

New Testament Studies

Gospel of Mark (*RVS Notes*)

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Son of Man: Come to Serve and to Give His Life as a Ransom for Many

In general—Mark focuses on Jesus’ activities more than on his teaching. His style is vividly forceful and descriptive, reflecting an eyewitness account (that of Peter). Mark has a strong emphasis on the miracles of Jesus, recording more miraculous events per verse than any other gospel. His account is a fast-moving narrative that quickly brings the reader to the central event of the gospel—the death and resurrection of Jesus. One of the book’s distinctive words is *euthus* (translated immediately or straightway) which appears over forty times. This word appears more times in Mark than in the rest of the New Testament combined.

Mark is candid about the obtuseness of the disciples, the faux pas of Peter, and his own desertion of the Lord in the Garden. The focus on the passion of Christ is significant. Mark devotes six of his sixteen chapters to the last eight days of Jesus’ life. The portrait of Jesus and the meaning of discipleship is at the center of his account. His purpose is essentially pastoral. The Roman Christians needed to hear the gospel again with a new emphasis on its implications for their lives amid a hostile environment. They needed a fresh glimpse of the nature of discipleship and what it meant to follow the Lord Jesus.

In some ways, Mark is an apology for the manner of the Lord’s death (crucifixion was the Roman punishment for the worst of criminals). He presents Jesus as the Son of God worthy of belief despite (indeed, because) of the cross and issues a call to faithful discipleship. Christology and servant discipleship are the twin poles of his purpose.

Author and Recipients—Mark’s gospel is anonymous. However, the testimony of the church fathers is unanimous that the gospel was written by John Mark, an associate of the apostle Peter. A quote from Papias from the second century is particularly relevant asserting that Mark recorded Peter’s recollections and was striving for an accurate portrayal of the Lord Jesus rather than strictly chronological narrative. The internal evidence of the book supports this verdict. John Mark was familiar with the geography of Palestine, knew Aramaic, understood Jewish institutions and traditions, and expressed certain events so vividly as to be derived from eyewitness accounts of the apostolic inner circle.

John Mark was the son of a well-off family in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12-14) who figured prominently in the early church. Their home was an early Christian meeting place (Acts 12:12) and may have been the location of the Last Supper (Mk. 14:16). Mark was probably the young man who fled naked from the arrest of the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:50-52). He was a cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10) and was in Antioch when the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas began. He accompanied Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:5), abandoned the team at Perga, and returned home to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). That act of desertion earned him the displeasure of Paul and led to Paul and Barnabas splitting up at the time of the second missionary journey. Barnabas took Mark with him to the island of Cyprus while Paul and Silas journeyed through Syria and Cilicia and beyond (Acts 15:37-39). Mark and later collaborated so closely with Peter that the chief of the apostles called John Mark his “son” (1 Pt. 5:13). He was with Paul during the apostle’s first Roman imprisonment (Col. 4:10; Phile. 23-24) in the early 60s. At the end of his days, Paul wrote to Timothy and requested him to come to him and bring Mark along “because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Mark writes to a Roman audience. He omits things that would not be meaningful to Gentile audiences (Christ’s genealogy, fulfilled prophecy, Mosaic law references, and various Jewish customs), he

interprets Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:34; 15:22), and uses certain “Latinisms” in place of Greek equivalents.

Form critics have denied that John Mark was the author of this gospel. The form critical theory itself cannot really allow an eyewitness and a single hand to be the source of most, if not all, of the material found in a gospel. Form critics maintain that the stories about Jesus circulated orally for an extended period before written down and were shaped by the life experience (*sitz im leben*) of the early Christian community. The gospel writers were seen as essentially scissors and paste authors and the gospels were more products of the community than of the authors themselves. The gospels recorded more the history and life experience of the church than the life experience of the Lord Jesus. With the advent of redaction criticism, focusing on the contribution of the writers/editors, a third life experience was added to that of the church community and the Lord Jesus, that of the author himself.

