order.

<sup>575</sup>Cranfield, pp. 349-50; Taylor, p. 455.

fulfill the Adamic Covenant mandate to subdue the animals (Gen. 1:28; cf. Matt. 17:27), the Second Adam.

11:4-6 The "bystanders" may have been, or at least included, the owner of the animals (Luke 19:33). Perhaps the synoptic writers recorded the disciples' obedience in such detail because the untying of the colt may have been a messianic sign (cf. Gen. 49:8-12). Pre-Christian Jewish texts interpreted Genesis 49:10 as messianic.<sup>576</sup>

11:7-8 The disciples made a saddle for Jesus from their outer garments. Jesus' decision to enter Jerusalem this way fulfilled the messianic prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. It also indicated that He entered as a servant ruler, not as a political conqueror. When Israel's rulers wanted to present themselves as servants of the people, they rode donkeys (e.g., Judg. 10:4; 12:14). When they entered as military leaders, they rode horses. Normally pilgrims to Jerusalem entered the city on foot.<sup>577</sup> Placing one's garment on the animal for Jesus to sit upon is reminiscent of a coronation, and placing garments on the ground before someone was a sign of homage to royalty (cf. 1 Kings 1:38-40; 2 Kings 9:12-13; 1 Macc. 13:51).<sup>578</sup>

"What is described is apparently a spontaneous expression of respect."<sup>579</sup>

11:9-10 The people hoped Jesus would be their Messiah. "Hosanna" is the transliteration of a Greek word that transliterated the Hebrew *hosi ah na* (lit. "O save us now," Ps. 118:25a). It was an exclamation of praise calling for deliverance.

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" is a quotation from Psalm 118:26, that was part of the liturgy the Jews used during the Passover. This was a common greeting for visitors to Jerusalem.<sup>580</sup> However, on this occasion it took on new meaning (cf. Gen. 49:10). It is likely, however, that the crowd was not identifying Jesus with the Messiah.<sup>581</sup> Other interpreters, however, believe that the use of these terms indicates that the multitude knew that Jesus was presenting Himself as the Messiah.<sup>582</sup>

The peoples' reference to the coming Davidic kingdom shows that they hoped for its establishment soon (2 Sam. 7:16; Amos 9:11-12). Some in the crowd acknowledged Jesus as the Son of David (Matt. 21:9).

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<sup>576</sup>Lane, p. 395.

<sup>577</sup>Ibid., p. 393.

<sup>578</sup>Evans, p. 143.

<sup>579</sup>Cranfield, p. 350.

<sup>580</sup>Wessel, p. 725.

<sup>581</sup>Cranfield, p. 351.

<sup>582</sup>E.g., Pentecost, *The Words . . .*, p. 373.

"Hosanna in the highest" meant "O, You who live in heaven, save us now." This was a call to God to deliver His people. The chiasm structure of the peoples' words shows that they were chanting antiphonally, as was customary at Passover.

Someone who knew nothing about Jesus might have concluded from witnessing this procession that it was just a part of the traditional Passover celebration. Often when pilgrims caught sight of the temple for the first time, coming from the east over the Mount of Olives, they burst out in jubilant praise.<sup>583</sup> It did not provoke action from the Roman soldiers.

11:11 Having "entered Jerusalem," the crowd seems to have disbursed quickly, and Jesus proceeded to the temple area (Gr. *hieron*). He had been there many times before. He looked "all around," taking full stock of conditions there, and noted that the temple needed cleansing again (cf. John 2:13-22). Since the hour was "late"—the city gates closed at sunset—He departed "for Bethany" with the disciples to spend the night there.

"The city of Jerusalem did not welcome the prophet—perhaps Messiah—from Galilee as had those among his following. When Jesus finally entered the temple precincts, there was no priestly greeting. Jesus was ignored. All that he could do was look over the precincts and then retire to Bethany with his disciples."<sup>584</sup>

"On the whole, it seems to be the most probable conclusion that the entry in this peculiar fashion into Jerusalem was deliberate on the part of our Lord, and was meant to suggest that, though He was indeed the Messiah and 'Son of David,' yet the Messiahship which He claimed was to be understood in a spiritual and non-political sense, in terms of the prophecy of Zechariah, rather than in terms of the 'Son of David' idea as interpreted by contemporary expectation (e.g., in the Psalms of Solomon). The time had in fact come for our Lord to put forward His Messianic claims, and to make His appeal to Jerusalem in a deliberately Messianic capacity. He does so, however, in a manner which is suggestive rather than explicit, and which was so calculated as to afford the minimum of pretext for a charge of quasi-political agitation."<sup>585</sup>

"We conclude that Jesus' action in riding into Jerusalem was not an obvious and unambiguous assertion of his Messiahship and that neither the disciples nor the crowd were aware of its messianic meaning. . . . It seems clear that he intended to fulfill the prophecy of Zech. ix. 9, but to do so in circumstances so paradoxical as to make the meaning of his action hidden.

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<sup>583</sup>Lane, p. 397.

<sup>584</sup>Evans, p. 147.

<sup>585</sup>Rawlinson, p. 151.

It was a veiled assertion of his Messiahship, which would not be recognized at the time, though it would afterwards be luminous for his disciples. To them it would then be a confirmation of the truth of his Messiahship—they would know that the scripture had been fulfilled, though the fact had been unnoticed at the time, and that he had indeed come to Jerusalem as the true Messiah. But it would also be a token of the nature of his Messiahship; for the Zech. passage told of a King who should 'speak peace unto the nations', not a conquering nationalist Messiah. Moreover, his royal entry into Jerusalem was to be of a piece with the rest of his ministry, his majesty hidden under an outward appearance that was far from kingly."<sup>586</sup>

## **2. Jesus' condemnation of unbelieving Israel 11:12-26**

This incident is the first part of another of Mark's interrupted stories (cf. 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-31). Its structure provides the key to its interpretation. First, Jesus cursed the fig tree. Then He cleansed the temple. Finally He came back to the fig tree with a lesson for the disciples. There is unity of subject matter in the whole section. The chiasmic arrangement highlights the central element as being most revealing.

### **The cursing of the fig tree 11:12-14 (cf. Matt. 21:18-19)**

Mark gave more precise time intervals than Matthew did. Matthew related the cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21:18-19), and Jesus' lesson to the disciples the following day (Matt. 21:20-22), back to back.

- 11:12-13      The next day was Tuesday, which Hoehner dated as March 31, A.D. 33.<sup>587</sup> Apparently the events of "Palm Sunday" took place on a Monday. The incident that Mark recorded next, beginning in verse 12, occurred as Jesus and His disciples walked from Bethany to Jerusalem on Tuesday morning (Matt. 21:18). Normally, small, edible buds appeared on the fig trees in March, before the leaves did in April.<sup>588</sup> The lack of edible buds indicated that this tree would not bear figs later on, even though there were leaves on this tree. Mark explained that "it was not the season for figs"—for his non-Palestinian readers. Matthew did not add this explanation.
- 11:14          Jesus saw an opportunity to teach His disciples an important truth using this tree as an object lesson. Being a prophet, Jesus performed a symbolic act (cf. Isa. 20:1-6; Jer. 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek. 4:1-15). He cursed the tree to teach them the lesson, not because it failed to produce fruit. The tree was a good illustration of the large unbelieving element within the nation of Israel. God had looked to that generation of Israelites for spiritual fruit, as Jesus had hoped to find physical fruit on the fig tree (Matt. 3:8; cf. Jer.

<sup>586</sup>Cranfield, pp. 353-54.

<sup>587</sup>Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* . . . , pp. 91, 143.

<sup>588</sup>Edersheim, 2:374; Evans, pp. 154-55; cf. *The Nelson* . . . , pp. 1666-67.

8:13; Hos. 9:10; Mic. 7:1; Nah. 3:12; Zech. 10:2). Israel's outward display of religious vitality was impressive, like the leaves on the tree, but it bore no spiritual fruit of righteousness. It was hypocritical (7:6; 11:15-19, 27—12:40). A less likely interpretation, I think, sees the tree as symbolizing the temple.<sup>589</sup>

"Jesus was on the eve of spiritual conflict with a nation whose prime and patent fault was hypocrisy or false pretense, and here he finds a tree guilty of the same thing. It gives him his opportunity, without hurting anybody, to sit in judgment on the fault."<sup>590</sup>

"In Mark's story world, hypocrisy exists where there is a discrepancy between appearance and underlying truth."<sup>591</sup>

This is the only destructive miracle that the Gospel writers attributed to Jesus, and it involved a tree. The healing of the Gadaran demoniac resulted in the destruction of pigs (5:13), but that miracle itself was positive in that it healed the man.

### **The cleansing of the temple 11:15-19 (cf. Matt. 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-48)**

This was Jesus' second messianic act that constituted part of His formal presentation to Israel. The first was the Triumphal Entry (vv. 1-11).

11:15-16 A marketplace atmosphere existed in the court of the Gentiles, the outermost courtyard within the temple enclosure (Gr. *hieron*, cf. v. 17). During Passover season, pilgrims could buy sacrificial animals and change their money on the Mount of Olives, so there was no need to set up facilities to do these things in the temple courtyard—which Caiaphas had done.<sup>592</sup>

"The bankers sat at their tables changing Roman or Greek coinage into Jewish or Tyrian currency in which alone the half-shekel tax could be paid (cf. Exod 30:13-16)."<sup>593</sup>

Jesus' literal housecleaning represented His authority as Messiah to clean up the corrupt nation of Israel. Verse 16, unique in Mark, shows the extent to which Jesus went in purifying the temple. By doing this, Jesus was acting as a faithful servant of the Lord and demonstrating zeal for God's honor.

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<sup>589</sup>Evans, pp. 158-60, 182.

<sup>590</sup>Gould, pp. 211-12.

<sup>591</sup>Kingsbury, p. 15.

<sup>592</sup>Lane, pp. 403-4. See also V. Eppstein, "The Historicity of the Gospel Account of the Cleansing of the Temple," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 55 (1964):42-58.

<sup>593</sup>Mann, p. 448.



"The court of the Gentiles should have been a place for praying, but it was instead a place for preying and paying."<sup>594</sup>

11:17 The Isaiah 56:7 prophecy was a prediction yet unfulfilled, as well as a statement of God's perennial intent for the temple. From Jesus' mouth, it was also a prophecy of conditions in the messianic kingdom (cf. Zech. 14:21).

Mark added "for all the nations," which Matthew omitted from Isaiah 56:7. The phrase has special significance for Gentile readers. God permitted Gentiles to come and worship Him in the temple court of the Gentiles, indicating His desire to bring them into relationship with Himself.

The Jewish leaders, however, had made this practically impossible—by converting the only place Gentiles could pray in the temple complex into a market where fraud abounded (cf. Jer. 7:11). They had expelled the Gentile worshippers to make room for Jewish "robbers" (Gr. *lestes*), a term that referred to the swindling and extortion practiced there.

Jesus was claiming that the temple belonged to Him—rather than to the Jewish leaders—by cleaning it up! The quotation He cited from Isaiah presented the temple as God's "house." Thus Jesus was claiming to be God.

"The third stage in the progressive disclosure of Jesus' identity [to the reader] focuses on the secret that he is the Son of God."<sup>595</sup>

11:18-19 Jesus' action and words had threatened the reputation and resources of the Sanhedrin members. They plotted to kill ("destroy") Him (cf. 3:6). The intensity of their hatred becomes clear later (11:27—12:37). Mark alone recorded that they "were afraid of" Jesus. The reason was the impact His teaching was having on the multitudes that gathered from all over the ancient world for Passover (cf. 1:22; 6:2; 7:37; 10:26). Jesus was acting like Israel's King and High Priest.

"And so we have reached Mark's main point: the awe-inspiring power of Jesus' teaching, backed up as it is by his strong actions. He strikes fear even in the hearts of the hierarchs who are trying to destroy him. In fact, they are trying to destroy him *because* they fear him, *because* he has a powerful hold on the crowd. He will be crucified, then,

<sup>594</sup>Wiersbe, 1:151.

<sup>595</sup>Kingsbury, p. 46. Cf. 8:27-30; 10:46—11:11 and 12:35-37.

not because of any weakness in him. Quite oppositely, because of his power! Furthermore, the power for which he will be crucified is a power that he exerts for the benefit of all the nations, Gentiles as well as Jews. He uses his power for the sake of Mark's audience, that is to say, and at great cost to himself. So for his crucifixion Jesus deserves honor and worship, not scorn and ridicule."<sup>596</sup>

At evening, Jesus and the disciples again left Jerusalem and spent the night on Mt. Olivet (Luke 21:37), probably in Bethany (v. 11).

"If the Lord Jesus were to show up in our house of worship, what changes would He make?"<sup>597</sup>

### **The lesson of the withered fig tree 11:20-26 (cf. Matt. 21:19-22)**

This is the third part of the incident centering on the cleansing of the temple (cf. vv. 12-14).

11:20-21 This event happened on Wednesday morning. "Withered from the roots" means that death was spreading through the tree, emanating from its sources of nourishment. The "roots" of the tree correspond to the religious leaders of the nation. The curse of *spiritual death* would spread from them to that whole generation of unbelieving Jews. Peter connected the judgment with Jesus' words. In parallel fashion, Jesus' pronouncement of judgment on that generation of Jews would have a similar effect.

11:22-23 Rather than explaining the symbolic significance of the cursing of the fig tree, Jesus proceeded to focus on the means by which the miracle happened. This was an important discipleship lesson that Jesus had taught before (cf. Matt. 6:13-14; 7:7; 17:20; 18:19; Luke 11:9; 17:6), but it appears only here in Mark. The point was that dependent trust in God can accomplish humanly impossible things through prayer (cf. James 1:6).

God is the source of the power to change. "Moving a mountain" is a universal symbol of doing something that appears to be impossible (cf. Zech. 4:7). Jesus presupposed that overcoming the difficulty in view was God's will. A true disciple of Jesus would hardly pray for anything else (Matt. 6:10). The person praying can therefore believe that what he requests will happen because it is God's will. He will neither doubt God's ability to do what he requests, since God *can* do anything, nor will he doubt that God *will* grant his petition, since it is God's will. He will not have a divided heart about this matter.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>596</sup>Gundry, p. 641.

<sup>597</sup>Wiersbe, 1:151.

<sup>598</sup>See David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of *Diakrino*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:8 (December 2005):744-49.

"What is here indicated by means of hyperbole is that one is to be absolutely confident in God's readiness to respond to faith."<sup>599</sup>

Evans suggested that the mountain Jesus referred to may have been the Temple Mount, but it seems more likely that Jesus was referring to any mountain.<sup>600</sup>

Why did Mark not explain what Jesus assumed, namely, that disciples would pray for God's will to happen? Evidently when he wrote, his original readers were committed Christians. The Roman Empire then weeded out professing-only Christians, much more than the world does today, at least in the West. The idea that a Christian would want anything but the will of God to happen was absurd, in a world where identifying oneself as a Christian meant severe persecution and possibly death.

11:24 Asking is a particular form of praying. As disciples, we can "believe" that we will have what we request in prayer, when we "ask" for God's will to take place (Matt. 6:10; 7:7), because God will accomplish His will.

11:25 Faith in God is not the only condition for answered prayer. One must also "forgive" his or her fellow human beings. The Jews commonly stood when they prayed (cf. 1 Sam. 1:26; Luke 18:11, 13). Forgiving our brothers and sisters is a precondition for obtaining family forgiveness from the Father (Matt. 6:14-15). This is the only place in Mark where Jesus referred to the disciples' ("your") "Father who is in heaven." This may have reminded them of His teaching in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-15; Luke 11:2-4).

"Nowhere else in Mark is there teaching on the need for people to forgive others."<sup>601</sup>

11:26 This verse does not appear in the most important ancient manuscripts of Mark's Gospel. Evidently scribes inserted it later, because they associated the preceding verse with Matthew 6:14.

### **B. JESUS' TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE 11:27—12:44**

This entire section contains Jesus' teaching in the temple courtyard on Wednesday. The religious leaders first questioned Jesus' authority (11:12—12:12), and then His teaching (12:13-37). Finally, Jesus condemned their hypocrisy, and commended a widow's action that demonstrated reality (12:38-44). Jesus functioned as a faithful servant of the Lord in the role of a prophet here.

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<sup>599</sup>Cranfield, p. 361.

<sup>600</sup>See Evans, p. 188.

<sup>601</sup>Ibid., p.192.

### **1. The controversy over Jesus' authority 11:27—12:12**

This controversy consisted of a discussion with the religious leaders over John the Baptist's authority (11:27-33), followed by a parable that illustrated the religious leaders' irresponsibility (12:1-12).

#### **The authority of John the Baptist 11:27-33 (cf. Matt. 21:23-27; Luke 20:1-8)**

11:27-28 The "chief priests," teachers or "scribes," and "elders" constituted the three components of the Sanhedrin. This was a very official inquiry prompted by Jesus' presence and made necessary by His cleansing of the temple. Israel's official leaders wanted to know about Jesus' credentials and who gave Him the right to say and do what He did. They questioned the nature and source of His authority. Their questions were legitimate, since the leaders were responsible for supervising Israel's religious life. Yet their question was a challenge to Jesus' honor.<sup>602</sup>

"The essence of the depiction of the opponents [of Jesus in Mark] lies in that they are self-serving; that is, they are preoccupied with preserving their power, their importance, their wealth, and their lives."<sup>603</sup>

11:29-30 Essentially, Jesus asked these leaders if they believed God was behind John's ministry (was "from heaven"). John had taught that God was behind Jesus' ministry. If the critics said they believed God was behind John's ministry, they would have had to agree that God was behind Jesus' ministry. Jesus challenged them to respond. "Answer Me" (v. 30) is unique in Mark, and reflects Jesus' superiority to these men.

"As on the earlier question of Sabbath observance (2:23—3:6), the counterquestion [*sic*] implies that Jesus stands not under the Sanhedrin but over it. His counterquestion demonstrates the authority about which he is questioned."<sup>604</sup>

By responding to the officials with a question, Jesus was not trying to divert attention away from it. He was using a common device that was designed to get an opponent to say something that the opponent would not ordinarily say otherwise.<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>602</sup>See Joseph H. Hellerman, "Challenging the Authority of Jesus: Mark 11:27-33 and Mediterranean Notions of Honor and Shame," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:2 (June 2000):213-28.

<sup>603</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 121.

<sup>604</sup>Edwards, p. 226.

<sup>605</sup>Mann, p. 457.

11:31-33 The critics' concern for their own position—rather than for the *truth*—is obvious in their refusal to answer Jesus. Clearly, they rejected *both John and Jesus* as God's authorized prophets! Jesus had already answered their question in a veiled way, by claiming that His authority was the same as John's. He refused to give them a more obvious answer, knowing that they were trying to discredit Him. Their failure to reply to Him released Him from His conditional promise to reply to them (v. 29)—since they failed to meet the condition. Rejection of revelation shut the door on further revelation.

"In his assault on the demonic, forgiveness of sins, supremacy over Torah and temple, speech about God as Father, and grounding pronouncements about matters in which God is sovereign in his own authority, Jesus exercises an authority that is God's prerogative. . . . Coming from anyone else it would have signaled utter madness—as it did in the eyes of his enemies. What the devout Jew saw in Torah, or perhaps in the temple, the gospels see in Jesus, for Jesus replaces Torah and temple as the *locus Dei* [place of God]. When questioned about the source of his authority, Jesus points to his baptism by John, wherein the voice declaring Jesus Son of God and the Spirit empowering him as servant of God confer on him the *exousia* [authority] of God.

"Thus in the gospel of Mark, as in John, Jesus appears as God incarnate in his bearing, speech and activity. This astonishes, baffles, and even offends his contemporaries, from his closest circles outward. The religious leaders in particular regard his laying claim to a realm that belonged properly to God as the gravest possible trespass. Jesus gives the distinct impression, however, that he is not a trespasser but is entering into his rightful property."<sup>606</sup>

### **The parable of the wicked tenant farmers 12:1-12 (cf. Matt. 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19)**

"The other major example of the concentric [chiastic] pattern in Mark's story [beside 2:1—3:6] is the series of Jesus' conflicts with the authorities in Jerusalem [ch. 12], comprised of seven episodes: Episodes A and A<sup>1</sup> involve Jesus' statement of judgment against the authorities (the riddle of the wicked tenants and the warning against the scribes). Episodes B and B<sup>1</sup> include a quotation from the psalms followed by a reaction to that citation (the quotations about the cornerstone and David's son); and episodes C and C<sup>1</sup> are both legal discussions about love for God and neighbor (Caesar and God, and love for God and neighbor). Episode D is

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<sup>606</sup>Edwards, pp. 232-33.

the central episode; its topic is the resurrection, and its theme illuminates all the episodes: the failure of the authorities to understand either the writings or the power of God."<sup>607</sup>

Matthew's account of this parable is fuller than Mark's, because Matthew evidently wanted to show the Jews how wicked and irresponsible their leaders were. Mark probably included the story because it contrasts the behavior of Israel's official servants, the religious leaders, with God's Servant, Jesus.

"Recent study of the Zenon papyri and of the rabbinic parables has shown that situations very closely analogous to that of the parable actually existed in Palestine both around 280 years prior to Jesus' ministry and for some time afterward."<sup>608</sup>

12:1 Jesus addressed this parable to all the people present (Luke 20:9), but particularly to the religious leaders. The "man" in the parable represents God, the "vineyard" is Israel (Ps. 80:8-19; Jer. 2:21), and the tenants ("vine-growers") are Israel's leaders.

"Vineyards were often farmed commercially. Given the temple context of the parable, as well as the high-handed behavior of the tenants . . . , we should view the *georgoi* ["vine-growers"] of the parable as wealthy commercial farmers."<sup>609</sup>

The parable develops the scene presented in Isaiah 5:1-2, which is part of a prophecy of God's judgment on Israel (cf. Ps. 80:8-16). God spared no expense or effort to make Israel a choice nation. He had left Israel on its own, so to speak, after He had established the nation.

"Since the whole of the upper Jordan valley and a large part of the Galilean uplands were in the hands of foreign landlords at this time, such a practice was common."<sup>610</sup>

12:2-5 The "*harvest* time" stands for the time when God expected to obtain some reward for His investment in Israel. The servants ("slaves") represent the prophets, whom Israel's leaders typically rejected, persecuted, and even in some cases murdered (cf. 1 Kings 18:13; 22:27; 2 Chron. 24:20-22; 36:15; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 37:15). The main point of the parable is the wicked treatment Israel's leaders had given the servants whom God had sent to them.

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<sup>607</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 53.

<sup>608</sup>Lane, p. 416.

<sup>609</sup>Evans, pp. 232-33.

<sup>610</sup>Lane, p. 417.

12:6-8 The sending of the owner's son constituted the supreme test for the tenant farmers. The tenant farmers ("vine-growers") in the parable may have believed that the owner of the vineyard had died, and that he had only one son who was his heir. They rationalized that if they killed the son, there would be no one else to inherit the vineyard, and they could retain control of it. The tenants evidently "threw" the son "out of the vineyard," and *then* "killed him" (Matt. 21:39; Luke 20:15; cf. 1 Kings 21:2-3, 16). Mark's order of events (v. 8) shows that his murder was also an act of rejection.<sup>611</sup>

The religious leaders certainly behaved as though God was dead. He really had only one uniquely beloved Son (cf. 1:11; 9:7).

12:9 The tenant farmers' rejection of the owner's "son" was equally a rejection of "the owner." His predictable reaction would be to remove them and give the care of his vineyard to other tenants. As in the parable, God would remove ("destroy" Jerusalem, the temple, and religious leaders in A.D. 70) Israel's leaders and replace them with other leaders, the leaders of the church.

"This prediction was fulfilled in the church where the spiritual leadership became entrusted mainly to those of Gentile origin. But the determining factor is their faithfulness, not their national origin."<sup>612</sup>

12:10-11 Jesus carried His revelation, concerning the fate of the Son, further by referring to Psalm 118. This is the same psalm the crowds chanted at the Triumphal Entry (11:9; cf. Ps. 118:22-23). The "stone" in view is probably the capstone for the building that God is constructing. In its original use, the stone represented Israel. Here, Jesus made Himself the Stone (cf. Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7). The Father's reversal of the Son's fate elicited wonder from the beholders, because it was an unexpected turn of events that demonstrated divine sovereignty.

It appears that Israel's leaders rejected the Stone that was to be the capstone to complete Israel, God's temple, through which He would work to bring blessing to all mankind (Gen. 12:3). The Stone rejected has become, not the capstone, but the most important Stone ("chief corner stone") in the foundation of a new temple that God is now building, namely, the church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-10).

After God removes the church from the earth (1 Thess. 4:13-18), the Stone will return to the earth (cf. Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45; Rev. 19:11-16), and Israel will accept Him (Zech. 12:10). Then He will complete Israel (Isa. 59:20), and Israel will, during the Millennium, function as the temple that God

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<sup>611</sup>Lenski, p. 512.

<sup>612</sup>Hiebert, p. 290.

intended her to be (Dan. 7:22). He will then bring blessing to the whole earth through Israel.

12:12 The meaning of Jesus' parable was clear to the religious leaders. Jesus had exposed their murderous plot to kill Him. The favor of the multitude shielded Jesus from their wrath temporarily.

"The parable of the Wicked Vineyard Tenants ends on a note of suspense and also on a note of irony. For in plotting Jesus' destruction, they [Jesus' antagonists] unwittingly live up to their characterization in the parable as murderers."<sup>613</sup>

Jesus' claims to being God's beloved Son were becoming increasingly clear to everyone. As they became clearer, opposition from Israel's leaders intensified.

## **2. The controversy over Jesus' teaching 12:13-37**

Controversy over Jesus' authority led to controversy over His teaching. The Jewish religious leaders attacked Him three times, trying to destroy His credibility and popularity. They plied Him with questions about the poll tax (vv. 13-17), the resurrection (vv. 18-27), and the greatest commandment (vv. 28-34). Then Jesus took the initiative and questioned them about Messiah's sonship (vv. 35-37). This ended their attacks. The whole encounter happened on Wednesday following the events just recorded. It recalls the similar earlier sequence of conflicts with Jesus in Galilee (cf. 2:1—3:6)

### **Jesus' teaching about the poll tax 12:13-17 (cf. Matt. 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26)**

12:13 Sanhedrin members took the initiative in sending the "Pharisees" and "Herodians." They united against Jesus, whom they perceived as a common threat, even though they differed among themselves politically. They asked Jesus about a political issue that divided them.

12:14-15a The critics' preamble was hypercritical (better than "hypocritical") flattery (cf. Matt. 22:18; Luke 20:22).<sup>614</sup> But what they said about Jesus was true. They intended to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma.<sup>615</sup>

"The flattering words . . . are intended to cajole, perhaps even pressure, Jesus into being dangerously candid."<sup>616</sup>

Since Judea had become a Roman province in A.D. 6, the Romans had required the Jews to pay a yearly "poll (head) tax" into the emperor's treasury. The Zealots later refused to pay it, claiming that payment

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<sup>613</sup>Evans, p. 239.

<sup>614</sup>Mann, pp. 469, 470.

<sup>615</sup>Hunter, p. 116.

<sup>616</sup>Evans, p. 245.



acknowledged Rome's right to rule over them. The Pharisees paid it but objected strongly to it. The Herodians paid it willingly since they supported Roman rule.

Jesus' critics asked Him what was the right or lawful thing to do. In their eyes Messiah would never sanction foreign rule, but if Jesus publicly opposed Rome He would be in a dangerous position. They thought that either answer would hurt Jesus.

12:15b-16 Jesus exposed their question for what it was, malicious entrapment rather than honest inquiry. The small silver "denarius" was the only coin the Romans accepted in payment for taxes.<sup>617</sup> The images on the coin showed that Rome had political authority over those who used it.

"The denarius of Tiberius portrayed the emperor as the semi-divine son of the god Augustus and the goddess Livia and bore the (abbreviated) inscription 'Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus' on the obverse and 'Pontifex Maximus' on the reverse. Both the representations and the inscriptions were rooted in the imperial cult and constituted a claim to divine honors."<sup>618</sup>

Why did Jesus ask His accusers to bring Him a denarius? Perhaps He did not have one Himself.<sup>619</sup> If so, this may reflect on Jesus' poverty and His dependence on God and others for His support. I suspect that He did what He did to involve His hearers more actively in the lesson that He was teaching them. Audience participation always ensures better learning.

12:17 Jesus avoided the "either or" problem with a "both and" response that all of His critics could agree with. God has authority over those who bear His image. Therefore, the Jews should "give ("render to") Him" His due, namely: complete personal submission. Caesar also had some authority over those who used "his image" by using his coins. Therefore the Jews should pay their tax.

"Though the obligation to pay to Caesar some of his own coinage in return for the amenities his rule provided is affirmed, the idolatrous claims expressed on the coins are rejected. God's rights are to be honored. Here Jesus is not saying that there are two quite separate independent spheres, that of Caesar and that of God (for Caesar and all that is his belongs to God); but he is indicating that there are obligations to Caesar which do not infringe the rights of God but are indeed ordained by God."<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>617</sup>Grassmick, p. 162.

<sup>618</sup>Lane, p. 424.

<sup>619</sup>McGee, 4:213.

<sup>620</sup>Cranfield, p. 372.

This answer "amazed" (Gr. *exethaumazon*) Jesus' critics. He had avoided the trap they had laid for Him, and had given a profound though simple answer to their question.

This teaching would have been especially helpful to Mark's original Roman readers. It helped them and all subsequent disciples understand that Christianity does not advocate disloyalty to the state (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Duty to God does not eliminate duty to government. Nevertheless, duty to government does not eliminate one's higher duty to God, either.

**Jesus' teaching about the resurrection 12:18-27 (cf. Matt. 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-40)**

12:18 The "Sadducees" were mainly urban, wealthy, and educated Jews. Their numbers were comparatively few, but they occupied important positions including many in the priesthood. Their influence was greater than their size as a party within Judaism. This is the only place Mark mentioned them. They claimed to believe only what the Old Testament taught, and they did not follow the traditions of the elders that the Pharisees observed. They did not believe in the "resurrection," because they said they could find no clear revelation about it in the Old Testament.

"It is probable that the Sadducees began as a political faction which supported the legitimacy of the Hasmonean throne over the protest of the purists who insisted on a separation of the priestly and royal prerogatives or who looked for a revival of the Davidic kingdom."<sup>621</sup>

The Hasmonean throne refers to rule by the Herods.

12:19-23 The Sadducees posed their hypothetical case to make any view of the resurrection but their own look absurd.<sup>622</sup>

12:24-25 The Sadducees did not understand the Scriptural revelation about resurrection. Furthermore, they did not realize that God's "power" was sufficient to raise people and to raise them to a different type of life. Marriage as we know it will not exist when we have immortal bodies, and deathless existence will not require propagation of the human race. The Sadducees denied the existence of the angelic race (Acts 23:8), which belief Jesus also corrected. They considered their views enlightened, but Jesus said they needed enlightening.<sup>623</sup> Jesus did not say that when people die they become angels, which they do not, nor that we will be "like angels" *in every respect*, which we will not.

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<sup>621</sup>Lane, p. 426.

<sup>622</sup>Swete, p. 278.

<sup>623</sup>See Mann, p. 475.

12:26-27 In concluding that the Old Testament did not teach the resurrection, the Sadducees had overlooked an important passage in the Torah (Pentateuch). They regarded the Torah as particularly authoritative. Exodus 3:6 taught continued human existence after death. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive in Moses' day. The Sadducees not only rejected the resurrection, but also the afterlife in heaven or hell.<sup>624</sup> The Jews had a more holistic view of man than most modern westerners do (cf. Gen. 2:7). The Sadducees concluded that if the material part of man died, the whole person ceased to exist. Jesus, who held the same unified view of man, argued that if the immaterial part of man lived on, the whole person would live on.

The major error of the Sadducees was their "greatly mistaken" understanding of scriptural revelation. Jesus' final rebuke (v. 27), unique in the second Gospel, stressed that flaw.

"If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the [Abrahamic] covenant, and of which the formula 'the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob' is the symbol. It is in fidelity to his covenant that God will resurrect the dead."<sup>625</sup>

Covenants are in effect as long as the covenant partners are alive, but if one of them dies, the covenant promises are no longer binding (cf. Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39). For the covenant promises that God made to the patriarchs to still be in effect, the patriarchs still had to be alive.

"The argument turns on an inference drawn from parallel truths. God is the God of the patriarchs; he is also the God of the living. Therefore the patriarchs, though presently dead, must someday live."<sup>626</sup>

"No appeal is made to Isa 26:19, Dan 12:2, Ps 16:9-11, or Job 19:26, texts that more or less support the doctrine [of resurrection]. Jesus instead appeals to the very character and being of God himself. He is the God of the living, not the God of the dead. If he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—as he disclosed himself to Moses the great lawgiver—then life, not death, will surely be the destiny of all those linked to him in faith. If all God's people are destined to perish and to remain dead, then in what sense is he the God of the living?"<sup>627</sup>

<sup>624</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 18:1:4; idem, *The Wars . . .*, 2:8:14. See the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Sadducees," by D. A. Hagner, 5:214-15.

<sup>625</sup>Lane, p. 430.

<sup>626</sup>Evans, pp. 256-57.

<sup>627</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 257-58.

### Jesus' teaching about the greatest commandment 12:28-34 (cf. Matt. 22:34-40)

The third attack by Jesus' enemies involved a question about the greatest commandment (cf. Luke 10:25-28).

12:28 The rabbis counted 613 commands in the Mosaic Law: 365 positive and 248 negative. They recognized that all were not equally important or equally foundational. They debated which were the "heavy" commands and which were the "light" ones. They also tried to formulate principles that comprehended the rest of the Law.<sup>628</sup> These were the concerns of the law teacher who asked Jesus what type (Gr. *poia*) of command He regarded as first in importance ("foremost").

"The scribe desired Jesus to indicate a principle of classification."<sup>629</sup>

Matthew viewed his question as coming from the scribe who spoke as a spokesman for the Pharisees, whereas Mark presented it as the inquirer's personal concern. This difference reflects Mark's interest in individuals.

12:29-30 Mark's account included Deuteronomy 6:4, which Matthew omitted. This verse, the first in the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5; cf. Deut. 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41) that the Jews repeated twice daily, provides a basis for Deuteronomy 6:5. *Shema* is the first Hebrew word in this passage, and it means "Hear." Matthew's Jewish readers would have understood this, but Mark's Gentile readers probably would not have. Verse 4 is an affirmation of belief in the unity of God (i.e., in monotheism). Many of Mark's original readers had formerly been polytheists.

"God is to be loved completely and totally (v. 30) because he, and he alone, is God and because he has made a covenant of love with his people. In the covenant God gives himself totally in love to his people; therefore he expects his people to give themselves totally ('soul,' 'mind,' and 'strength') in love to him."<sup>630</sup>

"Heart" represents the control center of human personality, "soul" the self-conscious thought life, "mind" the thought capacity, and "strength" all of one's bodily powers.<sup>631</sup> These are to be the sources out of which love for God should flow. We should love God with all our will (decisions), emotions (desires), minds (thoughts), and bodies (actions).

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<sup>628</sup>Wessel, p. 737.

<sup>629</sup>Hiebert, p. 303.

<sup>630</sup>Wessel, p. 737.

<sup>631</sup>Grassmick, p. 164.

"A comparison of the order—heart, soul, mind (Matthew); heart, soul, mind, strength (Mark); heart, soul, strength, mind (Luke); heart, soul, strength (the Masoretic Text); and mind, soul, strength (the Septuagint)—among the various lists suggests that Mark and Luke added 'mind' to the Hebrew/Septuagintal formula whereas Matthew substituted 'mind' for 'strength.'"<sup>632</sup>

12:31 The scribe had requested one commandment, but Jesus gave him two. Love for man, in Leviticus 19:18, grows out of love for God, in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and is inseparable from it philosophically. The Jews regarded only fellow Jews and full proselytes as their neighbors, but Jesus taught that a neighbor is anyone with whom we have any dealings whatsoever (cf. Luke 10:25-27). "Neighbor" (Gr. *plesion*, lit. one nearby) is a generic term for fellow man.

We are to love all others as we love ourselves. The Law assumed that every person has a fundamental love for himself or herself. We demonstrate this love by caring for ourselves in many different ways.<sup>633</sup> "Loving our neighbors as ourselves" does not mean spending the same amount of time or money to meet the needs of others, that we do to meet our own needs, since this would be impossible. It means treating others as we treat ourselves.

These are the greatest commandments, in that they summarize the two basic responsibilities regarding the Law: our duties toward God and our duties those toward other people. These are basic human responsibilities. The termination of the Mosaic Code does not invalidate them. They have been primary since creation, and will continue as such forever—because of man's relationship to God, and because of the unity of the human race.

12:32-33 Mark alone recorded the scribe's response and Jesus' comment (v. 34). These words underscore the importance of Jesus' teaching. The scribe believed Jesus' answer was correct. He, too, viewed love as more important than the observance of religious ritual (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6). This was not typical of the Pharisees, who regarded ritual observance as more important than attitude, and ceremony as more important than morality.

". . . the 'friendly scribe' himself puts his finger on the fundamental difference separating Jesus and the religious authorities in terms of what it is to do the will of God:

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<sup>632</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "Deuteronomy, New Testament Faith, and the Christian Life," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 26.

<sup>633</sup>For refutation of the view that this command implies that we must learn to love ourselves before we can love others, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 130-31.

Whereas the essential matter for Jesus is loving God and neighbor, for the authorities it is strict adherence to law and tradition as they define this.

". . . Mark is in effect using the friendly scribe to identify the two contrasting positions of Jesus and the authorities on doing the will of God."<sup>634</sup>

12:34 Jesus meant that the scribe was "not far from" *entering* "the kingdom." His openness to Scriptural revelation and his positive orientation to Jesus, if continued, would bring him to faith in Jesus and ultimately entrance into His kingdom.

Jesus' skillful answers discouraged His critics from trying to trap Him. So they stopped asking Him questions.

It was clear that Jesus derived His authority from God's Word (cf. 11:28). All the answers He gave went back to the Old Testament. Since this is the authority all the Jewish leaders claimed to follow, though they did not, they failed to discredit Jesus.

**Jesus' question about Messiah's sonship 12:35-37 (cf. Matt. 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44)**

Until now the religious leaders had questioned Jesus about His teaching. Now He asked them about theirs (Matt. 22:41). Matthew's account of this incident is the longest.

12:35 Jesus responded to the situation before Him. He wanted to know the sense in which the teachers of the law believed that Messiah was David's son. The Old Testament clearly taught that Messiah would be a descendant ("son") "of David" (2 Sam. 7:8-16; et al.). The leaders believed this, but their understanding of Messiah's relationship to David was only that of another victorious Jewish king from David's dynasty.

12:36-37 Mark focused the readers' attention on Jesus' authoritative teaching by omitting the Pharisees' answer, which Matthew included to discredit them (Matt. 22:42). Here only in the sayings of Jesus did He trace the authority of an Old Testament passage to its divine inspiration. How could Messiah be both *less* than David (his son) and *greater* than David (his lord) at the same time? A father does not refer to his own son as his "lord." It is more natural for a son to call his father "lord."<sup>635</sup>

". . . Jesus uses his superior knowledge of the legal and prophetic writings to justify his actions and to defend against criminal accusations."<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>634</sup>Kingsbury, pp. 17, 124.

<sup>635</sup>Cranfield, pp. 382-83.

<sup>636</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 85.

Psalm 110:1 showed that the Messiah was not only David's junior in age, but also his senior in rank.<sup>637</sup> He is the *Son of God*: God as well as Man.

"Only through the Virgin Birth does Jesus possess the dual nature that allows Him to be both David's Son and David's Lord."<sup>638</sup>

Mark's record of the crowd's positive response to Jesus' teaching further stressed its authority. Israel's religious leaders challenged it, but the multitudes acknowledged it.

### **3. Jesus' condemnation of hypocrisy and commendation of reality** **12:38-44**

Jesus proceeded to condemn His accusers who had condemned Him. They had condemned Him because He did not fit their ideas of Messiah. He had shown that the Old Testament presented a different Messiah than the one they wanted. Now He condemned them for failing to measure up to what the Old Testament required of them. This section concludes Mark's account of Jesus' public ministry and resumes Jesus' teaching of His disciples.

#### **Jesus' condemnation of hypocrisy 12:38-40 (cf. Matt. 23:1-39; Luke 20:45-47)**

Mark condensed Jesus' comments, that Matthew recorded extensively, to give the essence of Jesus' criticism. These words signal Jesus' final break with Israel's official leaders.

12:38-39 Jesus condemned the religious leaders for having the attitude of lords rather than that of servants. He spoke of the religious teachers as a group, though there were exceptional individuals, of course (cf., e.g., v. 34). Most Israelites of this time venerated the scribes with unbounded respect.<sup>639</sup>

"The reference [to "chief seats in the synagogues"] is to the bench before the ark which contained the scrolls, and (since the bench faced the people) a desirable location in which to be highly visible."<sup>640</sup>

12:40 This verse "passes from their ostentatious manners to their corrupt morals."<sup>641</sup> Teachers of the law did not receive an income from the state; they depended on voluntary contributions.<sup>642</sup> This led some of them to prey on ("devour") the sympathy of others, even "widows," who needed all their income simply to survive. This reference sets the stage for the next incident (vv. 41-44).

<sup>637</sup>Moule, p. 99. Cf. Evans, pp. 272-76.

<sup>638</sup>Bailey, in *The New . . .*, p. 90.

<sup>639</sup>See Lane, pp. 339-40, for some examples.

<sup>640</sup>Mann, p. 491.

<sup>641</sup>Hiebert, p. 310.

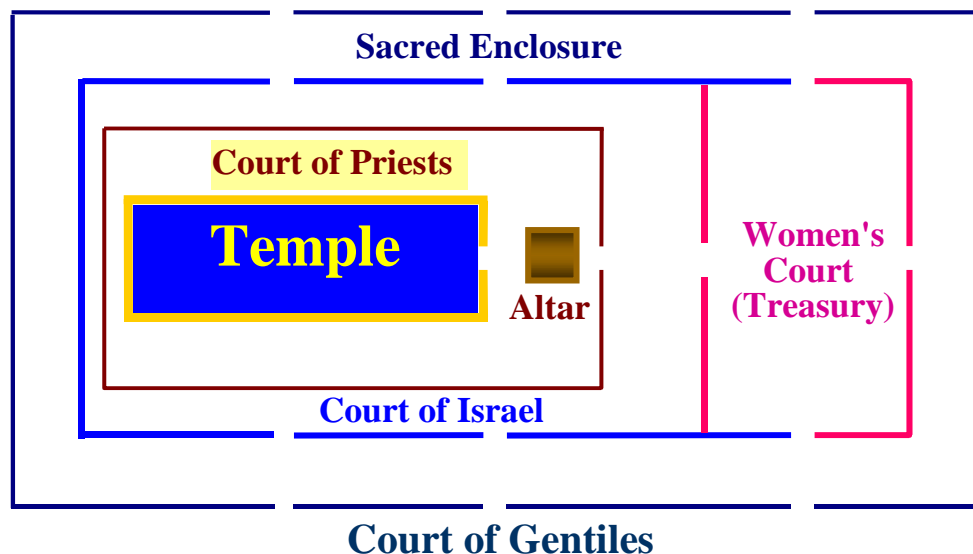
<sup>642</sup>Wessel, p. 740.