Date and Place of Writing—Mark was probably written before 70, but early traditions disagree whether the gospel was penned before or after Peter’s martyrdom in the mid-60s. The priority of Mark with respect to Luke pushes that date to the early 60s, since Luke-Acts seems to have been written in that timeframe. Given Mark’s association with Peter and Peter’s alleged presence in Rome long before his martyrdom there, Mark could well have been in Rome in the late 50s. Estimates place Mark’s composition sometime between the late 50s to the mid-60s.

Critical scholars insist that the reference in Mark 13:14 clearly shows that Mark was written after 70. Of course, this assumes (common among critics) that predictive prophecy cannot happen. If one accepts predictive prophecy, then there are no compelling reasons why Mark could not have been written in the early dates suggested above.

Some have suggested a Galilean origin for the gospel, but most think that Mark probably wrote from Rome. The presence of John Mark with Peter in “Babylon” (see 1 Pt 5:13, probably code for Rome), Papias’ testimony that Mark was Peter’s interpreter, and the tradition that Peter was martyred at Rome all support the traditional understanding of the gospel’s place of origin.

Mark and the Other Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke have been called the Synoptic Gospels. “Synoptic” means “seeing together” and succinctly summarizes what the reader encounters at the very beginning of the New Testament. These three accounts of Jesus’ life and teaching contain similar material and view their subject from a common perspective. Yet, they do differ in detail, arrangement of material, and in their respective emphases. The reasons for the great similarities and the significant differences have generated much discussion among New Testament scholars and Bible students through the years. This debate has focused on which gospel was written first and the sources the various writers relied on in writing. Theories have changed through the years, but the most popular current understanding is to see Mark as the first gospel written, with Matthew and Luke written at later dates, but close in time. A good deal of the material in Mark is repeated in Matthew and Luke. There is also significant overlap of material in Matthew and Luke. This has caused scholars to postulate that the latter two gospels used Mark’s account and a common collection of the sayings of Jesus that circulated at the time, a mysterious source labeled “Q.” “Q” comes from the German word meaning “source.”

Literary dependence is the only way to explain the close relationship between the Synoptic Gospels. The priority of Mark theory, while not without problems, best accounts for the similarities between the Synoptics. The differences are due to a combination of the oral and written traditions which Matthew and Luke used independently in addition to their dependence on Mark.

Place in Biblical Studies—Early Christian scholars largely overlooked Mark. It was not written by

an apostle, was deemed rough and ungrammatical, and was seen as an abridgement of Matthew. The 19th century changed all that as modern Biblical scholars concluded that Mark was the first gospel written containing uninterpreted facts about the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus that Luke and Matthew expanded and interpreted.

Guiding Concepts

Divine Sonship and power—Mark highlights Jesus’ power and authority over Satan and his brood (1:27; 3:19-20), over sin (2:1-12), over nature (4:35-41; 6:45-52), over disease (5:21-34), over death itself (5:35, 43), as Lord of the Sabbath (2:27-28; 3:1-6), over traditions (7:1-20), and over Temple observance (11:15-18). Everyone and everything recognize Jesus’ divinity—John the Baptist, the demons, natural forces, the disciples, and the Father Himself. Everyone that is, except the religious leaders. The supreme irony is that those who should have recognized Jesus right away, fail to do so at all.

Servant ministry—John Mark highlights Jesus’ servant ministry in his preaching and teaching and in his miraculous works. His life and focus were service and being a ransom for his people (Mk 10:45). This, in many ways, is the distinctive heartbeat of Mark’s gospel. Mark’s reference to Jesus as the Son of Man aligns the Lord with Old Testament servant expectations. Jesus is indeed Lord, Messiah, and God, but the power and paradigm of his mission as the ransom for sin is encapsulated in this title. The church is to follow the Lord in these steps of service and resist claims to claims for greatness so endemic to our fallen humanity.