Their typically "long prayers" presented an impression of piety that masked greed. They pretended to love God greatly, but their aim was to get people to love them greatly. The result would be "greater condemnation" when they stood before God's judgment bar. Here is another indication that there are degrees of punishment (cf. Matt. 11:20-24; James 3:1; et al.).

### Jesus' commendation of reality 12:41-44 (cf. Luke 21:1-4)

This incident contrasts the spiritual poverty and physical prosperity of the scribes, with the physical poverty and spiritual prosperity of the widow. It also contrasts the greed of the scribes with the generosity of the widow. It resumes Jesus' instruction of His disciples (12:41—13:37). This pericope brings the themes of true piety (the woman) and hardened unbelief (the scribes) to a climax.<sup>643</sup>

12:41-42 There were 13 trumpet-shaped receptacles (Heb. *shofar*) that the priests had placed against the north, east, and south walls of the women's courtyard to receive the Jews' offerings.<sup>644</sup> The court of the women (temple's "treasury") was within the court of the Gentiles, the outermost court of the temple. A low barrier separated the court of the Gentiles from the other courtyards and the temple building that lay within this enclosure. The court of the women was farther from the temple building than the court of Israel, which only Jewish men could enter, or the court of the priests, which only the priests could enter. Jesus had given His preceding teaching in the court of the Gentiles. Now He evidently moved into the court of the women.



<sup>643</sup>See Geoffrey Smith, "A Closer Look at the Widow's Offering: Mark 12:41-44," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:1 (March 1997)27-36.

<sup>644</sup>Mishnah *Shekalim* 6:5. See also Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 48-49.



While there, He observed "how" (Gr. *pos*) the Jewish men and women, who had come to celebrate Passover, were putting their voluntary contributions into the receptacles.

The woman whom Jesus observed was not only a widow, but "a poor widow." Evidently it was obvious to onlookers that she was poor and a widow, probably from the clothes she was wearing. She contrasted with the many wealthy people there. The "two small" bronze ("copper") "coins" (Gr. *lepta*) that the widow contributed were together worth less than one-hundredth of a denarius, the day's wage of a working man in Palestine. Mark told his Roman readers that they were worth "a fraction of" (NIV) one Roman cent (Gr. *kodrantēs*, a transliteration of the Latin *quadrans*).

"It has been said that two lepta could buy one a handful of flour or the equivalent of one meager meal . . ."<sup>645</sup>

12:43-44 Mark stressed the importance of this lesson for disciples, by first noting that Jesus called "His disciples to Him," and then that He prefaced His statement with "Truly I say to you" (NASB). The poor widow's offering was worth more than the others, because it cost her more to give it, and most of all because she gave it willingly. Since she gave two coins, she could have kept one for herself. Her sacrifice expressed her love for God and her trust in God to sustain her (cf. 1 Kings 17:8-16).

"The means of the giver and the motive are the measure of true generosity."<sup>646</sup>

"The test of liberality is not what is given, but what is left."<sup>647</sup>

How did Jesus know that the woman had "put in all she owned, all she had to live on"? Perhaps He knew this as a prophet, or He may have assumed it from her appearance, or He may have been speaking hyperbolically.<sup>648</sup>

Here is another instructive example of a person with a servant's attitude who gave *all*, as little as that was, to God (cf. 10:45). Jesus and Mark taught disciples how God values wholehearted commitment to Himself with this incident.

### **C. JESUS' TEACHING ON MT. OLIVET CH. 13**

The Olivet Discourse is the longest section of Jesus' teaching that Mark recorded (cf. 4:1-34; 7:1-23). Mark used this discourse as a bridge between Jesus' controversies with

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<sup>645</sup>Evans, p. 283.

<sup>646</sup>Plummer, p. 290.

<sup>647</sup>William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Mark*, p. 179. Cf. Cole, p. 196.

<sup>648</sup>Evans, p. 284.

Israel's leaders (11:27—12:44) and the account of His passion (chs. 14—15). It provides assurance that the leaders who had plotted against Jesus would suffer God's judgment.

". . . chap. 13 greatly enhances Mark's portrayal of Jesus as a predictor."<sup>649</sup>

"Mark 13 is one of the most difficult chapters in the New Testament for a modern reader to understand. That is so because Mark 13 is one of the most Jewish chapters in the Bible. From beginning to end it is thinking in terms of Jewish history and Jewish ideas."<sup>650</sup>

Matthew and Mark both stressed Jesus' teaching that focused on His second coming. Matthew and Mark also recorded more about Jesus' answer to the disciples' second question, "What will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" (13:4b). Luke concentrated more on His answer to their first question, "When will these things be?" (13:4a). Matthew wrote to answer the questions of Jewish unbelievers. Mark wrote primarily to respond to those of Gentile Christians living under Roman persecution and in a hostile world. Mark stressed Jesus' exhortations to watchfulness and His preparation of the disciples for future hardships.

"The whole of the 'Little Apocalypse [i.e., the Olivet Discourse]' seems designed to warn the disciples against four great spiritual dangers. The first danger is that of reliance upon the outward adjuncts of religion, venerable and loved though they be. The second danger (verses, 5, 6) is that of deception by false Messiahs; the third (verses 7, 8) is that of distraction by world turmoil about us; the fourth (verses 9ff.) is that of being 'tripped' because of the unexpected bitterness of the persecution for our faith. To be forewarned, in each case, is to be forearmed."<sup>651</sup>

### **1. The setting 13:1-4 (cf. Matt. 24:1-3; Luke 21:5-7)**

13:1 This discourse evidently followed Jesus' departure from the temple on Wednesday with His disciples. The "wonderful (beautiful) stones" that caught the disciple's eye were probably those above the floor of the temple courtyard. Herod the Great had enlarged the temple esplanade and supported it with huge foundation stones. At the southeast corner, the temple complex rose about 170 feet above the Kidron Valley below.<sup>652</sup> Some of those stones are still in place.

In view of what Jesus predicted and what happened, the disciples apparently referred to the stones of the *buildings* and *porches*, not the foundation stones. The colonnades that surrounded the temple courtyard were also very beautiful. The whole temple complex was magnificent.<sup>653</sup>

<sup>649</sup>Gundry, p. 734.

<sup>650</sup>Barclay, p. 317.

<sup>651</sup>Cole, p. 197.

<sup>652</sup>Finegan, pp. 323-27.

<sup>653</sup>See Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 15:11:3-7; and Edersheim, *The Temple*, ch. 2.

Mark probably called attention to the stones in view of what Jesus would say about them (v. 2).

13:2 Jesus predicted the complete destruction of the temple buildings (cf. Jer 7:11-14). This happened in A.D. 70 when Titus the Roman destroyed the city of Jerusalem, from April 11 to September 7.<sup>654</sup> He razed the buildings and porches on the temple esplanade so thoroughly that no trace of them remains today. Not even their exact location on the temple mount is certain.

"Up to this point during this day, Jesus had acted as God's Forhtteller, applying the truth of God to the scene before Him; with this statement, He turned to predictive prophecy, declaring the near future."<sup>655</sup>

However, this prophecy has not yet attained complete fulfillment. There are still many stones standing on one another in the temple complex, specifically in its foundations. What Jesus proceeded to predict shows that complete fulfillment would not come until the future (i.e., the Tribulation).

13:3-4 Evidently the disciples pondered Jesus' prophecy as they crossed the Kidron Valley that separated the temple complex from Mt. Olivet to the east. When they sat down on the mountain and looked west into the temple courtyard, Jesus' first four disciples (1:16-20) asked two questions.

The first question dealt with the time of the temple's destruction. Matthew's account shows that their second question had two parts: They asked what the sign of Jesus' coming, and of the end of the present age, would be. Mark combined these two parts into one simple question about the sign of "all these things" being fulfilled. The disciples viewed the destruction of the temple and the end of the present age as occurring together. In His answer, Jesus taught them that these events would not happen at the same time. Again a question from the disciples led to a teaching session (cf. 4:10-32; 7:17-23; 9:11-13, 28-29; 10:10-12).

## **2. Warnings against deceptions 13:5-8 (Matt. 24:4-8; Luke 21:8-11)**

Jesus first answered the disciples' second question about the sign of the end of the present age. He did so negatively, by warning them of false signs—"the beginning of birth pangs" (vv. 5-13). Then He gave them positive information about the event that will signal great "tribulation," followed by His Second Coming (vv. 14-27). Finally, Jesus answered their first question—about the destruction of Jerusalem—with a parable (vv. 28-32). The central part of this revelation is eschatological (vv. 14-27), flanked by moral exhortations. Verses 5-37 contain 19 imperative verbs in the Greek text. This discourse is a good example of the practical nature of biblical prophecy.

<sup>654</sup>W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 2:595.

<sup>655</sup>Hiebert, pp. 315-16.

"The conditions associated with the impending local crisis of Jerusalem's fall foreshadow those connected with the worldwide end-time crisis. Thus Jesus' words, relevant to His first disciples, remain so for all disciples who face similar conditions throughout this Age."<sup>656</sup>

- 13:5-6        The first word of the discourse proper means "take heed" (Gr. *blepete*). This word occurs four times in the following verses, indicating that *warning* is an important theme (vv. 9, 23, 33). Here, Jesus warned the disciples about people who would claim to be the Messiah ("I am He"). There would be "many" of them before He would return. Mark's "I am" is a divine name (cf. Exod. 3:14; John 8:58). Jesus said these false messiahs would claim to be "God" as well as "Messiah." Coming "in My name" means claiming His authority.<sup>657</sup>
- 13:7-8        "Wars," "rumors of wars," "earthquakes," and "famines" would precede Jesus' return, but they are not signs of the end of the age. There will be many of these things before the end comes. The messianic kingdom will appear in history similar to an infant who emerges from a very painful birthing experience (cf. Isa. 66:8; Jer. 22:23; Hos. 13:13; Mic. 4:9-10). Jesus compared wars, rumors of war, earthquakes, and famines to the beginning of these pains.

These phenomena show that the kingdom is coming, but they do not enable observers to date its arrival precisely. They are part of God's program for the present age that includes judgment as well as salvation. They do not necessarily indicate that the Tribulation has begun. However, these things will also mark the first part of the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 6). Verses 5-8 probably describe conditions before and during the first half of the Tribulation, and verses 9-23 describe conditions during the second half.<sup>658</sup>

### **3. Warnings about personal danger during persecution 13:9-13 (cf. Matt. 24:9-13; Luke 21:12-19)**

These warnings also occur in other contexts of Jesus' ministry (cf. Matt. 10:17-22; Luke 12:11-12). Jesus evidently voiced them more than once.

Mark stressed the idea of persecution by recording the Greek word *paradidomi* three times in this pericope. The NASB translated this word "deliver up" in verses 9, 11, and 12. The NIV rendered it "handed over" in verse 9, "arrested" in verse 11, and "betray" in verse 12.

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<sup>656</sup>Grassmick, p. 167.

<sup>657</sup>Evans, p. 305.

<sup>658</sup>Cf. Bailey, in *The New . . .*, p. 91.

13:9 The disciples could anticipate persecution from the Jews and the Gentiles, from religious and secular courts. However, such treatment would provide opportunity to bear witness for Jesus. This warning is appropriate for all disciples in the inter-advent era, as are all the warnings in this discourse.

13:10 "Unto all the nations" is in the emphatic first position in the Greek text. "All" the nations must hear the gospel before the end of the age (cf. Matt. 24:14). This is the responsibility of every generation of disciples (Matt. 28:19). The generation of believers alive during the Tribulation, immediately preceding Jesus' return, will accomplish this task *in their generation* (Rev. 7). "Must" (Gr. *dei*) indicates divine necessity. God wants this to happen, and it will happen.

"It is part of God's eschatological purpose that before the End [of this age] all nations shall have an opportunity to accept the gospel."<sup>659</sup>

This verse is not a promise, that if disciples will preach the gospel to all nations in a particular generation, God will then begin the kingdom—as postmillennialists teach. Man cannot bring in the kingdom by the universal preaching of the gospel. God will bring it in at His appointed time. This is not a promise that everyone will become a believer in Jesus, either.

13:11 Jesus promised that God will give special grace (help) to disciples, who want to bear a good testimony, when they are arrested and tried for their faith (v. 9). The "Holy Spirit" will give such disciples the appropriate words to "speak" then (cf. Exod. 4:12; Num. 22:35; Jer. 1:9). Jesus did not forbid careful thought, but just anxious care (cf. Luke 21:15).<sup>660</sup> This promise should give disciples in these situations freedom from unnecessary anxiety. However, Jesus did not promise release from suffering.

"History bears ample witness to the fact that Christians on trial for their faith have been amazed themselves at the aptness of the answers that flashed into their minds at the opportune moment."<sup>661</sup>

13:12-13 Betrayal even by family members will be another trial disciples may have to bear (cf. Mic. 7:2-6; Luke 12:51-53). Persecution would come through official channels but also from blood relatives. All kinds of people would hate them for their testimony.

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<sup>659</sup>Cranfield, p. 399.

<sup>660</sup>Taylor, p. 508.

<sup>661</sup>Hiebert, p. 321.

"As there is nothing that excites such love as the gospel, when intelligently received, so there is nothing that occasions such hate as this same gospel, when passionately rejected."<sup>662</sup>

The last part of verse 13 states a general principle. Faithful endurance of persecution to its end results in deliverance. Disciples who endure their persecution faithfully, to the end of that persecution, will experience deliverance from it while they are alive. Disciples who endure their persecution faithfully, to the end of their lives, will experience deliverance from it by death. Disciples living just before Jesus returns, who endure their persecution faithfully to the end of the present age, will experience deliverance at Jesus' Second Coming.

Faithful endurance of persecution also results in the privilege of reigning with Jesus in His kingdom (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12). Note that Jesus did not teach that all will endure to the end faithfully. Unfortunately some disciples do not (2 Tim. 2). Notwithstanding, our ultimate salvation does not depend on enduring persecution faithfully, but on God's faithfulness to His promises to keep us secure (2 Tim. 2:13; cf. John 10:27-28; Rom. 8:31-39; et al.).

This pericope should be a special encouragement for disciples undergoing persecution for their faith, including Mark's original readers. It is easier to endure suffering for our faith when we view it in the context of God's plan for the future. This perspective gives us hope.

#### **4. The coming crisis 13:14-23 (cf. Matt. 24:14-28)**

Having clarified what the sign of the coming destruction would not be, Jesus now explained what it would be. Matthew and Mark both described the destruction preceding Jesus' second coming. Luke recorded Jesus' teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Luke 21:20-24).

13:14 "But" identifies the contrast between the false and true signs. The true sign was the appearance of "the abomination of desolation" (cf. Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15).

The "abomination of desolation" would be something *abominable* that desecrates, associated with idolatry, that would defile the temple—resulting in its desertion by the godly.<sup>663</sup> The ultimate abomination would be the *Antichrist*, the "abomination" in view primarily in Matthew and Mark's accounts. The immediate abomination would be the polluting of the temple preceding its destruction in A.D. 70. A former abomination was the Syrian, Antiochus Epiphanes, who erected a pagan altar over the

<sup>662</sup>Morison, p. 359.

<sup>663</sup>Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Mark 13," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (July 1953):298-99.

brazen altar, and sacrificed a pig on it to Zeus in 167 B.C. (1 Macc. 1:41-64; 6:7).<sup>664</sup>

Some interpreters also believe that the temple to Zeus that the Romans built, after the A.D. 135 Bar Cochba revolt, in Jerusalem—which they renamed "Aelia Capitolina"—was another "abomination of desolation."<sup>665</sup>

The "abomination" would be "standing where it" did not belong ("should not be," i.e., in the temple). Mark described Jesus saying that the "abomination" (Gr. *bdelygma*, a neuter noun) would stand (*estekota*, a masculine participle) as a *person*—who set himself up *as God*—in the temple. The fact that Jesus used a masculine participle to modify a neuter noun suggests that the abomination is *a man*.

Mark avoided referring specifically to the temple sanctuary, though Matthew did refer to it (Matt. 24:15). Perhaps Mark did this to avoid planting the idea of polluting the temple in any Roman reader's mind. His parenthetical instruction to the reader would have encouraged Roman Christians to look up the identity of the place in Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:25-27; 12:5-13).

When the Zealots occupied the temple in A.D. 67-68 and installed a usurper, Phanni, as high priest, Jewish Christians fled from Jerusalem to Pella, a Transjordanian mountain town.<sup>666</sup> This flight prefigured the one that will take place in the future (i.e., the Tribulation). Evans listed and refuted four "abominations" that scholars have nominated as the fulfillment of this prophecy: Pontius Pilate, Caligula, Phanni, and Titus.<sup>667</sup>

- 13:15-18      The point of these somber instructions is that the appearance of the abomination of desolation will require immediate flight from Jerusalem. The situation will be urgent.
- 13:19          This verse clarifies that the time of the appearance of the abomination will be in the Tribulation (Gr. *thlipsis*, Dan. 12:1; Jer. 30:7). Jesus looked beyond the destruction of Jerusalem to a much greater Tribulation.<sup>668</sup>
- 13:20          God will not shorten the Tribulation to a period less than the seven years He has already announced (Dan. 9:26-27). He has already chosen to shorten it to a period of seven years.<sup>669</sup> If He did not limit the Tribulation

<sup>664</sup>Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 12:5:4.

<sup>665</sup>E.g., Cole, p. 202.

<sup>666</sup>Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 4:3:7-10; 4:6:3; Eusebius, 3:5:3.

<sup>667</sup>See Evans, pp. 318-19.

<sup>668</sup>Cf. Taylor, p. 514.

<sup>669</sup>See Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 50-54.

to this relatively brief duration, no one would survive. God's special love for believers led Him to shorten His judgment on the world then to only seven years.

13:21-23 Jesus repeated His warning about people who will claim to be the Messiah (cf. vv. 5-6), so that His disciples would not believe them. "If possible" (v. 22) is not intended to imply that the elect will inevitably continue to believe in Jesus and follow Him faithfully. If that were so, Jesus' repeated warnings would be meaningless. It means instead that the false messiahs will do miracles with the intent of leading the elect into error *if they*—the false messiahs—can (cf. 2 Tim 3:1-15). In view of this possibility, Jesus' disciples need to be discerning (Gr. *blepete*, v. 23).

"So for us the fulfillment of these verses [vv. 14-20] is past, present and future, and they are rightly included under the heading 'Signs of the End' or 'Characteristics of the Last Times'. The key to their understanding is the recognition that there is here a double reference. The impending judgement [*sic*] on Jerusalem and the events connected with it are for Jesus as it were a transparent object in the foreground through which he sees the last events before the End, which they indeed foreshadow."<sup>670</sup>

#### **5. The Second Coming of the Son of Man 13:24-27 (cf. Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 21:25-28)**

These verses do not describe the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but rather the Tribulation at the end of the present age, and the Second Coming that will follow it. The Second Coming is the climax of the Olivet Discourse. It is also the climax of the Book of Revelation, especially chapters 6—19, that is an expanded revelation of the Olivet Discourse.

13:24-25 In contrast to the appearance of false messiahs, the true Messiah will appear after the predicted Tribulation.<sup>671</sup> This is, of course, a reference to the Second Coming, not the Rapture. The Rapture terminates the Church Age, a period of time within the inter-advent age. The Olivet Discourse deals with the larger period, the inter-advent age, and does not refer to the church, though the church has existed throughout most of the inter-advent age. The Book of Revelation gives further information about the celestial phenomena that will happen then (Rev. 6—18; cf. 2 Pet. 3:10). However, the Old Testament prophets also predicted these things (Isa. 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Amos 8:9). If we take the wars, earthquakes, and famines of verses 7-8 literally, and I think we should, we should probably understand these phenomena literally too.

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<sup>670</sup>Cranfield, pp. 404-5.

<sup>671</sup>Bruce, "The Synoptic . . .," 1:431.



- 13:26 Jesus described His return by referring to Old Testament prophecies of it (Dan. 7:13; Deut. 30:4; Zech. 2:6). The unveiling and triumph of Jesus are the major emphases (cf. Rev. 19:11-16).<sup>672</sup> Jesus will no longer appear primarily as the Suffering Servant, but as the glorified "Son of Man"—"coming . . . with great power and glory"!
- 13:27 Evidently Jesus will bring all the elect together. This implies the resurrection of Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:2) and Tribulation saints who have died (Rev. 6:9-11). Probably Christians, saints of the Church Age who have gone to heaven at the Rapture or death, will return with Him (1 Thess. 4:17). Saints living on the earth when Jesus returns will also assemble to Him (cf. Matt. 25). Jesus pictured all believers converging to Him at His Second Coming—whether alive or dead, on earth or in heaven. He will become the universal center of attention, and then He will begin reigning. Unbelievers will not experience resurrection until the end of Jesus' millennial reign (Rev. 20:7-15).

**6. The time of Jesus' return 13:28-32 (cf. Matt. 24:32-41; Luke 21:29-33)**

Jesus began this discourse with exhortation (vv. 4-13), and He ended it the same way (vv. 28-37).

- 13:28-29 The parable of the fig tree appears in all the synoptic versions of the Olivet Discourse. Jesus had previously used a fig tree to illustrate the generation of Israelites that failed to believe in Him at His first advent (11:14). Here He used it to illustrate the fact that perceptive people can anticipate coming events by the signs that precede those events. Persecution (vv. 9-13), culminating in the Tribulation (vv. 14-25), pointed to the commencement of Jesus' kingdom (vv. 26-27; cf. Luke 21:31).
- 13:30 Jesus probably meant that the fulfillment of "all these things" (v. 4b) would begin in the generation of His present disciples, but complete fulfillment would not come until later.<sup>673</sup> A second view is that Jesus was referring to the specific generation in the future who would observe the signs He just spoke about. A third view is that Jesus meant His contemporaries were those who would see all these things coming to pass.<sup>674</sup> A fourth view is that by "generation," Jesus meant the entire Jewish race.<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>672</sup>Wessel, p. 750.