Messianic secret—John Mark emphasizes Jesus’ commands to those witnessing his power to remain silent as to his identity. Critical scholars even suggest that Jesus never claimed to be God or Messiah and Mark writes to cover up this failure and remove the embarrassment to Christian belief by inventing the so-called messianic secret. Some explanations as to this include:

- With exorcisms, Jesus did not want testimony by demons, even when that testimony was true;
- With healings, the people healed were commanded to silence to avoid publicity and relieve the pressure of the crowds on Jesus’ ministry;
- To avoid being seen as the “miracle man;”
- To avoid many of the current false notions of Messiah;
- The disciples were commanded to remain silent because they did not fully understand Jesus’ identity and work yet. They would after his resurrection and would proclaim it to the ends of the earth.

Wilderness—The wilderness motif is diffused in Matthew and Luke but concentrated in Mark (in Mk. 1 and 6). As used in the gospel, the wilderness is seen—

- as a prelude to restoration;
- as linked to revelation;
- as a place of testing and dependence;
- as a time for repentance.

Fear—Proper and false fear is a theme in the gospel as well. Note the following texts: 4:41; 5:15, 33, 36; 6:20, 50; 9:32; 10:32; 11:18, 32; 12:12; 16:8.

The text in Mark 16 leads to an important textual issue. Was 16:9-20 (the so-called longer ending) originally included in Mark’s gospel? Most manuscripts include it but two of the earliest and best manuscripts do not. In addition, the testimony of Jerome and Eusebius, asserting that the best

manuscripts available to them did not have the longer ending, makes 16:9-20 very problematical. It may be that Mark meant to end his gospel with 16:8, leaving it with a plain statement of the Resurrection and describing the state of reverential awe that that event inspired. It may be that Mark wrote an ending to his gospel that was lost in transmission, and the early church added the longer ending to address the obvious omissions—the post-Resurrection appearances, the commissioning of the disciples, and the Lord’s Ascension.

Summary Outline

Mark’s gospel is focused on the structural divide of the events at Caesarea Philippi. Until that point, the emphasis is on Jesus’ miracles attesting to His identity. After Peter’s great confession, Mark’s focus is on Jesus’ suffering and death and the implications of this for servant discipleship.

John the Baptist	First Impact of Power	Explanation & Significance of Power	Obedient Initiated into Power	Extreme Power for Extreme Cases	Progressive Enlightenment: From Physical to Spiritual Reality	To Jerusalem: Struggle of Self-Denial	Victory Over Delusions	Betrayal and Arrest Trial	Crucifixion and Burial Resurrection Events		
1	2	3	4	6	7	8	8	11	14	15	16
Service & Power: Implications for Identity						Sacrifice & Suffering: Implications for Submission					
Galilee & Perea						Judah & Jerusalem					

Key Idea: Servant of God

Key Verse(s) Mk. 10:45

Key Chapter: Mk. 8

Detailed Outline:

I. Preparing the Way

- A. John the Baptist’s ministry
- B. Baptism and temptation of Jesus

II. Early Galilean Ministry (1:14-3:6)

- A. First disciples called (1:14-20)
- B. Jesus’ first Sabbath healings (1:21-34)
- C. Leaving Capernaum (1:35-39)
- D. Healing a leper (1:40-45)
- E. Conflict with religious leaders (2:1-3:6)
 - 1. Healing a paralytic (2:1-12)
 - 2. Calling of Levi; Eating with sinners (2:13-17)
 - 3. Questions about fasting (2:18-22)

4. Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-3:6)

III. Later Galilean Ministry (3:7-6:13)

- A. Withdrawal to Lake Gennesaret (3:7-12)
- B. Selection of the Twelve (3:13-19)
- C. Jesus and Beelzebub; Jesus and family (3:20-35)
- D. Parables of the kingdom (4:1-34)
 - 1. Sower and the soils (4:1-20)
 - 2. Lamp and the lampstand (3:21-25)
 - 3. Growing seed (4:26-29)
 - 4. Mustard seed (4:30-32)
 - 5. Summary (4:33-34)
- E. Triumph over hostile forces and diseases (4:35-5:43)
 - 1. Calming a storm at sea (4:35-41)
 - 2. Healing a demon-possessed man (5:1-20)
 - 3. Raising Jairus' daughter and healing a woman with a hemorrhage (5:21-43)
- F. Rejection at Nazareth: Prophet without honor (6:1-6a)
- G. Sending out the Twelve (6:6b-13)

IV. Withdrawal from Galilee (6:14-8:30)

- A. Death of John the Baptist (6:14-29)
- B. Feeding the five thousand (6:30-44)
- C. Walking on water; Gennesaret healings (6:45-56)
- D. True and false defilement (7:1-23)
- E. Syrophenician woman's faith (7:24-30)
- F. Healing a deaf-mute (7:31-37)
- G. Feeding the four thousand (8:1-10)
- H. Warning against the teaching of the Pharisees and the worldliness of the Herodians (8:11-21)
- I. Healing a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26)
- J. Peter's confession (8:27-30)

V. Journey to Jerusalem (8:31-10:52)

- A. First Passion prediction (8:31-33)
- B. Requirements of discipleship (8:34-9:1)
- C. Transfiguration (9:2-8)
- D. Coming of Elijah (9:9-13)
- E. Healing a demon-possessed boy (9:14-29)
- F. Second Passion prediction (9:30-32)
- G. Greatness in the kingdom (9:33-37)
- H. Driving out demons in Jesus' name (9:38-42)
- I. More requirements of discipleship (9:43-50)
- J. Teaching on divorce (10:1-12)
- K. Blessing the children (10:13-16)
- L. Riches and the kingdom of God (10:17-31)
- M. Third Passion prediction (10:32-34)
- N. James and John: Greatness in the revisited (10:35-45)
- O. Healing blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52)

VI. Jerusalem Ministry (11:1-13:37)

- A. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11)

- B. Unfruitful fig tree (11:12-14; 11:20-25)
- C. Cleansing the Temple (11:15-19)
- D. Jesus' authority challenged (11:27-30)
- E. Parable of the tenants (12:1-12)
- F. Paying taxes to Caesar (12:13-17)
- G. Marriage and the resurrection (12:18-27)
- H. Greatest commandment (12:28-34)
- I. Messiah: David's son and David's Lord (12:35-37)
- J. Warning against the teachers of the law (12:38-40)
- K. Widow's offering (12:41-44)
- L. Olivet discourse (13:1-37)
 - 1. Fate of the Temple and signs of the end (13:1-8)
 - 2. Persecution and witness of the disciples (13:9-13)
 - 3. Abomination of desolation; flight enjoined (13:14-23)
 - 4. Coming of the Son of Man (13:24-27)
 - 5. Lesson of the fig tree (13:28-31)
 - 6. Watchfulness enjoined (13:32-37)

VII. Passion and Resurrection (14:1-16:8 [or 16:20])

- A. Plot to arrest Jesus (14:1-2, 10-11)
- B. Anointing at Bethany (14:3-9)
- C. Lord's Supper (14:12-26)
- D. Peter's denials and disciples' desertion predicted (14:27-31)
- E. Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42)
- F. Betrayal and arrest (14:43-52)
- G. Jesus before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65)
- H. Peter's denials (14:66-72)
- I. Jesus before Pilate (15:1-15)
- J. Jesus mocked and scourged (15:16-20)
- K. Crucifixion and death (15:21-41)
- L. Burial (15:42-47)
- M. Resurrection (16:1-8)
- N. Longer ending: Post-Resurrection appearances, commission, and Ascension (16:9-20)

Son of Man: Come to Serve and to Give His Life as a Ransom for Many

I. Preparing the Way (1:1-13)—This section details how John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus (1:1-8) and records the baptism and temptation of the Lord Jesus (1:9-13). The Lord's identity is testified to by John Mark (1:1), by the prophets (1:2-3), by John the Baptist (1:4-8), and by the Father and the Holy Spirit (1:9-11).

A. John the Baptist's ministry (1:2-8; Mt. 3:1-12; Lk. 3:1-20; Jn. 1:19-34)—Mark does not record a nativity narrative but moves directly to the ministry of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Messiah. There is great excitement over John's ministry for he preached the coming of long-anticipated Messiah. John emphasized the superiority of the ministry of the Coming one. John was baptizing a baptism of repentance, but Messiah was coming with a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1:1—"Gospel" comes from old English "god-spel" (good news) and accurately translated the Greek *euangelion*. "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua," which means "the Lord saves." "Christ" is the Greek word for "anointed."