<sup>673</sup>E.g., C. E. Stowe, "The Eschatology of Christ, With Special Reference to the Discourse in Matt. XXIV. and XXV.," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 7 (July 1850):471.

<sup>674</sup>Gundry, p. 747; Cole, p. 205; Burdick, p. 1017.

<sup>675</sup>E.g., Wiersbe, 1:158.

"All" those things began during *that* first-century generation, if one interprets "all those things" to be the signs as a whole (vv. 9-25). The Greek word *genetai*, translated "take place" (NASB) or "have happened" (NIV), means "have come into existence"—and permits this interpretation. One could therefore translate this Greek verb: "have begun to come into existence."

13:31 "Heaven and earth" is a figure of speech (merism) for all creation (cf. Gen. 1:1).<sup>676</sup> The universe *as we know it* will end one day (Rev. 21:1), but Jesus' "words" will remain. Jesus was referring specifically to His predictions in this chapter, but at the same time, His statement was general and includes *all* His "words." By saying this about His "words" (Word), Jesus was implying that He was God (cf. Ps. 102:25-27; Isa. 40:6-8; 51:6). The fulfillment of this prophecy is certain.

13:32 "That day" is the day of Jesus' return, contrasted with "those days" preceding it (vv. 17, 19, 24). Jesus was distinguishing between knowing that an event was approaching or near at hand (vv. 28-29), from knowing the exact time of its arrival. God the "Father" *alone* "knows" the "day" and the "hour" of the Son's return (cf. Acts 1:7). Jesus' ignorance of this information was a result of His incarnation (Phil. 2:6-8).<sup>677</sup> Jesus may not have known this information when He made this statement, but He probably knows the time of His return now.

### **7. The concluding exhortation 13:33-37 (cf. Matt. 24:42; Luke 21:34-36)**

Matthew recorded much more of what Jesus taught the disciples, following His statement in verse 32, than Mark or Luke did. They just included the essence of His exhortation to be vigilant.

13:33 For the fourth time, Jesus urged His disciples to "take heed" (Gr. *blepete*, vv. 5, 9, 23). He underlined this warning by adding: "Be vigilant" (Gr. *agrypneite*) (or "Keep on the alert"). Watchfulness is necessary because we do not know the exact time of Jesus' return.

In view of God's revelations concerning the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming, were Jesus' exhortations to remain watchful unnecessarily urgent? Christians who know their Bibles are aware that many events will precede the Second Coming. Is it realistic or necessary to live as though Jesus' return is imminent?

<sup>676</sup>See Appendix 7 "Some Figures of Speech" at the end of my notes on Matthew for a list of some of the more frequently used figures and their meanings.

<sup>677</sup>See Harold F. Carl, "Only the Father Knows: Historical and Evangelical Responses to Jesus' Eschatological Ignorance in Mark 13:32," a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov. 16, 2000, Nashville, Tenn.

Jesus' return was not less than seven years away from His departure from the earth, because the Old Testament prophesied the seven-year Tribulation *before* the messianic kingdom (Dan. 9:24-27). Therefore, the 12 disciples to whom Jesus gave this discourse, could have been only a few years away from His return. They needed to be vigilant.

That generation of disciples, and all succeeding generations of disciples, learned later that Jesus would return for His own at the Rapture *before* He comes at the Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Thus, while His Second Coming is at least seven years away, His return at the Rapture will be sooner. Pretribulationists believe it could be at any moment. Therefore, all that Jesus said about the importance of being vigilant—anticipating His return—is applicable to and relevant for us.

13:34-36 Jesus told another parable about a doorkeeper. Mark is the only evangelist who recorded it. It is similar to the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) and the parable of the minas (Luke 19:12-27), though much shorter.

In this parable, the "doorkeeper" is the focus of attention. A doorkeeper or porter was responsible to guard the entrance to his master's house. Entrusted with his master's goods, this doorkeeper did "not know when" his "master" would return. However, *whenever* the master returned, the doorkeeper would have to be ready to admit him to a well-managed house. Evening, midnight, rooster crowing, and dawn were the names that the Romans gave the four watches of the night.<sup>678</sup>

The porter had to remain *watchful* ("on the alert"; Gr. *gregore*) at night, when the Light of the World was absent from His estate. The opposite of watchfulness is insensibility, lethargy, and inactivity—pictured here as *sleep* (cf. Rom. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:1-11). Likewise, it is necessary for Jesus' disciples to remain watchful ("on the alert," looking for, Gr. *gregoreite*, v. 35).

"The element of surprise is ineradicable from the parousia expectation."<sup>679</sup>

13:37 Jesus concluded this discourse as He began it, with a final call to watchfulness (Gr. *gregoreite*, vv. 34, 35). "You" may refer to the four disciples who asked Jesus the initial question (vv. 3-4), or it may refer to all the Twelve who sat before Him. "All" could refer to all the disciples present, or to all disciples including those not present. In any case, the point is clear. What Jesus taught here is something every disciple of His needs to apply. We "all" need to "be on the alert," in view of the Lord's return—like the doorkeeper in Jesus' parable (vv. 34-36).

<sup>678</sup>Wessel, p. 753.

<sup>679</sup>G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen*, p. 117.

The previous parable of the fig tree (vv. 28-32) taught that disciples need to recognize the signs that the time of the Lord's return is drawing near. This parable of the doorkeeper (vv. 33-37) clarified that they would not be able to tell exactly when He would return at His Second Coming. Even though Daniel's prophecy specified the length of the Tribulation as seven years (Dan. 9:24-27), the exact day and hour of Christ's return remains unknown (cf. Matt. 24:50).

The outstanding emphasis in Mark's account of this discourse is clear. Disciples need to take heed (Gr. *blepo*, to be aware, to observe, to discern; vv. 5, 9, 23, 33), to be vigilant (Gr. *agrupneo*, to be awake, to watch; v. 33), and to be watchful (Gr. *gregoreo*, to be awake, attentive, vigilant, and circumspect; vv. 33, 35, 37).

## **VII. THE SERVANT'S PASSION MINISTRY CHS. 14—15**

This section of Mark's Gospel records the climaxes of many themes that the writer had introduced. Mark chose to concentrate on the passion, or sufferings of Jesus, rather than simply give a record of all the events of the last week of Jesus' life. Out of Mark's 661 verses, 242 (37 percent) deal with the last week, from the Triumphal Entry through the Resurrection, and 128 concern Jesus' passion and resurrection.<sup>680</sup> Over half the events Mark recorded in the last week (53 percent) deal with Jesus' sufferings and triumph, the two major themes in the last three chapters

### **A. THE SERVANT'S ANTICIPATION OF SUFFERING 14:1-52**

Several themes peak in this section. Here we have the clearest evidence that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God (cf. 1:1; 8:29). Here, too, Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders, His foes, came to a head (cf. 3:1, 6; 11:18; 12:12). The ignorance and selfishness of Jesus' disciples, His friends, also peaked (cf. 3:19; 6:1-6; 8:31—10:52). Finally, the Servant's ministry climaxed in His giving His life as a ransom for many (cf. 10:45).<sup>681</sup>

#### **1. Jesus' sufferings because of betrayal 14:1-11**

This is another section of the Gospel that has a chiasmic or "sandwich" structure (cf. 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-31; 11:12-26; 14:27-52). Mark's account of the conspiracy to kill Jesus (vv. 1-2, 10-11) surrounds Jesus' anointing in Bethany (vv. 3-9).

#### **The plot to arrest Jesus 14:1-2 (cf. Matt. 26:1-5; Luke 22:1-2)**

These verses introduce the whole passion narrative. Passover commemorated the Israelites' redemption from slavery in Egypt through the Exodus (Exod. 12:1—13:16). It anticipated a greater deliverance from the consequences of slavery to sin. The Jews began to celebrate Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread followed on the fifteenth through the twenty-first of Nisan. Mark dated the events that follow immediately as occurring "two days" before Passover. This would have been Wednesday, April 1, A.D. 33.<sup>682</sup>

<sup>680</sup>Wessel, p. 754.

<sup>681</sup>See J. P. Heil, "Mark 14, 1-52: Narrative Structure and Reader Response," *Biblica* 71:3 (1990):305-32.

<sup>682</sup>Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects . . .*, pp. 92, 143.

Passover, like the feasts of Tabernacles and Pentecost, was a pilgrim feast. Many Jewish families from all over the world traveled to Jerusalem to observe these feasts as the Mosaic Law required (Deut. 16:16). The Jews could observe the Passover only in Jerusalem (Deut. 16:5-6). Consequently mobs of people choked the city. One writer claimed that the population of Jerusalem swelled from 50,000 to 250,000.<sup>683</sup> Jesus enjoyed a large popular following, so the religious leaders wanted to avoid a riot by executing Jesus inconspicuously. Evidently they wanted to postpone further confrontation with Jesus until after the feasts when the pilgrims would have returned to their homes. However, Judas' offer to betray Jesus (vv. 10-11) was too good to refuse.

**The anointing at Bethany 14:3-9 (cf. Matt. 26:6-13; John 12:1-8)**

14:3 For thematic reasons, Matthew and Mark both placed this event within the story of the hostility of Jesus' enemies. It is apparently out of chronological order (cf. John 12:1). This rearrangement of the material highlighted the contrast between the hatred of unbelievers and the love of believers for Jesus. The incident probably occurred the previous Saturday evening.<sup>684</sup>

John added that the woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, and that she anointed Jesus' feet as well as His head. Anointing a guest's head was a common way to honor such a person at a festive occasion (cf. Ps. 23:5; Luke 7:46). Mary appears in three scenes in the Gospels, and each time she is at Jesus' feet (cf. Luke 10:38-42; John 11:31-32). She is a good model for all disciples to emulate. The high value of her perfume and its expensive container may suggest that this was an heirloom passed from one generation to another.<sup>685</sup>

"The neck of the perfume bottle was sometimes snapped off. In this case, the breaking of the flask and the pouring imply that no portion of the ointment was held back; all was poured out on Jesus' head."<sup>686</sup>

14:4-5 Apparently Judas Iscariot voiced the disciples' violent objection (Gr. *embrimaomai*, cf. 10:14) to Mary's act of loving sacrifice (Matt. 26:8; John 12:4-5). Customarily, Jews gave gifts to the poor on the evening of Passover.<sup>687</sup> Mary's gift to Jesus was worth a year's wages. The disciples could see no reason for this "waste" because they did not understand that Jesus' death was imminent. Their concern for the poor contrasts with her concern for Jesus.

14:6-8 Jesus defended Mary's act and explained why it was appropriate. It was an act of devotion to Jesus, and it was an anointing for His burial. We cannot

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<sup>683</sup>Lane, p. 490.

<sup>684</sup>Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects . . .*, p. 91.

<sup>685</sup>Lane, p. 492.

<sup>686</sup>Evans, p. 360.

<sup>687</sup>Wessel, p. 756.

tell how much about Jesus' death Mary understood, though she may have come to understand, better than the Twelve, the truth that He would die soon.<sup>688</sup> She probably anointed Him only as an act of love. We should not interpret Jesus' statement as expressing disregard for the poor (cf. Matt. 5:3; 6:2-4; 19:21; Luke 6:20, 36-38; 21:1-4; John 13:29).

14:9 This statement is a further evaluation of the greatness of Mary's act. It implies the continuance of "the gospel" proclamation, after Jesus' death and resurrection, to "the whole world."

"The Lord erected a memorial for all time to her who had done her best to honour Him."<sup>689</sup>

"Wherever the gospel is truly preached, the story of the anointing is sure to be prized as the best possible illustration of the spirit which moved Jesus to lay down His life, as also of the spirit of Christianity as it manifests itself in the lives of sincere believers."<sup>690</sup>

### **Judas' betrayal of Jesus 14:10-11 (cf. Matt. 26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6)**

If the preceding incident happened on Saturday evening, and Judas betrayed Jesus on Wednesday, then Mary's act of extravagance did not lead Judas to betray Jesus immediately. The Gospel writers did not explain Judas' reasons for betraying Jesus explicitly. It was evidently Judas' initiative, in offering "to betray" Jesus, that led the Sanhedrin ("chief priests") to move up their timetable for Jesus' execution. If Judas handed Jesus over to them, they could avoid the hostility of the crowds (cf. v. 2; Luke 22:6).

Even though Mary's act of devotion is the high point of this section, providing an excellent example for disciple readers, the dark undercurrent of betrayal is its dominant feature. The religious leaders, Judas, and even the disciples manifested opposition to glorifying Jesus. This attitude was a source of suffering for the Servant.

## **2. Jesus' sufferings because of desertion 14:12-52**

The Servant's sufferings in anticipation of His death continue in this section of the text. They centered around two events: Jesus' observance of the Passover with His disciples, and His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane with His Father.

### **Jesus' farewell in the upper room 14:12-26**

Mark's account of what happened in the upper room is divisible into three parts: the preparations for the meal, Jesus' announcement of His betrayal, and His institution of the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>688</sup>Burdick, p. 1018.

<sup>689</sup>Swete, p. 326.

<sup>690</sup>Bruce, *The Training . . .*, pp. 299-300.

**Preparations for the Passover meal 14:12-16 (cf. Matt. 26:17-19; Luke 22:7-13)**

The main feature of this pericope is the unusual method by which Jesus' directed His disciples.

14:12 The Jews commonly referred to the first day of the combined Passover and Unleavened Bread feasts as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.<sup>691</sup> Mark clarified for his Gentile readers that this was the day the Jews slew the Passover lamb, namely, the fourteenth of Nisan. This would have been Thursday, April 2. Mark could say that from Wednesday, the Passover was "two days away" (v. 1), because the Jews ate the Passover lamb between sunset and midnight on the evening of the day they slew the lamb. For the Jews, this was two days later since they began each day with sunset.

"According to Jewish convention, Jesus would have slit the animal's throat, its blood would have been drained into a silver or gold basin held by a priest, and the priest would have taken the basin to the altar where he would have sprinkled the blood at the base of the altar . . ."<sup>692</sup>

The disciples then had to prepare to eat the Passover within Jerusalem (Deut. 16:5-6) that very evening.

Wednesday	Thursday		Friday	
April 1	Midnight	April 2	Midnight	April 3
	3:00 a.m.		3:00 a.m.	
	6:00 a.m.		6:00 a.m.	
	9:00 a.m.		9:00 a.m.	Jesus was crucified
	Noon		Noon	Jesus died
	3:00 p.m.	The Jews slew their Passover lambs	3:00 p.m.	
14 Nisan	6:00 p.m.	15 Nisan	6:00 p.m.	16 Nisan
	9:00 p.m.	The Jews ate their Passover lambs	9:00 p.m.	

14:13-16 The two disciples were Peter and John (Luke 22:8). Normally, women carried the water, so a man carrying a water jar would not be hard to find. Sometimes men carried water in leather waterskins.<sup>693</sup> Perhaps the man

<sup>691</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 2:15:1.

<sup>692</sup>Evans, p. 373.

<sup>693</sup>Mann, p. 565.

carrying a water jar was a prearranged signal.<sup>694</sup> Obviously Jesus had made arrangements to provide for His disciples' needs, but the Twelve had certain responsibilities in addition, namely, the preparation of the food.

"He Who was born in a 'hostelry'—*Katalyma*—was content to ask for His last Meal in a *Katalyma*."<sup>695</sup>

The whole record shows Jesus' sovereign control over the destinies of Himself and His disciples. Even as He approached the Cross, Jesus was aware of, and caring for, His disciples. Nevertheless they had responsibilities as well. All of this is instructive for the teachable disciple who reads this account.

**The announcement of Jesus' betrayal 14:17-21 (cf. Matt. 26:20-25; Luke 22:14, 21-23; John 13:21-30)**

Mark did not record all that happened in the upper room. He stressed the announcement of Jesus' betrayal and Jesus' explanation of the significance of the bread and wine.

14:17 This would have been Thursday evening. Because the Jews began their days at sundown, this incident would have happened at the beginning of the fifteenth of Nisan. Jesus came with the Twelve to the upper room. Luke 22:15-16, 24-30 and John 13:1-20 record what happened next.

14:18 Originally the Jews ate the Passover standing (cf. Exod. 12:11). However, in Jesus' day they customarily reclined to eat it.<sup>696</sup>

"To feel this pathos we should recall that in ancient near eastern culture, eating with someone connotes an almost sacred trust of friendship."<sup>697</sup>

"To betray a friend after eating a meal with him was, and still is, regarded as the worst kind of treachery in the Middle East [cf. Ps. 41:9]."<sup>698</sup>

The disciples heard for the first time that one of them would betray Jesus. Mark's account stresses Jesus' identification of His betrayer as "one of the Twelve" (v. 20).

"Perfidy on the part of an intimate, not criminality on the part of Jesus, put Jesus on a cross."<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>694</sup>Evans, p. 374.

<sup>695</sup>Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:483.

<sup>696</sup>Mishnah *Pesachim* 10:1.

<sup>697</sup>Gundry, p. 827.

<sup>698</sup>Wessel, p. 759. Cf. Evans, p. 375.

<sup>699</sup>Gundry, p. 832.



14:19-20 The disciples' grief expressed sadness at this announcement. Their question was a protestation of innocence, but with a tinge of self-distrust. It expected a negative answer, but it was a question. Judas' motive in asking was obviously different from the others. Jesus' answer again implied the treachery of the betrayer. It also gave him an opportunity to repent since Jesus did not name him.

14:21 Jesus explained that His betrayal was part of divine purpose that the Old Testament had predicted (e.g., Ps. 22; Isa. 53). Nevertheless the betrayer would bear the responsibility for his deed and would pay a severe penalty.

"The fact that God turns the wrath of man to his praise does not excuse the wrath of man."<sup>700</sup>

The seriousness of Judas' act was in direct proportion to the innocence of the Person he betrayed (cf. v. 9). "By whom the Son of Man is betrayed" (NASB) views Judas as Satan's instrument.

If the fate of unbelievers is annihilation after death, rather than eternal punishment, it is hard to see why Jesus could say that it would be better for such people if they had never been born.

**The institution of the Lord's Supper 14:22-26 (cf. Matt. 26:26-30; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)**

Matthew and Mark's accounts of this event are similar, but Paul's is more like Luke's.

14:22 The "bread" Jesus ate would have been the unleavened bread that the Jews used in the Passover meal. The "blessing" Jesus pronounced was a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the bread, not a consecration of the bread itself. People, not places or things, are always the objects of blessings in the Bible. Jesus' distribution of the bread to the disciples was more significant than His breaking of it. By passing it to them, He symbolically shared Himself with them. When Jesus said, "This is My body," He meant the bread represented His body (cf. Luke 12:1; John 6:32-35).

"The most satisfactory understanding of the phrase ["Take it; this is My body"] would seem to be "Take this: this means my body."<sup>701</sup>

The disciples could hardly have eaten the literal flesh of Jesus since He was physically reclining among them. Moreover, the Jews abhorred eating human flesh, and would never consume animal blood, much less human blood (cf. Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14).<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>700</sup>Cranfield, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 424.

<sup>701</sup>Mann, p. 577.

<sup>702</sup>Riddle, p. 194.

"The bitter herbs served to recall the bitterness of slavery, the stewed fruit, which possessed the consistency and color of clay, evoked the making of bricks as slaves, while the paschal lamb provided a reminder of God's gracious 'passing over' of Israel in the plague of death that came to Egypt."<sup>703</sup>

14:23-24 The common "cup," likewise, symbolized Jesus' sharing of Himself with the disciples, and their unity as disciples (cf. 10:38-39). Judas had apparently left the upper room before the institution of the Lord's Supper. Jesus' viewed His "blood" as the ratifying agent of the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34), as animal blood had made the Old (Mosaic) Covenant valid (Exod. 24:8). The Greek word translated "covenant" is *diatheke*, a word that describes an agreement made by one person for others. A different word, *syntheke*, describes an agreement that two parties made in which both had obligations to each other.

The diluted *wine* in the cup was also a reminder of the covenant's existence.<sup>704</sup> Jesus' blood "poured out" is an obvious allusion to His death. "For" translates the Greek preposition *hyper* meaning "in behalf of" or "instead of," a clear reference to vicarious atonement (cf. Matt. 26:28). "Many" means all (cf. 10:45; Isa. 53:11-12).

"By the word *many* he means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race."<sup>705</sup>

14:25 The phrase "the fruit of the vine" may have been a liturgical formula describing wine used at a feast.<sup>706</sup> In any case, Jesus was saying He would not "drink" wine "again" until He did so "in the kingdom." Jesus was anticipating the messianic banquet at the beginning of His kingdom (cf. Isa. 25:6). This was a welcome promise in view of Jesus' announcement of His coming death.

"The cup from which Jesus abstained was the fourth, which ordinarily concluded the Passover fellowship. The significance of this can be appreciated from the fact that the four cups of wine were interpreted in terms of the four-fold promise of redemption set forth in Exod. 6:6-7: 'I will bring you out . . . I will rid you of their bondage . . . I will redeem you . . . I will take you for my people and I will be your God' (TJ *Pesachim* X. 37b)."<sup>707</sup>

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<sup>703</sup>Lane, p. 505.

<sup>704</sup>Taylor, p. 546.

<sup>705</sup>Calvin, 3:214.

<sup>706</sup>Wessel, p. 761.

<sup>707</sup>Lane, p. 508.

"Jesus seldom spoke of His death without also speaking of His resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:34)."<sup>708</sup>

"New" or "anew" means in a qualitatively different way (Gr. *kainon*). Now Jesus and the disciples anticipated suffering and death, but then they would anticipate joy and glory.

14:26 The "hymn" was probably the second part of the *Hallel* (lit. praise, Ps. 115—118) that the Jews sang antiphonally at the end of the Passover.<sup>709</sup> The other evangelists recorded more that Jesus said and did in the upper room (e.g., John 13—16). By the time they left, it was probably quite late at night.

"When Jesus arose to go to Gethsemane, Ps. 118 was upon his lips. It provided an appropriate description of how God would guide his Messiah through distress and suffering to glory."<sup>710</sup>

### **Jesus' agony in the garden 14:27-52**

Jesus experienced suffering as He said farewell to His disciples in Jerusalem (vv. 12-26), but His suffering increased as He anticipated the Cross on the Mount of Olives (vv. 27-52).

#### **The prediction of Peter's denial 14:27-31 (cf. Matt. 26:31-35; Luke 22:31-34; John 13:36-38)**

Evidently Jesus made this prediction in the upper room before the institution of the Lord's Supper. Mark probably inserted it here in his narrative because of its logical connection with Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane.

14:27-28 We should understand the meaning of "fall away" (Gr. *skandalisthesesthe*, cf. 4:17; 6:3; 9:42-47) in the light of the prophecy that Jesus said predicted it (Zech. 13:7). Zechariah did not mean that the sheep would abandon the Shepherd permanently, much less that they would cease to be what they were—followers. He pictured the flock fleeing from the Shepherd because someone attacked Him. That is precisely what the disciples did when the authorities arrested and executed Jesus. Later those sheep rallied around the Shepherd. Jesus announced His leading them as a shepherd "to Galilee" later (v. 28). Again He spoke of His resurrection immediately after announcing His death (vv. 24-25).

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<sup>708</sup>Hiebert, p. 355.

<sup>709</sup>Mann, p. 581.

<sup>710</sup>Lane, p. 509.

Jesus attributed the Shepherd's striking to God. He changed the Zechariah passage slightly. Clearly Jesus viewed Himself as God's Suffering Servant (Isa. 53:4-6). This point would have helped the disciples accept Jesus' fate.

14:29-30 Peter refused to allow the possibility that he would forsake Jesus, even though the other disciples ("all") might (cf. John 21:15). Jesus informed Peter that his defection would actually be worse than that of the other disciples. He introduced His warning with the customary solemn affirmation, and explained that the denial was not only certain but imminent. Furthermore Peter would utter it "three times"—in spite of the rooster's double warning. Mark alone referred to the second crowing, probably because of Peter's recollection of the event. The word Jesus used for "deny" or "disown" (Gr. *aparnese*) is a strong one meaning "deny utterly."

"The word *twice* (Greek *dis*) makes for greater accuracy; either Peter will disown Jesus three times before the cock crows twice, or the denials will occur before the bugle call of the *gallicinium* (= 'cock crow') which signaled the dawn of the 'Roman' day—i.e., at the beginning of the fourth watch."<sup>711</sup>

"Roosters crow early in the morning (cf. *m. Yoma* 1:8; *m. Tamid* 1:2), even before first light, so Jesus' prophecy, if accurate, must be fulfilled soon."<sup>712</sup>

14:31 Jesus' reply should have caused Peter to realize his weakness and seek help. Instead, he dug in his heels, and virtually told Jesus that he would "die with" Him and prove Him wrong. He kept affirming excessively (Gr. *ekperissos*, used only here in the New Testament) that he would definitely not deny Jesus. Peter did not know how weak he was, a problem most disciples of Jesus share with him. He would have to learn the hard way, through failure. Peter led the other disciples in denying that they would deny Jesus.<sup>713</sup> Later, he denied Jesus with the same vehemence with which he professed that he would *not deny Him!*

This pericope is a strong warning for all disciples. When facing persecution for one's allegiance to Jesus, one should not trust in the strength of his or her commitment. He or she should trust in God, who can supply the grace needed to remain faithful (cf. 9:14-29).

#### **Jesus' sufferings in Gethsemane 14:32-42 (cf. Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:40-46)**

This incident contrasts Jesus' humility and dependence on the Father with Peter's self-confidence (vv. 27-31). It is a remarkable revelation of the humanity of Jesus.

<sup>711</sup>Mann, p. 586.

<sup>712</sup>Evans, p. 402.

<sup>713</sup>W. N. Clarke, "Commentary on the Gospel of Mark," in *An American Commentary*, p. 214.

"So far from sailing serenely through his trials like some superior being unconcerned with this world, he is almost dead with distress."<sup>714</sup>

This is Mark's third mention of Jesus praying (cf. 1:35; 6:46). In each instance, Jesus affirmed His commitment to the Father's will that Satan was constantly testing.

14:32-34 Jesus apparently took His inner circle of disciples (cf. 5:37; 9:2) with Him, in order to teach them about suffering, and to receive help from their intercession for Him (cf. Matt. 26:38). The other disciples were to pray as well (Luke 22:40). Perhaps they were also to keep watch so that He might be able to give Himself entirely to prayer.<sup>715</sup>

"Since in that culture people prayed with their eyes open, the command to pray does not work against the command to keep awake, as it would if the three disciples were to close their eyes in prayer."<sup>716</sup>

This was apparently a favorite place that Jesus and the disciples had visited previously (cf. Luke 22:39; John 18:2).

The words "distressed" (Gr. *ekthambeisthai*) and "troubled" (Gr. *ademonein*) together "describe an extremely acute emotion, a compound of bewilderment, fear, uncertainty and anxiety, nowhere else portrayed in such vivid terms as here."<sup>717</sup> The prospect of bearing God's wrath for the world's sins and experiencing separation from His Father grieved Jesus deeply (Gr. *perilypos*, cf. 6:26). This was much more than any mere martyr has ever had to endure.

14:35-36 The Jews did not address God with "Abba" (lit. "Daddy"), because they considered such intimacy disrespectful. Jesus used this word because He—as the Son of God—was on intimate terms with the Father (cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). In the first prayer session, Jesus evidently prayed for the better part of an hour (v. 37), though Mark only recorded the essence of His request (cf. Heb. 5:7). In the ancient world, almost everyone prayed aloud, and this is how Jesus probably prayed.<sup>718</sup> His submission to His Father here recalls Genesis 22:7, where Isaac addressed his father Abraham in a very similar situation quite near this very place.<sup>719</sup>

Jesus expressed faith in God, with whom all things—consistent with His nature—are possible (cf. 9:23). The unclear issue to the God-man, who

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<sup>714</sup>Moule, p. 117.

<sup>715</sup>Gundry, p. 854.

<sup>716</sup>Ibid., p. 856.

<sup>717</sup>R. G. Bratcher and E. A. Nida, *Translator's Handbook on Mark*, p. 446.

<sup>718</sup>Lane, p. 515.

<sup>719</sup>See Joseph A. Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50:3 (September 1982):449-58.

voluntarily limited His knowledge in the Incarnation, was not God's ability but God's will.

"It is this complete dependence on God for his own salvation which is the source of Jesus' courage to renounce himself, be least, and lose his life."<sup>720</sup>

"It [Jesus' request] is as if to say, 'I believe that you can do anything, including making it possible for me not to go through the horror of the passion.'"<sup>721</sup>

Jesus referred to the Cross as the "hour" and the "cup." The first expression includes everything involved in the Cross (cf. John 7:30; 8:20; et al.). The "cup" figuratively particularized God's judgment in the Cross (cf. 10:38-39; 14:29). Jesus' human will was distinct from the Father's will, but never opposed to it.

"Though the Lord Jesus did praise God (Luke 10:21) and thank the Father (8:6, 7) in His praying, most of His recorded prayers were petitions and intercessions."<sup>722</sup>

14:37 Perhaps Jesus spoke specifically "to Peter," in verse 37, because Peter had boasted that he would never deny Jesus (vv. 29, 31). Jesus' use of the name "Simon," Peter's original name, may imply his natural weakness. Peter was not living up to the meaning of his new name; he was not behaving like a rock.

"True friendship as we experience it—the sharing of inmost thoughts, the exchange of feelings, hopes, sorrows, joys—was a reality that Jesus seems not to have enjoyed, with any continuity, with the Twelve."<sup>723</sup>

14:38 Jesus then addressed all three disciples. He commanded them to be continually watchful (Gr. *gregoreite*, cf. 13:34, 35, 37) and to pray (Gr. *proseuchesthe*, the general word for prayer). These activities are necessary to overcome temptation. This use of "flesh" is probably literal (i.e., the body) rather than metaphorical (i.e., the sinful human nature), since it contrasts with the human spirit (i.e., man's volitional powers; cf. Ps. 51:12).

Mark wrote that Peter was asleep three times (vv. 37, 40, 41), and later he wrote that Peter denied Jesus three times (vv. 68, 70, 71). The disciples

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<sup>720</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 108.

<sup>721</sup>Evans, p. 413.

<sup>722</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1674.

<sup>723</sup>Lane, p. 518.

should have been praying for themselves, as well as for Jesus, in view of what Jesus had told them was coming.

"In the passion account, the disciples are ironic figures: Because of their incomprehension, they badly misconstrue the true nature of things. Thinking themselves to be astute, courageous, and loyal, they are in reality imperceptive, cowardly, and faithless. Entering upon the passion, the disciples yet follow Jesus in commitment to him. As events unfold, however, they will renounce their commitment through word or deed and apostatize."<sup>724</sup>

"Spiritual wakefulness and prayer in full dependence upon divine help provide the only adequate preparation for crisis (cf. Ch. 13:11)."<sup>725</sup>

14:39-40 Jesus returned from the disciples—who gave Him no support—to the Father, who sustained Him. The disciples did not have anything to say to ("did not know what to answer") Jesus, probably because they felt ashamed. They had boasted great spiritual strength, but they were demonstrating great spiritual weakness. There seems to be an inverse relationship between how self-confident we feel and how much we pray.

14:41-42 Mark alone recorded that Jesus made three separate forays into the depths of the garden to pray.

"The Temptation of the Garden divides itself, like that of the Wilderness, into three acts, following close one on another."<sup>726</sup>

Jesus' perseverance in prayer demonstrated the extent of His dependence on the Father. Jesus' question convicted the disciples again. He probably intended His words as an ironic (or cryptic) command—"Keep on sleeping and resting"—rather than as a question or simply to express surprise (cf. Matt. 26:45).

Less clear is the meaning of, "It is enough."<sup>727</sup> He could have meant that Judas had received the betrayal money from the chief priests, since the Greek word *apechei* can mean "he has received it." Another possibility is that He meant that He now understood that the Cross was inevitable. Perhaps Jesus meant the disciples had had enough sleep and it was time to

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<sup>724</sup>Kingsbury, p. 111.

<sup>725</sup>Lane, p. 520.

<sup>726</sup>G. F. Maclear, "The Gospel According to St. Mark," in *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, p. 163.

<sup>727</sup>Cranfield, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 435-36, listed eight different interpretations.

wake up.<sup>728</sup> Fourth, He may have meant that He had finished His praying. I prefer the third and fourth views, because they are the simplest explanations and they make good sense.

"The hour" that had "come" was the time of Jesus' arrest and death (cf. v. 35). The "sinners" in view were Satan's agents who would slay Jesus. Jesus' short sentences reflect the tension and urgency of the moment.<sup>729</sup>

Mark described Jesus' movements in a somewhat chiasmic form. Jesus came to the garden with His disciples, left most of them evidently at the entrance, took three of them farther, and proceeded even farther into its depths alone. Then He withdrew. At the center, Jesus communed with His Father. The center of the garden and the center of the pericope correspond to the center of His spiritual conflict. This description helps the reader identify Jesus' praying as at the very heart of His preparation for the Cross. It accounts for the remarkable poise with which Jesus handled Himself throughout the tumultuous events that followed.

"Perhaps the most commonly recognized pattern of narration in Mark is the threefold repetition of similar actions and events. . . . Some series are obvious because they occur in direct sequence: at Gethsemane, Jesus returns from prayer three times to find the disciples sleeping; Peter denies Jesus three times; Pilate asks the crowd three leading questions, each of which is rejected; and the narrator recounts events of the crucifixion at three, three-hour intervals (nine o'clock, noon, and three o'clock)."<sup>730</sup>

Here, "This threefold pattern of narration underscores the definitive failure of the disciples."<sup>731</sup>

**Jesus' betrayal, arrest, and abandonment 14:43-52 (cf. Matt. 26:47-56; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12)**

14:43 All the synoptic writers apparently repeated that "Judas" was "one of the Twelve," even though the reader already knows this, to stress the tragedy of Jesus' betrayal.<sup>732</sup> Judas guided the mob (Acts 1:16) that had come with authority from the Sanhedrin. Part of the crowd consisted of Jewish temple police (Luke 22:52) and Roman soldiers (John 18:12). The police carried clubs and the soldiers had short swords.

14:44-46 The disciples of rabbis customarily greeted their teachers with a "kiss" on the hand.<sup>733</sup> This prearranged "signal" enabled Judas to identify Jesus to

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<sup>728</sup>Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>729</sup>Hiebert, p. 362.

<sup>730</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 54.

<sup>731</sup>Ibid.

<sup>732</sup>Gould, p. 273.

<sup>733</sup>Bishop, p. 246.



the soldiers without arousing the suspicion and opposition of the other disciples. This signal also made it possible for Judas to single out Jesus specifically in the relative darkness.

"According to contemporary usage, no disciple was permitted to greet his teacher first, since this would have implied equality. Judas' sign, therefore, was not only a final repudiation of Jesus' authority and a signal to the mob but also a calculated insult. It is possible that John 18:4-7, which does not mention the kiss, indicates ('they drew back and fell to the ground') that even those who accompanied Judas were taken aback by this treachery."<sup>734</sup>

"When Judas says, 'Whom I shall kiss, that is He,' he used the word *philein* which is the ordinary word. But when it is said that he came forward and kissed Jesus the word is *kataphilein*. Now the *kata-* is intensive and *kataphilein* is the word for to kiss as a lover kisses his beloved. The sign of the betrayal was not a mere formal kiss of respectful greeting. It was a lover's kiss. This is the grimmest and most terrible thing in all the gospel story."<sup>735</sup>

14:47 Perhaps shame led Mark to conceal the fact that it was Peter who cut off Malchus' ear, evidently in a misdirected attempt to cut off his head (cf. John 18:10). Peter's lack of prayer resulted in a lack of poise that contrasted sharply with Jesus' behavior. He had not only boasted too much (vv. 29, 31), and prayed too little (vv. 37, 40, 41), but he also acted too violently.

"It may have been that Peter, still smarting from Jesus' prediction that he would not only fall away with the others but would deny Jesus three times before the early morning crowing of the rooster, was eager to prove his loyalty, even if he 'must die with' Jesus (cf. 14:31)."<sup>736</sup>

14:48-50 Jesus' reply pointed out that He was not a dangerous criminal. The Sanhedrin's action was totally unjustified and indefensible. Nevertheless it fulfilled prophecy. The Scriptures Jesus referred to included Isaiah 53:3, 7-9, 12 and Zechariah 13:7 (cf. v. 27). Verse 50 documents the failure of the disciples, including Peter, and their abandonment of Jesus to preserve their own safety. The writer's interest was the disciples' action more than that of the mob.

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<sup>734</sup>Mann, p. 596. See my note on John 18:6, in my Notes on John, for other views as to why the soldiers fell down.

<sup>735</sup>Barclay, p. 363.

<sup>736</sup>Evans, p. 425.

14:51-52 Only Mark recorded this strange event. He described the "young man" (Gr. *neaniskos*, between 24 and 40 years old) as one who was "following" Jesus. This description could mean he was one of the Twelve, or simply someone who was sympathetic with Jesus. He was wearing a rather costly linen outer garment (Gr. *sindon*) without an undergarment (Gr. *chiton*). It may have been his sleeping garment. Perhaps he had been in bed in Jerusalem, when he awoke to sounds of the mob leaving the city, and heard people talking about arresting Jesus—and decided to go along.

Then, when one of the soldiers "seized him," this young fellow was so intent on abandoning Jesus, that he was willing to tear himself away, leaving his "sheet" clothes in the soldier's hand, and run through the crowd "naked," rather than staying with Jesus. This man's action further illustrates how eager Jesus' followers were to save their own skins at the cost of Jesus' safety and companionship. His naked condition highlights his fear and embarrassment (cf. Amos 2:16).

This incident makes little contribution to the story of Jesus' arrest, apart from illustrating that everyone fled. Therefore some of the church fathers and most of the modern commentators have concluded that the young man was Mark, the writer of this Gospel. However, there is no solid evidence for this.<sup>737</sup>

### **B. THE SERVANT'S ENDURANCE OF SUFFERING 14:53—15:47**

Jesus' sufferings until now had been anticipatory and psychological. Now He began to experience physical pain resulting from His trials and crucifixion. As the faithful Servant of the Lord who came to do His Father's will, His sufferings continued to increase.

Jesus underwent two trials: a religious one before the Jewish leaders, and a civil one before the Roman authorities. This was necessary because under Roman sovereignty, the Sanhedrin did not have the authority to crucify.<sup>738</sup> The Sanhedrin wanted Jesus to suffer crucifixion (John 18:31). Each trial had three parts.

<b>JESUS' RELIGIOUS TRIAL</b>	
Before Annas	John 18:12-14, 19-24
Before Caiaphas	Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-65
Before the Sanhedrin	Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71

<sup>737</sup>See Abraham Kuruvilla, "The Naked Runaway and the Enrobed Reporter of Mark 14 and 16: What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:3 (September 2011):527-45.

<sup>738</sup>See Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 20:9:1; footnote b.

<b>JESUS' CIVIL TRIAL</b>	
Before Pilate	Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38
Before Herod Antipas	Luke 23:6-12
Before Pilate	Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39—19:16

### **1. Jesus' Jewish trial 14:53—15:1**

Mark omitted reference to Jesus' preliminary hearing before Annas (John 18:12-14, 19-24).

#### **The hearing before Caiaphas 14:53-65 (cf. Matt. 26:57-68; Luke 22:54, 63-65; John 18:24)**

14:53        The "high priest" in view here was Caiaphas. Interestingly Mark never mentioned him by name, though his name appears nine times in Matthew, Luke, John, and Acts. He was the high priest that the Romans had appointed in A.D. 18, and he served in this capacity until A.D. 36. He seems to have been the person most responsible for the plot to do away with Jesus.

This was an unscheduled, unofficial meeting of the Sanhedrin, since Jewish law required that official meetings take place during the daytime. It transpired before dawn on Friday, the fifteenth of Nisan, a feast day. Normally the Sanhedrin did not conduct hearings of this type on a feast day. The Jewish leaders probably met at this unorthodox hour because the Romans conducted their civil trials shortly after sunrise. The Sanhedrin wanted to deliver Jesus over to Pilate for a hasty trial before public sentiment built in favor of Jesus.

Normally the Sanhedrin did not pass sentence on an accused capital offender until the day following his trial. They made an exception in Jesus' case. Usually the Sanhedrin met in a hall on the west side of the temple enclosure.<sup>739</sup> However, now they met in Caiaphas' house or palace (Luke 22:54). "All" the Sanhedrin may mean every one of its 71 members or, probably, all that were necessary for a quorum, at least 23.<sup>740</sup>

14:54        This notation helps the reader understand that Peter was in the high priest's residence throughout Jesus' trial there. It prepares us for the account of Peter's denial (vv. 66-72), which happened while the Sanhedrin was examining Jesus. It also helps us appreciate the fact that Peter's desertion

<sup>739</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 5:4:2.

<sup>740</sup>Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 1:1.

of Jesus was only temporary. The synoptic evangelists did not mention that another disciple accompanied Peter into the courtyard (John 18:15). The officers ("servants") would have been the temple police, since the Roman soldiers would not have guarded the high priest's palace.

14:55-56 Even though this hearing, or grand jury investigation, took place at night, the Sanhedrin eventually found two witnesses against Jesus (Matt. 26:60). It seems that they had been planning their case for the prosecution carefully. However, the witnesses, who testified separately in Jewish trials, contradicted each other. Consequently their testimony was useless (cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

". . . as usual, it was harder to agree on a consistent lie than to tell the simple truth . . ." <sup>741</sup>

14:57-59 These verses provide a specific example of what Mark just described generally. Evidently the witnesses misunderstood Jesus' statement about the destruction of the temple (Gr. *naos*, temple building) of His body (John 2:19), and perhaps His statement about the future destruction of the Jerusalem temple (13:2). Jesus had said, "[*You*] destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," but they misquoted Him as saying, "*I will* destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days *I will* build another made without hands." Anyone who destroyed a temple in the ancient world was subject to capital punishment (cf. Jer. 26:1-19).<sup>742</sup> This was evidently one of the most serious charges against Jesus (cf. v. 61; 15:29).

14:60-61 Apparently Caiaphas decided to question Jesus, hoping to get Him to incriminate Himself, since he could not get two witnesses to agree against Jesus. Jesus did not need to respond to the high priest's first question. No one had offered any real proof against Him.

"His [Jesus'] resolute silence loudly declared to the Sanhedrin His disdain for their lying efforts to establish a charge against Him."<sup>743</sup>

Then Caiaphas, trying a new strategy, asked if Jesus was the Messiah. "The Blessed One" is a synonym for God that the Jews used instead of the holy name of God.<sup>744</sup> The popular Jewish concept of Messiah was that he would be a human descendant of David. Caiaphas was not asking if Jesus claimed to be God, but only a human "Messiah": "the Son of the Blessed."

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<sup>741</sup>Cole, p. 226.

<sup>742</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 10:6:2.

<sup>743</sup>Hiebert, p. 371. Cf. Evans, p. 448.

<sup>744</sup>Mishnah *Berachoth* 7:3.