1:2-8—Mark cites Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 as pointing to the witness of John the Baptist, a messenger in the desert preparing the way for the Lord Jesus. John identified with Elijah; indeed, the Lord will confirm that identification (9:11-13; see Mt. 17:10-13). Luke will describe John's forerunner ministry as "in the spirit and power of Elijah" and fleshes it out in language reminiscent of Malachi 4:5-6 (Lk. 1:16-17). John ministered in the rugged territory on the western shore of the Dead Sea. He was careful to magnify the one coming after him. His message and ministry were one of preparation so that the people would be ready to receive their Messiah.

1:4—The amazing thing about John's baptism was that he, a Jew, was asking his fellow Jews to submit to a baptism of repentance, something that only a Gentile was supposed to need.

B. Baptism and temptation of Jesus (1:9-13; Mt. 3:13-17, 4:1-11; Lk. 3:21-22, 4:1-13)—The Lord probably began his public ministry in 27, preceded by two events: his baptism by John and his temptation in the wilderness. Why did he submit himself to a baptism for the forgiveness of sins? Jesus had to identify himself with sinful humanity at the very outset of his ministry. This was proper to fulfill all righteousness (see Mt. 3:14-15). The descent of the Spirit clearly indicated his anointing for ministry.

Mark's account of the Lord's temptation in the wilderness is brief, recording no specific temptations and no victory over the evil one. There are some Old Testament pictures in the background: the Lord's forty days in the wilderness reminds us of Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness; the temptation's forty-day duration recalls the wilderness experiences of Moses (Ex. 24:18) and Elijah (1 Ki. 19:8, 15). The testing of the second Adam in the desert reminds us of the testing of the first Adam in the beautiful garden of Eden. The Lord emerges victorious whereas the nation and the first Adam failed.

1:11—Note the Father's affirmation of the Son: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." This is our heritage as followers of the Lord Jesus. When the living God looks at a believing Christian, he says what he said about his Son on the day of his baptism. He sees us, not as we are in ourselves, but as we are in the Lord Jesus. What is true of the Lord Jesus, is true of every believer. A good deal of Christian faith is a matter of learning to live by this different reality.

1:12—The Spirit immediately sent him into the wilderness. The word could be translated "drove to or into." It is a strong word Mark uses eleven times, most frequently to describe the Lord driving out

demons. Jesus in the wilderness is acting out the great drama of Israel in the wilderness going into the Promised land. The road Jesus was to tread was a road that led through dry and dusty paths, through temptation and apparent failure.

1:13—Satan is a Hebrew word that means adversary but came to signify one who pleads a case against a person, an accuser. Another title for Satan is the devil, from the Greek *diabolos*, which means slanderer. The evil one is one who deliberately and maliciously slanders all humanity before God and God before all humanity.

II. Early Galilean Ministry (1:14-3:6)—This section describes the calling of the first disciples (1:14-20), Jesus' first healings on the Sabbath (1:21-34), the Lord leaving Capernaum (1:35-39), healing a leper (1:40-45), and the growing conflict with the religious leaders (2:1-3:6). This escalating conflict is recorded in five separate incidents, the healing of a paralytic (2:1-12), the Lord eating with sinners (2:13-17), questions about fasting (2:18-22), and two additional healings on the Sabbath (2:23-3:6).

A. First disciples called (1:14-20; see Mt. 4:18-22; Lk. 5:1-11)—After John's imprisonment by Herod, the Lord Jesus began his public ministry. The forerunner had completed his task, and the time had come for Messiah to begin his. The Lord began by calling Peter, Andrew, John, and James to follow him. They were called to repent and believe the good news. The kingdom of God was at hand. This repentance meant turning away from the social and political agendas that were all the buzz in contemporary Israel and turning back to true loyalty to Yahweh. The Jewish people at the time trusted all sorts of things: their ancestry, their land, their Temple, their law, and their traditions. The four men respond to the Lord's call without hesitation. John helps us here with the background that Mark omits by informing us that several months earlier Jesus had met the four men and they had come to trust him (Jn. 1:35-49).