"In the formulation 'the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One,' the second clause stands in apposition to the first and has essentially the same meaning. In Jewish sources contemporary with the NT, 'son of God' is understood solely in a messianic sense. Jewish hopes were situated in a messianic figure who was a man."<sup>745</sup>

"A Messiah imprisoned, abandoned by his followers, and delivered helpless into the hands of his foes represented an impossible conception. Anyone who, in such circumstances, proclaimed himself to be the Messiah could not fail to be a blasphemer who dared to make a mockery of the promises given by God to his people."<sup>746</sup>

14:62 Previously Jesus had veiled His messiahship because publicly claiming to be the Messiah would have precipitated a premature crisis (cf. 1:43-44; 8:29-30; 9:9; 11:28-33; 12:12). Now He openly admitted His messiahship because the time for crisis had arrived. Matthew may have given us Jesus' exact words (Matt. 26:64), and Mark their substance. Jesus added that He was not only a human Messiah, but the divine "Son of Man."

Furthermore, the passages Jesus claimed here to fulfill predicted His enthronement in heaven following His resurrection (Ps. 110:1), and His return to earth with God's authority to establish a worldwide kingdom (Dan. 7:13-14; cf. 8:38; 13:24, 26; Rev. 1:7). As such, He was claiming to be the Judge of those who sat to judge Him.<sup>747</sup> Jesus knew that this confession would seal His conviction. "I am" in this instance was probably a simple affirmation, not an allusion to the divine name, in view of how Jesus said it. "Power" was a recognized circumlocution for "God."<sup>748</sup>

14:63-64 Rending one's garments expressed indignation or grief (cf. Gen. 37:29; Judg. 14:19; 2 Kings 18:37). It had become the high priests' traditional response to blasphemy (cf. Acts 14:14).<sup>749</sup> However, it was illegal for the high priest to rend his garments (Lev. 21:10). The hypocrisy of the religious leaders is clear throughout their trial of Jesus. The Jews regarded blasphemy as any serious affront to God, not just speech that reviled Him (cf. 2:7; 3:28-29; John 5:18; 10:33). At this time, "blasphemy" consisted of claiming for oneself a unique association with God, reflected in sitting at God's right hand, not just misusing God's name.<sup>750</sup>

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<sup>745</sup>Lane, p. 535.

<sup>746</sup>Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>747</sup>See Bock and Del Rosario, pp. 359-61.

<sup>748</sup>Lane, p. 537.

<sup>749</sup>Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 7:5.

<sup>750</sup>See Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus*, pp. 30-183.

The Sanhedrin evidently considered Jesus' implicit threat as blasphemy against the high priest, and therefore against God.<sup>751</sup> The Mosaic Law prescribed death by stoning for blasphemers (Lev. 24:14), but this was not harsh enough for Jesus. Jesus had foreseen this, and had predicted death at the hands of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (10:33).

14:65 Having judged Jesus guilty, some of the Sanhedrin members vented their anger by attacking Him bodily. The temple guards present joined them in beating Jesus. Spitting and hitting were traditional Jewish ways of expressing repudiation (cf. Num. 12:14; Deut. 25:9; Job 30:10; Isa. 50:6). Even today, spitting in someone's face is one of the grossest forms of personal insult. They blindfolded Jesus, and challenged Him to identify His assailants—evidently because of a traditional belief that Messiah did not need to see but could judge by smell (Isa. 11:2-4).<sup>752</sup> The Old Testament predicted this type of abuse for Messiah (Isa. 53:5, 7-8, 10).<sup>753</sup> Peter recorded that through all this suffering, Jesus did not protest or retaliate (1 Pet. 2:21-23; cf. Isa. 53:7).

**Peter's denial of Jesus 14:66-72 (cf. Matt. 26:69-75; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:16-18, 25-27)**

This event was happening in the courtyard *below*, while the hearing just described continued on the floor *above*. These verses resume what Mark introduced in verse 54. The events were contemporaneous with Jesus' examination by the Sanhedrin (vv. 55-65).

"The irony inherent in the situation is evident when the force of juxtaposing verse 65 and verses 66-72 is appreciated. At the precise time when the court attendants were heaping scorn and derision upon Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, the prophecy that Peter would deliberately deny him was being fulfilled."<sup>754</sup>

"In stark contrast to Jesus, who is inside before the high priest, the most powerful Jew in Israel, Peter stands outside quailing before a female servant, a person of no power."<sup>755</sup>

14:66-68 Peter's presence was a testimony to His love for Jesus. Unfortunately his love could not stand the test of fear.<sup>756</sup> The servant-girl's description of Jesus ("that Nazarene, Jesus") made it clear that Peter was among enemies. However, there was nothing accusatory or threatening in what she said.

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<sup>751</sup>Evans, p. 456.

<sup>752</sup>Lane, p. 540.

<sup>753</sup>See Laurina L. Berg, "The Illegalities of Jesus' Religious and Civil Trials," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):330-42.

<sup>754</sup>Lane, p. 541.

<sup>755</sup>Evans, p. 467.

<sup>756</sup>Wessel, p. 771.

She had probably seen Peter with Jesus in the temple or the city during that week. Peter "denied" being one of Jesus' disciples: "using the form common in rabbinical law for a formal, legal denial."<sup>757</sup> Peter then left the warmth and light of the fire, in the center of the courtyard, and sought refuge in the shadows of the archway that led into the street.

"Being built on the slope of the hill, there was under the principal apartments [of the high priest's palace] a lower story, with a porch in front, so that we can understand how on that eventful night Peter was *beneath* in the palace."<sup>758</sup>

Some later manuscripts add "and a rooster crowed" at the end of verse 68. Probably scribes added these words in view of Jesus' prediction in verse 30 and the fulfillment in verse 72.

- 14:69-70a Evidently "the maid" was a different person than the servant-girl (v. 66; cf. Matt. 26:71). Instead of accusing Peter to his face, this girl whispered her charge to bystanders. Peter heard her. Again Peter denied being one of Jesus' disciples. This time he kept on denying it, as the Greek imperfect tense indicates.
- 14:70b-71 The third challenge came from the "bystanders," several people instead of just one, about an hour later (Luke 22:59). This time Peter went further. He denied that he even knew Jesus (cf. 8:29). He even called down God's judgment on himself if he was lying. "Cursing" means he put himself under a curse. "Swearing" means he affirmed the truthfulness of his words with oaths.
- 14:72 Mark alone noted that this was the "second time" that "a rooster" crowed (cf. v. 68). Peter had evidently received an earlier warning but had disregarded it. Now he remembered Jesus' prediction and broke down (Gr. *epibalon*, cf. Luke 22:61). He remembered too little and too late.

Peter now drops out of the picture until after Jesus' resurrection. He had finally learned and experienced his own weakness—and consequently seems to have felt unable to face the pressure of public identification with Jesus.

The parallels between Peter's behavior and Jesus' are all too evident. Both men faced a three-fold temptation. One defeated the tempter, and the other fell before him. While Jesus served God faithfully as His Servant on the upper floor, Peter failed to serve God faithfully on the lower floor. The reason for the difference goes back to Gethsemane. Disciples must learn from Peter's failure as well as from Jesus' success.

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<sup>757</sup>Lane, p. 542.

<sup>758</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 34.

"The importance and relevance of Peter's denial for the church to which Mark writes is obvious. To a church under severe pressure of persecution it provided a warning. If denial of Jesus Christ was possible for an apostle, and one of the leaders of the apostles at that, then they must be constantly on guard lest they too deny Jesus. The story also provided assurance that if anyone did fail Jesus under the duress of persecution, there was always a way open for repentance, forgiveness, and restoration (cf. 16:7)."<sup>759</sup>

### **The verdict of the Sanhedrin 15:1 (cf. Matt. 27:1-2; Luke 22:66-71)**

Matthew and Mark described this meeting as though it was separate from the earlier one (14:53-65). They probably did so to bring the reader back from the courtyard to the upper room in Caiaphas' house. Yet the decision seems to have been a separate one from the conviction for blasphemy. The Roman authorities would not have prosecuted Jesus as a blasphemer. Consequently the Sanhedrin ("Council"), evidently now at full strength or close to it, decided to charge Jesus with treason against the Roman government. This verse does not explain that decision, but Pilate's examination of Jesus that follows, shows that this was the charge the Sanhedrin had made against Him.

"Jesus, who is, indeed, king of the Jews in a deeply spiritual sense, has refused to lead a political uprising. Yet now, condemned for blasphemy by the Jews because of his spiritual claims, he is accused by them also before Pilate by [*sic* of] being precisely what he had disappointed the crowds for failing to be—a political insurgent."<sup>760</sup>

Mark did not explain who Pilate was, as Matthew did, evidently because his Roman readers knew about Pilate.

"Pilate belonged to a special group of imperial administrators, consisting of men beneath the rank of senator, the so-called equestrian class or Roman 'knights.' These magistrates, who owned a moderate minimum of property, were used to govern relatively small areas that required careful supervision. Their official title in the period prior to Claudius was not procurator but prefect (*praefectus*). . . . Pilate came to Judea in the year A.D. 26 as the fifth of the provincial prefects and remained in office ten years. He showed himself a harsh administrator who despised the Jewish people and their particular sensitivities."<sup>761</sup>

When Pilate visited Jerusalem from his provincial capital of Caesarea, he normally stayed either in Herod's palace, on the northwest corner of the city, or in the Fortress of Antonia, just northwest of the temple.<sup>762</sup> It was apparently to one of these places that the guards led Jesus in the early morning hours of Friday, the fifteenth of Nisan (April 3). Christian

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<sup>759</sup>Wessel, pp. 771-72.

<sup>760</sup>Moule, p. 124.

<sup>761</sup>Lane, pp. 548-49.

<sup>762</sup>Hiebert, p. 379.



tradition favors the Fortress of Antonia, but modern commentators usually favor Herod's palace.<sup>763</sup>

"As Friday morning arrives and the death of Jesus approaches, Mark will slow time from days to hours. Such slowing of time is yet another way of calling attention to the pivotal importance of Jesus' death."<sup>764</sup>

The Sanhedrin involved the Romans in Jesus' trial, because although the Jewish Council could *pass* a death sentence, they could not carry out any executions without Roman permission. The Jews probably bound Jesus to make Him look like a dangerous criminal (cf. 9:31; 10:33). He would not have tried to escape.

## **2. Jesus' Roman trial 15:2-20**

During the Jewish trial, Jesus had affirmed His messiahship—and the Sanhedrin had condemned Him for blasphemy. During His Roman trial, Jesus affirmed His kingship—and Pilate condemned Him for treason. The Roman trial, like the Jewish trial, had three stages: an interrogation before Pilate, an attempted interrogation before Herod, and an arraignment and sentencing before Pilate.<sup>765</sup>

### **Jesus' first appearance before Pilate 15:2-5 (cf. Matt. 27:11-14; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38)**

"Thus begins, not the trial *before* Pilate, but the trial *of* Pilate, for he stands self-revealed as he attempts in vain, first to avoid the issue, and then to escape responsibility for the decision."<sup>766</sup>

15:2 Pilate had absolute authority over Jesus' fate under Roman law. Customarily trials such as this one took place in public.<sup>767</sup> They also took place "as soon after dawn as possible because the working day of a Roman official began at the earliest hour of daylight."<sup>768</sup> First, the plaintiffs or accusers made their charges against the defendant. Then the prosecutor, in this case Pilate, examined the defendant—who could speak in his own defense—and he heard the testimony of any witnesses. Next, the prosecutor consulted with his legal advisers; and finally, he pronounced his verdict. The execution of the sentence followed immediately.<sup>769</sup>

Pilate's question shows that the Jews had charged Jesus with claiming to be a king. Claiming to be a king was tantamount to treason against Caesar and was a capital offense. Jesus admitted that He was "the King of the

<sup>763</sup>Cranfield, p. 449, favored the Antonia Fortress.

<sup>764</sup>Kingsbury, p. 49.

<sup>765</sup>For helpful insights into Roman law as it affected Jesus' trial, see R. Larry Overstreet, "Roman Law and the Trial of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:540 (October-December 1978):323-32.

<sup>766</sup>Cole, p. 232. Italics added.

<sup>767</sup>Grassmick, p. 185.

<sup>768</sup>Lane, p. 549.

<sup>769</sup>Grassmick, p. 185.

Jews," but He implied that He was a different kind of king than Pilate thought (cf. Matt. 27:11). With this reply, Jesus meant that what Pilate had said of Him was true, but that "King of the Jews" was not His preferred self-designation.<sup>770</sup> John wrote that Pilate discussed the nature of Jesus' kingship with Him further, and even concluded that Jesus was not guilty of treason (John 18:34-38).

15:3-5 The "chief priests," speaking for the Sanhedrin, brought "many" other "charges" against Jesus, some of which Luke mentioned (cf. Luke 23:2). Jesus' refusal to defend Himself against so many accusations "amazed" Pilate (cf. Isa. 53:7).

Ironically, Pilate himself declared who Jesus was with his inscription over His cross: The King Of The Jews (v. 28). Jesus did not need to tell Pilate who He was. Pilate was going to give Him His proper title anyway. This is another indication of Jesus' authority in the political realm.<sup>771</sup>

Mark used a double negative in the Greek text (*ouketi ouden*) to describe Jesus' absolute silence. In English, two negatives make a positive, but in Greek, two negatives strengthen the force of the negative. Mark recorded Jesus replying only briefly to Caiaphas (14:62) and to Pilate. This is consistent with Mark's emphasis on Jesus as the Servant of the Lord.

Only Luke recorded that Pilate now sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who was also in Jerusalem for the feast, since Jesus was a Galilean and Herod ruled over Galilee (Luke 23:6-12). Herod then sent Jesus back to Pilate.

**Jesus' second appearance before Pilate 15:6-15 (cf. Matt. 27:15-26; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39—19:16)**

Mark's brief account of Jesus' arraignment and sentencing concentrates on Pilate's offer to release Jesus or Barabbas.

15:6 Evidently the custom of releasing selected prisoners served to improve relations between the Roman ruler and his subjects.<sup>772</sup> Dictatorial governments such as Rome sometimes imprisoned popular rebel leaders. The Roman governor of Egypt practiced a similar custom.<sup>773</sup>

"Amnesties at festival times are known in many parts of the world and in various periods."<sup>774</sup>

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<sup>770</sup>Evans, p. 478.

<sup>771</sup>Edwards, p. 224.

<sup>772</sup>Evans, p. 480.

<sup>773</sup>Taylor, p. 580.

<sup>774</sup>S. E. Johnson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 249.

"Two forms of amnesty existed in Roman law, the *abolitio* or acquittal of a prisoner not yet condemned, and the *indulgentia*, or pardoning of one already condemned. What Pilate intended in the case of Jesus, who at this stage of the proceedings had not yet been sentenced by the court, was clearly the first form."<sup>775</sup>

"The historicity of the paschal amnesty has been disputed often, primarily because Josephus offers no evidence that such a custom ever existed. There is, however, a parallel in Roman law which indicates that an imperial magistrate could pardon and acquit individual prisoners in response to the shouts of the populace."<sup>776</sup>

15:7 This verse and the next provide more background information. "The man named Barabbas" was one of the popular Jewish freedom fighters whom the Romans had "imprisoned" for participating in an uprising against Rome. Later a large number of these revolutionaries organized and became known as the Zealots. Barabbas had also committed robbery, probably as part of his "insurrection" (John 18:40). Mark's use of the definite article before his name implies that his original readers had heard of Barabbas. However, "Barabbas" was a common name.<sup>777</sup>

"Barabbas comes into play and accomplishes Mark's purpose of making a foil against which the injustice of Jesus' crucifixion may stand out."<sup>778</sup>

15:8 Evidently there was a large "crowd" of Jews that had come to request the customary amnesty from Pilate. There is no indication in the text that they had come because they knew of Jesus' arrest or because they wanted to observe the outcome of His trial. They appear to have been there for reasons unrelated to Jesus.<sup>779</sup>

15:9-10 Pilate responded to this crowd's request by asking if they wanted him "to release" Jesus, whom he contemptuously called "the King of the Jews" (cf. v. 2). He recognized the chief priests' motives in arresting Jesus as being self-seeking ("envy"), rather than loyalty to Rome. He hoped to frustrate the "chief priests" by getting the people to request the release of someone Pilate viewed as innocent (Jesus). He could thereby retain real criminals such as Barabbas. Matthew wrote that Pilate gave the people the choice of Jesus or Barabbas (Matt. 27:17). He evidently believed that Jesus had the greater popular following and would be the people's choice.

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<sup>775</sup>Lane, p. 552.

<sup>776</sup>Ibid., pp. 552-53.

<sup>777</sup>See Gundry, p. 926, for sources.

<sup>778</sup>Ibid., p. 927. Cf. Mann, p. 638.

<sup>779</sup>Swete, p. 371.

15:11 Many of the people in the crowd were residents of Jerusalem, and many were pilgrims from far away. The "chief priests" were able to persuade them ("stirred up the crowd") to ask for Barabbas' "release." The people may have accepted the advice of their leaders because Barabbas had already tried to lead a rebellion, but Jesus had only hinted at an overthrow. Moreover it would have been very unusual for the crowd to side with Pilate and oppose their leaders.

"In Judea it was customary to confront the Roman authorities with as large and boisterous a delegation as could be mustered (cf. Acts 24:1; Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII. viii. 4)."<sup>780</sup>

15:12-14 The people's choice left Pilate with a problem. What would he do with innocent Jesus? Pilate's wife had just warned him to have nothing to do with that righteous man (Matt. 27:19). He put the question to the crowd. What kind of a judge is this, that asks the accusers what decision he should render? The religious leaders probably started the chant calling for Jesus' *crucifixion*—not just any capital punishment—but it quickly spread through the crowd. The mob ignored Pilate's request for reasonable reconsideration and continued chanting and "shouting."

15:15 Pilate had had problems in his relations with the Jewish people that he governed (cf. Luke 13:1-2). He saw the present situation as an opportunity to gain popular support. This overrode his sense of justice and his wife's warning.

Evidently Pilate flogged Jesus in the presence of the crowd, hoping that that punishment would satisfy them. John recorded that after the scourging, Pilate tried again to persuade the people against crucifixion (John 19:1-7). Scourging was not a necessary preparation for crucifixion, but it quickened an otherwise slow, lingering death.<sup>781</sup> Probably two soldiers stripped Jesus and tied His hands above Him to a post. Then they whipped Him with a leather scourge, containing pieces of bone and or metal embedded in the leather strips. Victims of Roman floggings seldom survived.<sup>782</sup>

"The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from

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<sup>780</sup>Lane, p. 555.

<sup>781</sup>Wessel, p. 775.

<sup>782</sup>Ibid.

vessels in the underlying muscles. . . . Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue."<sup>783</sup>

Mark's use of the phrase "delivered Him over" (NASB) or "handed Him over" (NIV) may be an allusion to Isaiah 53:6 and 12 where the same expression occurs in the Septuagint translation. This reminder of Jesus' position as the Suffering Servant is the emphasis in Mark's account of this aspect of His trial.

**The Roman soldiers' mockery of Jesus 15:16-20 (cf. Matt. 27:27-31; John 19:16-17a)**

15:16 "Praetorium" is a Latin loan word that describes a Roman governor's official residence (cf. Matt. 27:27; John 18:28, 33; 19:9; Acts 23:35). The Roman soldiers escorted Jesus to the *courtyard* (Gr. *aule*, cf. vv. 54, 66) of "the palace." This could have been either the Antonia Fortress or Herod's palace, but it was probably Herod's palace.

"Later tradition, however, located the Praetorium in the fortress Antonia."<sup>784</sup>

In the courtyard, a group of soldiers assembled around Jesus, probably those who were nearby and available. A "cohort" (Gr. *speira*) consisted of from 200 to 500 or 600 men, but here it probably refers to the group of soldiers that was available from the headquarters guard (cf. Matt. 27:27; John 18:3, 12; Acts 10:1; 21:31; 27:1).<sup>785</sup>

15:17-19 The reddish "purple" robe and the "crown of thorns" mocked Jesus' claim to be the Jews' king. The Greek word *porphyran* elsewhere describes colors from bright red to deep blue.<sup>786</sup> The crown of thorns was probably not a torture device but part of Jesus' mock royal attire.

"It may well have been an improvised caricature of the radiate crown signifying divine kingship and frequently depicted on coins then in circulation."<sup>787</sup>

"With this 'crown' the soldiers unwittingly pictured God's curse on sinful humanity being thrust on Jesus (cf. Gen. 3:17-18)."<sup>788</sup>

<sup>783</sup>C. Truman Davis, "The Crucifixion of Jesus. The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View," *Arizona Medicine* 22:3 (March 1965):185.

<sup>784</sup>Finegan, p. 320.

<sup>785</sup>Mann, p. 642. Cf. Evans, p. 490.

<sup>786</sup>J. A. Alexander, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 418.

<sup>787</sup>Lane, pp. 559-60.

<sup>788</sup>Grassmick, p. 187.

Mark did not mention the staff that they placed in Jesus' hand as a mock scepter (Matt. 27:29). "Hail, King of the Jews" is a parody of "Hail, Caesar." Their repeated beatings, spitting, kneeling as if in worship, and bowing as before a great person, intensified Jesus' sufferings.

"Irony is a dominant feature of Mark's story. *Verbal irony* occurs when a speaker self-consciously says one thing but means the opposite."<sup>789</sup>

15:20 Normally the Romans forced criminals condemned to crucifixion to walk naked to their place of execution, and flogged them along the way.<sup>790</sup> Evidently the soldiers concluded that Jesus would not live through such treatment in view of the abuse that He had already suffered. Therefore they "put His own garments" back "on Him."

"The Roman soldiers have acted out a mock salute of the Roman emperor, perhaps as was done during the celebration of a triumph."<sup>791</sup>

Mark's original readers faced subjection to similar mockery and abuse from pagan authorities. This pericope would have been an encouragement to them to remain faithful to Jesus. As a Servant, Jesus allowed other people to treat Him as a condemned criminal, because this was a part of His obedience to God (cf. Phil. 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 5:6-7).

### **3. Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial 15:21-47**

Jesus' sufferings continued to increase as He drew closer to the Cross.

#### **The crucifixion of Jesus 15:21-32 (cf. Matt. 27:32-44; Luke 23:26-43; John 19:17b-27)**

15:21 Probably only Mark mentioned Simon's sons ("Alexander and Rufus") because the Christians in Rome knew them or knew of them (cf. Rom. 16:13). Evidently Simon became a believer in Jesus. Mark mentioned very few people by name other than the Twelve. Simon was evidently a North African Jew who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover season. Since there was a large population of Jews in Cyrene, it is probable that Simon was racially a Semite rather than a black man.<sup>792</sup>

"According to Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* 1.24.4), the Gnostics seized upon this item in the tradition to assert that it was not Jesus who died but Simon."<sup>793</sup>

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<sup>789</sup>Rhoads and Michie, pp. 59-60.

<sup>790</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 19:4:5.

<sup>791</sup>Evans, p. 491.

<sup>792</sup>Hiebert, p. 389; Wessel, p. 778.

<sup>793</sup>Mann, p. 645.

Simon had to do literally what all followers of Jesus must do figuratively, namely, bear His cross (cf. 8:34; Luke 23:26). Normally the condemned had to carry the crosspiece of his cross to the place of execution.<sup>794</sup> The fact that Jesus did not, or could not, may reflect the unique character of His sufferings.<sup>795</sup> It also dignifies Jesus.<sup>796</sup>

"It was not uncommon for victims to die during a Roman flogging."<sup>797</sup>

15:22-23 "Golgotha" is a loose transliteration of the Aramaic word for "skull." Evidently the place resembled a skull or had some association with a skull or skulls or death. An ancient tradition that Jerome referred to identified the place as the one where Adam's skull lay. If you visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, you can see this traditional site of Adam's grave under what the authorities claim is the site of the crucifixion.

"According to an old tradition, respected women of Jerusalem provided a narcotic drink to those condemned to death in order to decrease their sensitivity to the excruciating pain (TB [Babylonian Talmud] *Sanhedrin* 43a)."<sup>798</sup>

"They" (v. 23) could refer to the soldiers, but it seems unlikely that *they* would have done anything to ease Jesus' pain.

15:24 Mark probably only mentioned Jesus' actual crucifixion, without description, because his Roman readers would have been only too familiar with its horrors. Yet for modern readers some explanation is helpful. Davis described it as follows.

"Simon is ordered to place the patibulum [crosspiece] on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backwards with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. The patibulum is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes [the vertical beam]. . . .

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<sup>794</sup>Cranfield, p. 454.

<sup>795</sup>Ibid.

<sup>796</sup>Gundry, p. 944.

<sup>797</sup>Mann, p. 645.

<sup>798</sup>Lane, p. 564.

"The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The Victim is now crucified. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain—the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

"At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. . . . Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically He is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen. . . .

"Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. . . .

"It is now almost over—the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level—the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues—the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. . . .

"The body of Jesus is now in extremis, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. . . .

"His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally He can allow His body to die."<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>799</sup>Davis, pp. 186-87.



Mark's quotation of Psalm 22:18, the psalm that predicted more detail of Messiah's sufferings in death than any other passage, contrasted the soldiers' callous actions with Jesus' agony.

"While the use of nails to fasten a body to the cross is not widely attested, in June, 1968, a team of Israeli scholars discovered at Giv'at ha-Mivtar in northeastern Jerusalem a Jewish tomb which produced the first authenticated evidence of a crucifixion in antiquity. Among the remains in an ossuary [dating from the first century before A.D. 70] were those of an individual whose lower calf bones had been broken and whose heel bones had been transfixed with a single iron nail."<sup>800</sup>

15:25 This time reference is unique to Mark's Gospel. The third hour was 9:00 a.m. John located Jesus' trial before Pilate at "about" the sixth hour (John 19:14). This would have been noon (Jewish time), or 6:00 a.m. (Roman time).<sup>801</sup> Consequently we should probably understand Mark's reference as being to the approximate beginning of Jesus' crucifixion, rather than the precise time when the soldiers nailed Him to the cross.

15:26 Typically, Mark recorded only the essence of "the charge" that Pilate wrote and had displayed over Jesus' head on the cross. It was probably written in red or black letters on a whitened background.<sup>802</sup>

15:27-28 Jesus' position between the two insurrectionists (John 18:40), perhaps cohorts of Barabbas, portrayed Him as the chief offender. The soldiers probably put Jesus in this position as a further insult to the Jews as well as to Jesus.

"Thus the temple-cleanser is crucified with bandits as though he were a temple-desecrator . . ."<sup>803</sup>

Most ancient manuscripts of Mark's Gospel omit verse 28. Many textual experts consider it an interpolation from Luke 22:37. Mark rarely pointed out the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.<sup>804</sup>

15:29-30 Evidently Jesus' predictions about destroying and raising "the temple" were well known (cf. 14:58-60). Unbelieving Jews seem to have focused on those statements as proof that Jesus could not be their Messiah. They viewed the temple with extreme veneration.

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<sup>800</sup>Lane, pp. 564-65.

<sup>801</sup>See my comments on John 19:14 for an explanation.

<sup>802</sup>Lane, p. 568.

<sup>803</sup>Gundry, p. 946.

<sup>804</sup>Plummer, p. 355.

"The jest was the harder to endure since it appealed to a consciousness of power held back only by the self-restraint of a sacrificed will."<sup>805</sup>

This public abuse heaped further suffering on the Suffering Servant. The Greek word Mark used to describe their abuse was *eblasphemoun* meaning "they were blaspheming." Earlier the high priest had charged Jesus with blasphemy of which He was innocent (14:64). Now the people did blaspheme God. Their comments fulfilled Psalm 22:7 and Lamentations 2:15.

15:31-32 The "chief priests" and "scribes" also blasphemed by "mocking" Jesus and claiming: "He saved others; He cannot save Himself." Their abuse must have wounded Jesus grievously since they were Israel's leaders. Of course, Jesus' descent from the cross was a physical possibility, but it was a moral and spiritual impossibility. The rulers' sarcastically meant title for Jesus, "King of *Israel*," focused on the added apparent irony of Jesus being the leader, not only of the "Jews" (people), but of their *nation*. They were the leaders of the nation, not Jesus. The fact that Jesus was apparently helpless on the cross was the supreme joke from their viewpoint. Their Messiah of all people needed to be in control. This was the climax of the religious leaders' opposition to Jesus (cf. 3:6; 11:18; 12:12; 14:1, 64; 15:1, 11-13).

*"Situational irony* occurs when there is a discrepancy between what a character naively expects to happen and what actually happens, or between what a character blindly thinks to be the case and what the real situation is. . . .

"In situational irony the speaker is confident that what he or she says or expects is true, but is unaware that the real situation is, in fact, the opposite. The characters in the story are blind victims of the irony of the situation, while the reader sees the ironic contrast between what the speaker says and the way things really are."<sup>806</sup>

The rebels "who were crucified with" Jesus joined the others who were "insulting Him." Rejection, abuse, and derision assailed Jesus from the highest to the lowest in society.

The total humiliation of Jesus, which this pericope records, presents Him as the completely submissive Servant of the Lord, even to the point of dying on a cross. What an example He is for all whom God has called to be His servants!

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<sup>805</sup>Swete, p. 383.

<sup>806</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 60

### The death of Jesus 15:33-41 (cf. Matt. 27:45-56; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-30)

Mark's account of Jesus' death included five climactic events: the darkness, two of Jesus' cries, the tearing of the temple veil, and the Roman centurion's confession. All of these events happened during the last three of the six hours of Jesus' sufferings on the cross.

"For the first three of Jesus' six hours on the cross he suffered in daylight at the hands of humans (15:21-32). In the darkness of the second three hours He suffered at the hands of God."<sup>807</sup>

15:33 All three synoptic evangelists recorded the supernatural "darkness" that covered all of Judah from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. None of them explained it. They all evidently viewed it as a sign of God's judgment on Jesus (cf. Isa. 5:25-30; 59:9-10; Joel 2:31; 3:14-15; Amos 8:9-10; Mic. 3:5-7; Zeph. 1:14-15). The Father withdrew the light of His presence from His Son during the hours when Jesus bore the guilt of the world's sins (Isa. 53:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:21). Perhaps darkness covered "the whole land" of Israel because it *also* symbolized God's judgment on *Israel*—for rejecting His Son.<sup>808</sup> The ninth plague in Egypt was a plague of darkness, and it too was followed by the death of the firstborn (Exod. 10:22—11:9).

"Darkness at noon, by its paradoxical nature, was a fitting sign for divine Omnipotence to give to those who had rejected the light."<sup>809</sup>

"In addition to the darkness of the Exodus, it was a commonly held belief in the ancient world that darkness was often associated with, or presaged, the death of great men."<sup>810</sup>

15:34 This cry came at the ninth hour, namely, 3:00 p.m. Jesus' cry expressed what the darkness depicted. "Jesus cried out" *loudly*, not weakly, with His last available energy. His great agony of soul was responsible for this cry. Mark recorded Jesus' words in Aramaic. Probably Jesus spoke in Aramaic in view of the crowd's reaction (cf. Matt. 27:46-47).

"The depths of the saying are too deep to be plumbed, but the least inadequate interpretations are those which find in it a sense of desolation in which Jesus felt the horror of sin so deeply that for a time the closeness of His communion with the Father was obscured."<sup>811</sup>

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<sup>807</sup>Bailey, in *The New . . .*, p. 96.

<sup>808</sup>Grassmick, p. 189.

<sup>809</sup>Cole, p. 242.

<sup>810</sup>Mann, p. 650.

<sup>811</sup>Taylor, p. 549.

Jesus was quoting Psalm 22:1: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" That is why He expressed His agony of separation as a question. Jesus was not asking God for an answer; the question was rhetorical. As Jesus used this verse, it expressed an affirmation of His relationship to God as His Father and an acknowledgment that the Father had "abandoned" Him. Jesus felt as though the Father had abandoned Him and expressed this feeling in David's words. God "abandoned" Jesus in the judicial sense that He focused His wrath on the Son (cf. 14:36). Since Jesus was God, the Father did not literally abandon the Son. The members of the Trinity are forever united.

"The sense in which God had **forsaken** Christ was that the Father withdrew from communion with the Son. No longer did he evidence his love toward his Son. Instead, Christ had become the object of the Father's displeasure, for he was the sinner's Substitute. Christ became 'sin or us (II Cor 5:21), and a holy God cannot look with favor upon sin."<sup>812</sup>

God the Father poured out His wrath on the Son, who took the sin of the world upon Himself on the Cross. Jesus, at the same time, bore God's curse and His judgment for sin (cf. Deut. 21:22-23; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). God, who cannot look on sin (Hab. 1:13), turned His back, so to speak, on Jesus who bore that sin in His own body on the Cross. Jesus experienced the "separation" from God when He took the place of sinners (10:45; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). That this "separation" was not literal or permanent—and yet was a real event experienced in time and history—is supported also by the fact that Jesus proceeded to address the Father in prayer: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (v. 37; cf. Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46).

Another interpretation follows:

"The burden of the world's sin, his complete self-identification with sinners, involved not merely a felt, but a real, abandonment by his Father. It is in the cry of dereliction that the full horror of man's sin stands revealed. But the cry also marks the lowest depth of the hiddenness of the Son of God—and so the triumphant *tetelestai* ["It is finished"] of Jn xix. 30 is, paradoxically, its true interpretation. When this depth had been reached, the victory had been won."<sup>813</sup>

Even though the physical sufferings that Jesus experienced were incomparable, the spiritual agony that He underwent—as the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world—was infinitely greater. We need to

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<sup>812</sup>Burdick, p. 1024.

<sup>813</sup>Cranfield, pp. 458-59.

remember this when we meditate on Jesus' death, for example at the Lord's Supper.

15:35-36 "Elijah" had delivered several people in distress during his ministry.

"That there was a popular belief in the coming of Elijah to aid in time of need seems well established (cf. Strack-Billerbeck, Vol. 1, p. 1042)."<sup>814</sup>

It is difficult to know if the "bystanders" did what they did, because they sincerely misunderstood Jesus, or if they were cruelly twisting His words to persecute Him further. In either case, they *did* wound Him more deeply. Perhaps one of the soldiers gave Jesus the sour wine (Gr. *oxos*) to prolong His life, so that the onlookers could see if Elijah would come and help Jesus.<sup>815</sup> Another view follows:

"It may be added that the late Dr. Jerome Webster, of Presbyterian Hospital, New York (and a long-time student of the effects of crucifixion on the human system) told me in conversation that, given the death of the victim by exhaustion and suffocation, anything given to the victim to drink would hasten the process of suffocation."<sup>816</sup>

In Mark's account, the soldier spoke (v. 36), and in Matthew's, the people did (Matt. 27:49). Both evangelists were undoubtedly accurate.

15:37 Jesus' strong "loud cry" indicates that this was not simply the last gasp of an exhausted, demoralized, or defeated man. Jesus' "cry" was a *shout of victory*. He triumphantly announced: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Then He dismissed His spirit (Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46; John 19:30)—"and breathed His last." It is possible that Jesus' last shout and the dismissal of His spirit took place simultaneously; He dismissed His spirit with a triumphal shout.<sup>817</sup>

Normally it took as long as two or three days for crucified people to die.<sup>818</sup> Jesus' relatively short period of suffering on the cross surprised Pilate (v. 44).

"His comparatively early death was not due to His physical sufferings alone, and it is a mistake to center major attention on the physical agonies of our Lord."<sup>819</sup>

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<sup>814</sup>Mann, p. 652.

<sup>815</sup>Gould, p. 295.

<sup>816</sup>Mann, pp. 652-53.

<sup>817</sup>Gundry, p. 948; Evans, p. 508.

<sup>818</sup>Grassmick, p. 190.

<sup>819</sup>Hiebert, p. 397. Cf. Clarke, p. 246.

- 15:38 All the synoptic writers also recorded the symbolic act of the tearing of the "veil of the temple"—"from top to bottom." They did not explain it, but the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews did (Heb. 6:19-20; 9:1-14; 10:19-22). It represented God opening a way into His presence by the death of His Son. The veil was probably the great outer one that separated the holy place from the courtyard.<sup>820</sup> If so, it would have been observed by many people. Priests would have been preparing the evening sacrifices in the temple when this event occurred near 3:00 p.m.
- 15:39 The "centurion" (Gr. *kentyrion*, a transliteration of the Latin *centurio*, that only Mark used) was the soldier in charge of Jesus' crucifixion (cf. v. 44). Elsewhere in the New Testament, the customary Greek word *hekatontarchos* ("centurion") appears. Mark's word choice here is another indication that he wrote for Romans. This centurion spoke more truly than he likely understood. He evidently meant that Jesus was a "righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Still, his words spoken as he stood directly in front of Jesus—as He died—were literally true! His statement constitutes the climax of Mark's demonstration that Jesus was God's divine Son (cf. 1:1; 8:29-30).

"Impressed by the manner of Jesus' death and the signs that attend it, the Roman centurion confesses of Jesus what he should only confess of the Roman emperor. Caesar is not the 'son of God'; Jesus, the crucified Messiah, is."<sup>821</sup>

"There seems little doubt that Mark intended this verse to be a match for the very beginning of his gospel [i.e., 1:1: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"]."<sup>822</sup>

This "centurion" was not a disciple of Jesus, but a Roman soldier, who had probably witnessed many crucifixions. The torn veil was a Jewish testimony to Jesus' identity, and the centurion's confession was a Gentile testimony to the same thing. Taken together they provide a double witness that Jesus was the Son of God.

"Here Judaism and the Gentile world, each in its own way, acknowledges Jesus' sovereign dignity."<sup>823</sup>

- 15:40-41 Matthew referred to the same three women, and Luke mentioned them generally. "James the Less" may have been the son of Alphaeus mentioned in 3:18—who was one of the Twelve. "Salome" was the mother of

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<sup>820</sup>Lane, p. 574-75.

<sup>821</sup>Evans, p. 510.

<sup>822</sup>Mann, p. 654.

<sup>823</sup>Lane, p. 488.

Zebedee's sons, James and John—who were Jesus' cousins. These women, like the soldiers, also witnessed Jesus' death. Their loving example contrasts with the enemies of Jesus who ridiculed Him. However, verse 41 is unique to Mark. It should be a special encouragement to all female disciples.

Many women "followed" Jesus and served ("ministered to") Him throughout His ministry. John mentioned that he was present at the crucifixion (John 19:26-27), but none of the other male disciples appear to have been there. *Women* can serve Jesus—as "disciples"—as well as men. Their roles may be somewhat different from their male counterparts', today, as they were then, but their ministry is just as important. Mark's introduction of these three women prepares the reader for their roles as eyewitnesses of Jesus' burial (v. 47) and resurrection (16:1-8).

<b>SOME WOMEN WHO OBSERVED THE CRUCIFIXION</b>		
<b>Matthew 27:56</b>	<b>Mark 15:40</b>	<b>John 19:25</b>
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
		Jesus' mother (Mary)
Mary the mother of James and Joseph =	Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses =	Mary the wife of Clopas
Mother of Zebedee's sons =	Salome =	Jesus' mother's sister

### **The burial of Jesus 15:42-47 (cf. Matt. 27:57-66; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42)**

The burial of Jesus was an important part of the preaching of the early church (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). It forms a connection between Jesus' death and His resurrection. More important, it proved the reality of Jesus' death.

15:42 By "evening" Mark meant late afternoon, "around 4:30 P.M."<sup>824</sup> Friday was the day the Jews prepared ("preparation day") for their Sabbath observance, which began at sundown on Friday. Mark took special pains to explain this for his Gentile readers.

15:43 The shortness of time evidently spurred "Joseph of Arimathea" into action (cf. Deut. 21:23). The location of Arimathea is questionable, but it may have been the same as Ramah (Ramathaim), the birthplace of Samuel, about 5 miles north of Jerusalem.<sup>825</sup> Joseph was "a prominent member" of

<sup>824</sup>Mann, p. 656.

<sup>825</sup>*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Arimathaea," by J. W. Meiklejohn, p. 81.

the Sanhedrin. Mark's description of him, as one who "was waiting for the kingdom of God," presents him as a devout Jew. He had also become a believer in Jesus (John 19:38).

Mark's original readers were citizens of Caesar's kingdom, but they were also waiting for the kingdom of God. Mark stressed the courage that Joseph mustered to make his request. Joseph's bold action would have inspired Mark's readers to take a stand for Jesus too. Joseph had to gather up his "courage," since he faced much opposition on the Council. Similarly, Mark's Roman readers would have had to summon their courage—in order to side with Jesus against powerful officials who opposed Him.

"To erase the shame of the Cross, Mark dignifies Jesus in burial as well as in death. . . . It speaks well of Jesus that despite the disgraceful manner of his death such a man as Joseph should dangerously seek to bury his body."<sup>826</sup>

15:44-45 It was unusual that a crucified person died so quickly. So Pilate verified Jesus' death. Mark noted that a Roman "centurion" confirmed Jesus' death, in order to prove to his Roman readers that Jesus really had died. Perhaps some Romans who had observed crucifixions would have had trouble believing that Jesus was dead, since they knew of crucified criminals who had lingered for days.

It was also unusual to give the corpse of a person condemned for treason to anyone but a near relative.<sup>827</sup> Consequently, Pilate's willingness to give (grant) Jesus' "body" to Joseph, suggests that he really did not believe that Jesus was guilty of treason (cf. vv. 14-15). This is the only place in the New Testament where someone referred to Jesus' dead body as a corpse (Gr. *ptoma*). Mark's use of the word further stressed the reality of Jesus' death.<sup>828</sup>

15:46 Nicodemus assisted Joseph with these tasks (cf. John 19:39), and perhaps other people, such as their servants, helped them. Mark's simple description stressed the wrapping of Jesus' body in "a linen cloth," or sheet (Gr. *sindon*). Perhaps this also indicated a genuine burial to his original readers.

"The purchase of a linen cloth dignifies Jesus with a brand new shroud."<sup>829</sup>

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<sup>826</sup>Gundry, p. 980.

<sup>827</sup>Wessel, p. 785.

<sup>828</sup>Cf. Nineham, p. 435.

<sup>829</sup>Gundry, p. 981.



15:47 The writer mentioned the presence of the two "Marys" at the tomb, during Jesus' burial, to set up his later statement that they were also present to witness the empty tomb (16:1, 5). They had seen Jesus die (v. 40), and now they saw Him buried. There was no question that they went to the right tomb on Sunday morning, since they had been there Friday afternoon. Once again, Mark guarded against any wrong conclusion that the disciples were mistaken about Jesus' resurrection.

The Servant of the Lord had paid the ultimate price for the sins of humankind, namely, His own life. Mark's narrative stressed Jesus' exemplary service and the reality of His death.

### **VIII. THE SERVANT'S RESURRECTION CH. 16**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the climax of Mark's Gospel, as it is the high point of all the other Gospel accounts. Jesus vindicated His claims to being the divine Son of God, not simply a human messiah, by His resurrection from the dead.

#### **A. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF JESUS' RESURRECTION 16:1-8 (CF. MATT. 28:1-8; LUKE 24:1-8; JOHN 20:1)**

16:1 The Sabbath ended with sundown Saturday evening. The women did not come to the tomb until Sunday morning (v. 2, cf. Matt. 28:1). Why did Mark refer to the Sabbath at all? Probably he did so to clarify that Jesus had been in the tomb for some time.

The women Mark mentioned coming to the tomb were the same ones he said observed Jesus on the cross (15:40-41). Two of them had already visited Jesus' tomb late Friday afternoon (15:47). However, there were several other women who accompanied them now (cf. Luke 24:10).