1:17-20—To abruptly leave one's family and the family business was a great sacrifice and went against everything the culture taught. In addition, disciples usually sought out the teacher, not the other way around. Following a teacher involved laying aside one's livelihood and being apart from family, at least for a while. The decision would normally have been made only after much deliberation.

B. Jesus' first Sabbath healings (1:21-34; see Mt. 8:14-17; Lk. 4:31-41)—The Lord's first healings occurred in a synagogue in Capernaum. The synagogue originated as a Jewish institution during the period of the Babylonian exile for Jewish believers to meet for prayer and the study of Torah. The sessions were lay led, supervised by elders. Visiting rabbis were frequently asked to preach as Jesus was on this occasion. In New Testament times, synagogues were found all over the Hellenistic world and were centers for Jewish religious and social life. Capernaum was the home of Simon Peter and became for a time the base of operations for Jesus' Galilean ministry. Jesus began to teach in the synagogue and was accosted by a demoniac, whom he healed (1:23-26). The crowd is amazed by this new teaching with authority (1:27-28). Jesus proceeds to the home of Simon Peter and Andrew and heals Peter's mother-in-law and many others. The eyewitness details suggest that this incident had its origins with Simon Peter. The exorcism of 1:26 was not an isolated case (1:32, 34).

What do we make of so many cases of demon possession? Demon possession appears frequently in the gospels and is often minimized or discarded as Hellenistic superstition by modern commentators. Years ago, it was typical to think that many so-called cases of demon possession were really descriptions of those having epilepsy or mental illness. However, the New Testament gives us so many accounts of the casting out of demons that to ascribe them all as cures to epilepsy or mental illness is not credible. Messiah is on the scene; this is no humdrum time in the history of salvation. The good news preached by Jesus the Messiah signaled an attack on the forces of evil. The demons knew and reacted to this

launch of holy war if you will. That the dimensions of that warfare would become more obvious in this period should not be so amazing.

1:25—Why is the command to remain silent so frequently repeated (see 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36-37; 8:26, 30; 9:9)? Given the Jewish convictions of a political deliverer and the Roman suspicions of Jewish insurrectionists, a premature announcement of a Jewish Messiah would hardly enhance the sober assessment of his call to repent and believe.

C. Leaving Capernaum (1:35-39; see Lk. 4:42-44)—Early the next morning, Jesus sought a quiet place to pray. People went to work as soon as the sun rose, so Jesus was up well before dawn. His praying habits will be remarked upon by those who followed him. The source of his authority and power lie in his communion with the Father. What was he to do with the shallow and superficial response of people who were only interested in what he could do to heal their physical afflictions? The disciples themselves were clueless. The Lord might have feared that healings and exorcisms were hindrances to understanding who he really was. The people of Capernaum were only interested in him as a miracle-worker. It was time to move on.

D. Healing a leper (1:40-45; see Mt. 8:1-4; Lk. 5:12-16)—Leprosy was used in biblical times to designate a wide variety of skin diseases. Its reference was not limited to what we now know as Hansen's disease. He met the leper's need with compassion, touching him, which technically violated the Mosaic law. The leper was instantly healed and was told not to tell anyone but to go and show himself to the priest as required by Leviticus 14 so that he could be reintegrated into the social and religious life of society.

Note that leprosy was a physical disease that accurately pictures sin. It is deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3); it spreads (Lev. 13:5, 8); it defiles and isolates (Lev. 13:44-46); and it renders things unfit (Lev. 13:47-50).

1:41-42—Some commentators have suggested that "filled with compassion" is better translated as "being angered", a reading found in some older manuscripts. Jesus would have been angered because he recognized this foul disease was the work of the evil and the terrible results of the Fall.

Pause to ponder—What lessons can we glean from Mark's first chapter?

- Being a servant is the highest of all callings. We are never more like the Lord Jesus than when we are serving others.
- As Lord Jesus continues his ministry, he will share his authority with his servants. Only those under authority have the right to exercise it.
- Servants are to be characterized by their compassion for people.

E. Conflict with religious leaders (2:1-3:6)—Jesus comes into conflict with Jewish religious leaders in five separate incidents, the healing of a paralytic (2:1-12), the Lord eating with sinners (2:13-17), questions about fasting (2:18-22), and two perceived Sabbath violations (2:23-3:6). These incidents probe forgiveness, fulfillment, and freedom. The Lord clarifies the purpose of his ministry: he came to save sinners, not those thinking themselves as righteous, to bring fulfillment and gladness, not sadness, and to introduce a new era, not patch up the old one.

1. Healing a paralytic (2:1-12; see Mt. 9:1-8; Lk. 5:17-26)—This passage displays the close relationship between the healing of the body and the forgiveness of sins. It speaks of persistence, of friendship, of forgiveness, and of deep redemptive need. The emphasis of this incident is not on Jesus' pity for a helpless cripple, but on his power to forgive sins.

The friends of the paralytic display their ingenuity and persistence in getting the paralytic before Jesus amidst the huge crowd by lowering the man through the roof of the house. This was no small thing to

do. The typical Palestinian peasant's house was a one room structure with a flat roof, accessible by means of an outside stairway. The roof was usually made of wood beams with thatch and compacted earth to shed precipitation. In addition, tiles were laid between the beams and the thatch. The man's friends carried him up the outside stairway, dug up the thatch and earthen compact, removed the tiles and lowered the paralytic before the Lord Jesus. Jesus responds to the healing request by forgiving the man's sins, illustrating the frequent Old Testament claim that much of human suffering rests in the separation from God and that forgiveness is our deepest need. Perceiving that the people present doubted his authority to forgive sins, the Lord Jesus demonstrates that authority by healing the paralytic. The crowds are amazed, but the teachers of the law have other thoughts. Jesus had crossed the line in their minds for only God could forgive sins. Under the Jewish law, blasphemy was a capital offense punishable by stoning (Lev. 24:10-23).

2:3-4—The paralytic's friends demonstrated praiseworthy qualities:

- Compassion for their friend;
- Faith in the Lord Jesus' ability to meet their friend's need;
- Persistent perseverance that did not allow difficulties to defer their mission.

2:10—This verse is the key to this incident: "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Claiming that authority riles the religious teachers.

Pause and ponder—The Lord will later link his forgiveness of our transgressions with our forgiveness of those who transgress against us (see Mt. 6:12). In many cultures, forgiveness is a sign of weakness; revenge is a moral duty. Whole families, whole communities, whole nations are torn asunder by this human characteristic of taking your own revenge. Forgiveness changes situations and individuals. It goes down to the hidden roots of personality, gently healing old, long buried hurts.

2. Calling of Levi; Eating with sinners (2:13-17; see Mt. 9:9-13; Lk. 5:27-32)—Jesus calls a tax collector to follow him. Tax collectors were seen as traitors and cheats. They took more than the tax prescribed and lined their own pockets. The Lord Jesus did not come shouting, grumbling, or calling down curses on Levi's head. Rather, the Lord Jesus told him to "follow me." Levi (also known as Matthew, see Mt. 9:9) follows immediately and enthusiastically invites his friends (sinners in the eyes of the Jews) to a dinner with the Lord. The Pharisees and teachers of the law are outraged. Challenged by the religious leaders, the Lord uses this occasion to expound on his mission. He came to call sinners to God, not those who saw themselves as righteous. Those who thought themselves righteous were not his immediate concern because they had to first acknowledge themselves to be sinners in need of forgiveness before they could truly respond to his call.

Eating with tax gatherers and sinners was nauseous to the Pharisees. Table fellowship was to indicate intimate relations which a wise teacher would know better than to engage in. The Pharisees saw Jesus' association with them as akin to betrayal. Jesus was befriending the wrong sort, running with the wrong crowd. Many of the Pharisees were doubtless pious and sincere men. However, Jesus constantly encountered some of their unworthy members, displaying some of the worst elements of traditional religion: jealousy, hypocrisy, and moribund formalism.