<b>WOMEN WHO VISITED THE TOMB EASTER MORNING</b>			
<b>Matthew 28:1</b>	<b>Mark 16:1</b>	<b>Luke 24:10</b>	<b>John 20:1</b>
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
The other Mary =	Mary the mother of James	Mary the mother of James	
	Salome		
		Joanna	
		others	

They went to "anoint" Jesus' corpse with "spices." The Jews did not practice embalming.<sup>830</sup> These women simply wanted to honor Jesus by making His corpse as pleasant smelling as possible. Perhaps Mary of Bethany's example had encouraged them to make this sacrifice for Him (cf. 14:3-9). Obviously they did not understand that Jesus would rise from the dead.

"In the final scenes, in Jerusalem, the little people [i.e., the minor characters in Mark's story] exemplify especially the teaching about being 'servant of all.' Earlier, Jesus served others. Now in his time of need others serve him: Simon the leper receives him in his house; a woman anoints him with ointment worth a worker's annual salary; Simon Cyrenean takes up his cross; Joseph takes his body from the cross and buries him; and a group of women go to the tomb to anoint him after his death. These actions are acts of service done for Jesus by people who courageously sacrifice or risk something—money or arrest or reputation—to carry them out. . . .

"Thus, the little ones serve throughout as 'foils' for the disciples. . . .

". . . the little people actually fulfill the functions expected of disciples. Because the disciples of John had buried John's corpse, the reader expects the same of Jesus' disciples. Instead, the little people do what might have been expected of the disciples . . ."831

- 16:2-3 Mark dated their visit even more precisely.<sup>832</sup> Apparently the women left their homes before dawn and arrived at the tomb just after sunrise (Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Their concern was the removal of the heavy "stone" that blocked their "entrance" into "the tomb." They evidently knew nothing about the sealing of the tomb and the posting of the guard there (Matt. 27:62-66).
- 16:4-5 Mark apparently included this story to impress the reader with the supernatural element represented by the angel. The women would have said to one another, "Who rolled the stone away? It must have been someone very strong." When they entered the antechamber of the tomb, they would have thought, "Who is this young man (Gr. *neaniskos*)? He must be very unusual." He appeared as a youth, but his strength and his

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<sup>830</sup>Hiebert, p. 408.

<sup>831</sup>Rhoads and Michie, pp. 132-33.

<sup>832</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, "The Women and the Empty Tomb," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):301-9.

unusual dress indicated that he was an angel (cf. 9:3). The angel's powerful and unexpected presence and or appearance alarmed the women.

"It may be suggested that the purpose of the angel's presence at the tomb was to be the link between the actual event of the Resurrection and the women. Human eyes were not permitted to see the event of the Resurrection itself. But the angels as the constant witnesses of God's action saw it. So the angel's word to the women, 'He is risen', is, as it were, the mirror in which men were allowed to see the reflection of this eschatological event."<sup>833</sup>

16:6 The angel first calmed the women's fears. They needed to stop being "amazed" (alarmed), since Jesus had predicted His resurrection—and now it had happened. Then the angel explained where Jesus was ("not here" in the tomb; however, He showed Himself to Mary Magdalene near the tomb shortly after this). He "has been resurrected" (Gr. passive tense, implying that God had raised Him)! The empty tomb and "place where they laid Him" testified to His resurrection. The same Person who was crucified was now alive!

"It is significant that early Jewish polemicists never sought to dispute this fact."<sup>834</sup>

16:7 "Peter," especially, needed this good news, in view of his triple denial of Jesus and his consequent despair. Mark only recorded this special reference to Peter probably because it meant so much to Peter. Jesus still regarded Peter as one of His leading disciples, in spite of his failure.

Jesus had predicted the scattering of His sheep and their regathering in Galilee (14:27-28). Galilee was the appropriate place to launch a worldwide mission to Gentiles as well as Jews. As He had called His disciples to be fishers of men in Galilee (1:17), now He would commission them to be shepherds of sheep there (John 21:15-19).

"Too many other predictions of Jesus have reached fulfillment in Mark to leave any doubt that this one will likewise reach fulfillment."<sup>835</sup>

"The final scene points back to Galilee, back to the beginning of the story. The young man's message at the tomb with instructions for the disciples to go to Galilee suggests perhaps a fresh start for the disciples or for anyone

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<sup>833</sup>Cranfield, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 465-66.

<sup>834</sup>Lane, p. 588.

<sup>835</sup>Gundry, p. 1009.

in the future of the story world who chooses to follow Jesus. By implication, this fresh journey will result in the same complications and the same hostility met in Galilee by John and then by Jesus. Furthermore, Galilee points away from Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, toward gentile nations, where Jesus had said the good news was to be proclaimed before the end came."<sup>836</sup>

However, the disciples did not go immediately "to Galilee." They needed further proof of Jesus' resurrection, which Jesus provided, before they went.

16:8 The women were so upset by what had happened, that when they left the tomb, they told no one what they had seen—at first. However, it was not long before they were spreading the news that Jesus was alive again (Matt. 28:8; Luke 24:9).

"The ending of Mark . . . punctures any self-confident superiority the reader might feel, for the ending turns irony back upon the reader. Throughout the story when Jesus commanded people to be quiet they talked anyway. But at the end when the young man commands the women to go tell the message—the crucial message—in an ironic reversal they are silent. The fear of the women dominates the ending of the story. At this point fear forces the reader to face once again the fear in his or her own situation. No matter how much the reader 'knows' or 'sees,' he or she still must make the hard choice in the end—whether to be silent like the women or to proclaim the good news in the face of persecution and possible death."<sup>837</sup>

"With his closing comment he [Mark] wished to say that 'the gospel of Jesus the Messiah' (ch. 1:1) is an event beyond human comprehension and therefore awesome and frightening. In this case, contrary to general opinion, 'for they were afraid' is the phrase most appropriate to the conclusion of the Gospel. The abruptness with which Mark concluded his account corresponds to the preface of the Gospel where the evangelist begins by confronting the reader with the fact of revelation in the person of John and Jesus (Ch. 1:1-13)."<sup>838</sup>

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<sup>836</sup>Rhoads and Michie, p. 71.

<sup>837</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-62. See also bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 396.

<sup>838</sup>Lane, p. 592.

## **B. THE APPEARANCES AND ASCENSION OF JESUS 16:9-20**

Many modern interpreters believe Mark ended his Gospel with verse 8.<sup>839</sup> This seems unlikely to some others, since if he did, he ended it with an example of disciples too fearful and amazed to bear witness to the resurrected Jesus. Throughout this Gospel, we have noted many unique features that appeal to disciples to serve God by bearing bold witness to Jesus, even in spite of persecution and suffering. The other interpreters believe the women's example would hardly be a good example for Mark to close his Gospel with.

The ending of Mark's Gospel is one of the major textual problems in the New Testament. The main reason some interpreters regard verses 9-20 as spurious is this. The two oldest Greek uncial manuscripts of the New Testament (fourth century), Codex Sinaiticus (*Aleph*) and Codex Vaticanus (B), plus many other old manuscripts, do not contain them. Moreover, the writings of some church fathers reflect no knowledge of these verses. On the other hand, verses 9-20 do appear in the majority of the old manuscripts, and other church fathers do refer to them—including Justin Martyr (A.D. 155), Tatian (A.D. 170), and Irenaeus (A.D. 180).<sup>840</sup> Some interpreters believe the vocabulary, style, and content of these verses argue against Mark's authorship of them.<sup>841</sup> This has led many modern scholars to conclude that verses 9-20 were not part of Mark's original Gospel.<sup>842</sup>

If they were not part of Mark's original Gospel, where did they come from, and are they part of the inspired Word of God or not inspired?

It may be that verses 9-20 were part of Mark's original Gospel and, for reasons unknown to us today, they were not included in some ancient copies of it. *Aleph* and "B" leave space for all or some of these verses.<sup>843</sup> If so, these verses are probably as fully authoritative as the rest of the Gospel.<sup>844</sup>

Another view is that someone added verses 9-20 to give this Gospel a more positive ending. He could have done so without divine inspiration, in which case these verses lack the divine authority that marks the rest of Scripture.

Alternatively, someone could have added verses 9-20 under the superintending influence of the Holy Spirit, in which case these verses have equal authority with the rest of the Gospel.<sup>845</sup> There are other passages of Scripture that seem to have been written somewhat

<sup>839</sup>E.g., Mann, pp. 659-70; Carson and Moo, pp. 187-90; Cranfield, pp. 470-72; Cole, pp. 257-59; et al.

<sup>840</sup>For more details, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. 122-26.

<sup>841</sup>E.g., Wessel, p. 792; Bratcher and Nida, pp. 517-22; Mann, pp. 673-74; et al.

<sup>842</sup>E.g., Swete, p. cxiii; A. F. Hort, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 199; B. B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 203; Joel F. Williams, "Literary Approaches to the End of Mark's Gospel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:1 (March 1999):21-35; The NET Bible note on 16:9; Lane, pp. 591, 601-5; et al.

<sup>843</sup>*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1680.

<sup>844</sup>John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark*; Morison, pp. 446-49, 463-70; Lenski, pp. 750-55; et al.

<sup>845</sup>Grassmick, p. 194.

later than the body of the book in which they appear, but which the Jews and later the Christians regarded as inspired. For example, the record of Moses' death appears at the end of Deuteronomy, which most conservatives believe Moses wrote (cf. Deut. 34:5-12). Another example is the references to the town of Dan in the Book of Genesis, which town did not go by that name until after Moses' time. Evidently someone after Moses' day updated the name of that town. Several other examples of this nature could be cited.

The view of many evangelicals, including myself, is that even though we may not be able to prove that verses 9-20 were originally part of Mark's Gospel, though they could have been, they appear to have been regarded as inspired and therefore authoritative early in the history of the church.

There are two other short endings to Mark's Gospel that follow verse 8 in some ancient copies, but almost all textual scholars reject these as being spurious.<sup>846</sup>

### **1. Three post-resurrection appearances 16:9-18**

These three accounts stress the importance of disciples believing what Jesus had taught, specifically that He would rise from the dead, with increasing urgency.

#### **Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene 16:9-11 (cf. John 20:11-18)**

16:9           The NIV has supplied "Jesus." The Greek text says, "Now after He had risen." The antecedent of "He" is obviously Jesus, but the lack of this antecedent in the immediately preceding context seems to some interpreters to indicate a major break between verses 8 and 9. Perhaps the writer did not feel he needed to name Jesus since He is the obvious antecedent.<sup>847</sup>

The writer may have described "Mary Magdalene" as he did here to explain why she was at the tomb. Jesus had done a great thing for her, and her love for Him was consequently very great. Perhaps the writer described her as he did, to identify her more precisely, since she becomes an important figure here for the first time in Mark's Gospel. Mary had returned to the tomb by herself after she and the other women had left it (vv. 1-8). Evidently people could not naturally perceive Jesus for who He was unless Jesus revealed Himself to them (cf. Luke 24:16, 31).<sup>848</sup>

16:10-11     Mary "reported to" the disciples that she had seen the risen Christ (cf. v. 7). While the rest of the Jews rejoiced, celebrating the Passover season, Jesus' disciples mourned His death. They would not believe Mary's eyewitness testimony. This should encourage other disciples who find that unbelievers will not believe their witness about the resurrection of Jesus.

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<sup>846</sup>See Mann, pp. 677-79.

<sup>847</sup>Morison, p. 450.

<sup>848</sup>S. J. Andrews, *The Life of Our Lord Upon the Earth*, p. 590.

**Jesus' appearance to two men 16:12-13 (cf. Luke 24:13-32)**

This is a condensed version of Jesus' appearance on the Emmaus road. The "different (immortal) form" in which Jesus "appeared" accounted in part for the failure of these men to recognize Him at first. The writer's point seems to be the unbelief of the disciples again. Neither the report of an eyewitness nor a personal appearance opened these men's eyes. God had to do that supernaturally, and He still does.

**Jesus' appearance to the Eleven 16:14-18 (cf. Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23)**

The writer said that Jesus "appeared to the Eleven" on this occasion. However, John qualified that statement by explaining that Thomas was absent (John 20:24). The writer was speaking of the Eleven as a group.

16:14 This event evidently happened on Easter Sunday evening. This is the most severe rebuke that Jesus ever gave His disciples that the Gospels record. They had not only disbelieved the reports of His resurrection, but they had also hardened their hearts against the *possibility* of His resurrection. The disciples' own unbelief would help them understand and appreciate the unbelief of many with whom they would share the gospel as eyewitnesses.

"The Apostles may have been allowed to hear of the Resurrection before seeing the risen Christ in order that they might know from personal experience what it was to have to depend upon the testimony of others, as would be the case with their converts."<sup>849</sup>

16:15 The stating of the Great Commission, on this occasion, seems to have preceded the giving of it that Matthew recorded (Matt. 28:19-20). The account in the second Gospel stresses the universal scope of the disciples' responsibility (cf. 14:9). "All" in "all the world" is an especially strong form of the Greek word for "all," namely, *hapanta*. Every part of the world needs the gospel.

16:16 This is a verse that some people believe teaches the necessity of water baptism for salvation. However, *Christian baptism* elsewhere in the New Testament is always defined by an outward confession of belief in Jesus Christ. This verse also regards baptism as such. The second part of the verse clearly teaches that unbelief results in condemnation (cf. 9:43-48), not belief and failure to undergo baptism.

In the first part of the verse, one article governs both participles: "has believed and has been baptized" (NASB) or "believes and is baptized" (NIV). This indicates the close relationship between believing and being baptized. However, they are not inseparable (cf. Rom. 3:21-28; 1 Cor.

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<sup>849</sup>Plummer, p. 372.

1:17; Eph. 2:8-9). Baptism is not a condition for salvation, but it is an important step of obedience for a believing disciple.

16:17-18 These verses also support the primary importance of believing. Those who believe, not just the Eleven, would continue to perform supernatural acts. Throughout Scripture such "signs" always signified that something of supernatural origin was happening, and they authenticated the message that the witness bore (cf. v. 20).

"The signs authenticated the faith the early believers proclaimed, not the personal faith that any one of them exercised."<sup>850</sup>

The Twelve had already cast out demons and healed people in Jesus' name (6:7, 12-13). They would continue to have these abilities (cf. Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:18; 19:12; 28:8). This is the only reference to the disciples speaking in "tongues" (i.e., languages) in the Gospels (cf. Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1; 14:2, 18-19). There is no textual basis for distinguishing the unlearned languages, spoken in Acts, from the gibberish that some claim the epistles refer to. Tongues in the New Testament were evidently always languages.<sup>851</sup> Immunity from the bite of poisonous snakes was another privilege the disciples would enjoy (cf. Acts 28:3-6). There are no examples of disciples drinking something deadly and surviving in the Book of Acts.

Jesus did not say how long the disciples would be able to do these things. Previous periods of miracle-working had all been fairly short (cf. Exod. 7—14; 1 Kings 17—2 Kings 10). Therefore that was what the disciples could expect (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8). Church history has confirmed that the period of miracle-working that existed in the first century passed away about the same time as the completion of the New Testament canon (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). Some Christians claim these promises are valid today, for example the snake-handling and poison-drinking sects of Appalachia. However, these were mainly promises of divine protection for occasions when the disciples' persecutors compelled them to do these things.

God still sometimes convinces people of the truth of the gospel, or confirms the truth of His Word to people, with supernatural experiences. Nevertheless these are not the same experiences as what Jesus promised here. Some of the early Christians could perform miracles whenever they wanted to do so in God's will (e.g., Acts 3:6; 16:18). That is not the case today, though God still performs miracles today.

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<sup>850</sup>Grassmick, p. 196.

<sup>851</sup>See S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Gift of Tongues and the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):309-11.



**2. Jesus' ascension 16:19-20 (cf. Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12)**

16:19 This event happened 40 days after the appearances that the writer just recorded (cf. Acts 1:3). He narrated the ascension and session of Jesus without elaborating. The title "Lord Jesus" occurs only here and in Luke 24:3 in the Gospels. Jesus of Nazareth became "Lord" to His disciples, in the sense of sovereign master, following His resurrection. He was that always, but the Resurrection taught the disciples that that is what He was.

Jesus had predicted His ascension in veiled terms (14:7). The disciples witnessed this. They did not witness His seating in heaven. The Old Testament anticipated Messiah's seating in heaven before His return to reign (Ps. 110:1). The disciples learned that that session would occur between Jesus' two advents, not before His first advent (cf. Acts 2:33-35; 7:56). Jesus' present seated position, at the Father's right-hand side, pictures His finished work on earth—for the time being—and His authority as the Executor of God's will in this age. Jesus' present rule over the church, from His Father's right-hand side in heaven, is not the same as His future rule over the Davidic kingdom—from David's throne on earth.<sup>852</sup>

16:20 However, Jesus' work on earth was also continued through the first generation of His disciples. It was a continuation of Jesus' work on earth in a real sense, because He continued to work with them, and confirmed their preaching with signs (cf. Acts 1:1-2).

". . . the whole of the Acts of the Apostles is covered here in this single twentieth verse . . ."853

Those first disciples provided a positive example for all succeeding generations of disciples to follow. Thus the Gospel ends on a positive note.

The task of evangelizing continued in Rome among the disciples who first received this Gospel. This account of the good news about Jesus Christ (1:1) would have been a particular encouragement to the new Roman disciples. They faced the choice of whether to take a public stand as Christians—and suffer the loss of real estate, personal property, employment, and even their lives—or to lay low. They were required by law to offer a pinch of incense in worship of "divine" Caesar, as Roman citizens. Doing so compromised their exclusive commitment to Jesus as Lord. To fail to worship Caesar cost them dearly. This Gospel is particularly helpful for disciples who face similar challenges in their own time and place in history.

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<sup>852</sup>See Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):81-82.

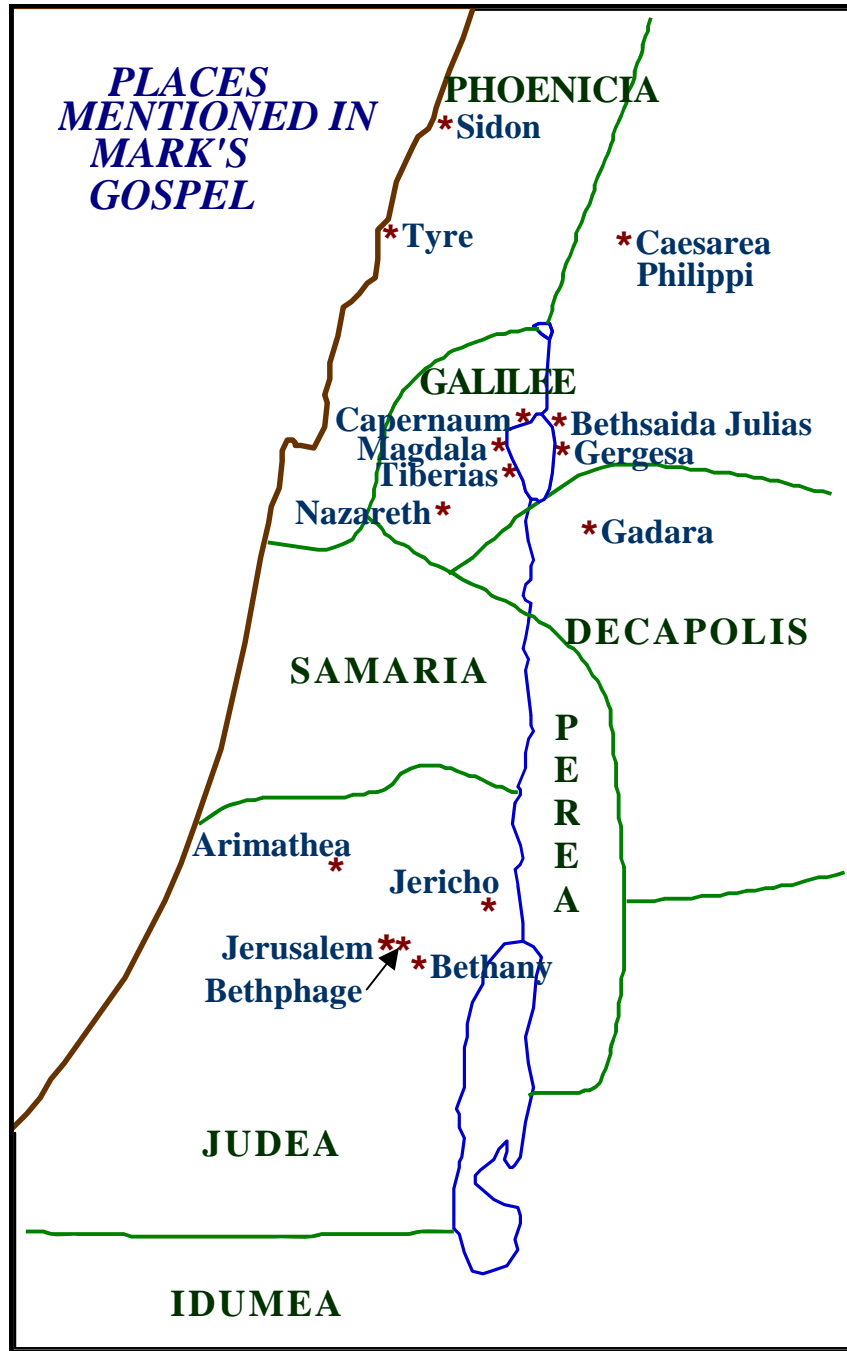
<sup>853</sup>Cole, p. 263.

Wiersbe pointed out that the Gospel of Mark parallels Paul's great servant passage in Philippians 2. Jesus came as a servant (Mark 1—13; Phil. 2:1-7), He died on a cross (Mark 14—15; Phil. 2:8), and God exalted Him to glory (Mark 16; Phil. 2:9). Both Mark and Paul stressed the need for Jesus' disciples to carry the gospel to all nations (Mark 16:15-16; Phil 2:10-11). And both of them gave assurance that God is at work in and through us (Mark 16:19-20; Phil. 2:12-13).<sup>854</sup>

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<sup>854</sup>Wiersbe, 1:168.

### End Map



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