Jesus' actions ring out like a great bell in today's world. It is time for the doctor to see the patients, to warn us to look at things from God's point of view and not from the jaded façade of human respectability, to encourage us to extend his healing welcome, his transforming grace wherever it is needed.

2:16—The orthodox Jews' attitude towards sinners combined and compounded contempt and fear of contagion. Note a vastly different attitude of C.T. Studd, famous 19th century British missionary:

Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell;

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

3. Questions about fasting (2:18-22; see Mt. 9:14-17; Lk. 5:33-39)—Jesus' participation in Levi's banquet leads to further questions about religious practices, particularly fasting and prayer. Fasting was seen as a sign of true piety. The Lord was criticized because his disciples were less disciplined in fasting than those of John the Baptist and the Pharisees. Thus, Jesus was asked why his disciples did not fast. Jesus answers with a parable involving guests at a wedding feast. It would be no more fitting for his disciples to fast while he was with them than it would be for the friends of the bridegroom to fast during the wedding festivities. Mournful rites were incompatible with the arrival of the new era of salvation. Jesus was bringing the time of restoration, of new life, of a fresh start for which Israel longed or should have. He was speaking of a new thing, not a renovation of the old, and fasting was not appropriate. He uses three illustrations for this concept:

- Wedding—Imagine a wedding where everyone is fasting. It is not time to fast, but to celebrate.
- Mending clothes—A new patch on an old garment can be a problem. The new material can shrink and pull away from the old.
- Wineskins—the idea is much like the patch above.

The legalism of the scribes and Pharisees had made the Jewish religious practice a burdensome thing. There would be time enough to fast after Jesus ascended to heaven. Implicit in this reply is Jesus' refusal to tie the new manifestation of the Spirit with religious legalism or ascetic self-denial.

Pause and ponder—The problem of wineskins—When wineskins are new, there is a certain elasticity. As they age they grow hard and unyielding. New wine is still fermenting and gives off gases. These gases cause pressure. If the wineskin is new it will yield to the pressure. If old, dry, and hard, it will explode. That illustration has an all too human application. There is a tendency as we age to develop a constitutional dislike of what is new. We grow unwilling to adjust in our habits and ways of life.

4. Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-3:6; see Mt. 12:1-14; Lk. 6:1-11)—This passage concludes with two incidents of perceived Sabbath violations. The first dealt with the Lord and his disciples walking through a grain field, picking heads of grain. This was allowed by the law (see Deut. 23:25). But to do this and then rob the grain in your hands was considered threshing which Jewish tradition forbade on the Sabbath. The incident highlights the minute and persnickety Jewish Sabbath regulations. They were missing the purpose of the Sabbath rest and putting people into straightjackets. The Lord points to David and his companions eating consecrated bread when they were hungry (see 1 Sam. 21:1-6). The need justified a technical violation of the law. The law was meant for good—for rest and for the opportunity for worship, not for its persnickety enforcement by self-righteous and sanctimonious regulators.

The second incident deals with the healing of a man with a shriveled hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The man may well have been a plant, for the text indicates that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. Convinced of his power to perform miracles, they presented him with a test case, wondering if he would break rabbinical tradition that only allowed healing on the Sabbath when life was at risk. The same principle is at issue—Jesus is not breaking the Sabbath by doing good to a human being in need. Jesus is angry with the hard-hearted religious leaders and their sanctimonious piety (3:5). The Pharisees are furious at the flaunting of their Sabbath imperatives and begin plotting the Lord's death with the Herodians (3:6).

2:26—The Lord identifies Abiathar as high priest in the incident with David and his men eating the consecrated bread, whereas 1 Samuel 21 references Ahimelech as priest (1 Sam. 21:1). However, when Saul hunts down the offending priest in 1 Samuel 22, it is Abiathar who flees (1 Sam. 22:20). Various explanations have been offered. One was that father and son had the same name. Another that

the Lord used “Abiathar” to refer to the Old Testament passage involving David’s men eating the consecrated bread because the passage lacked chapter and verse dividers we have today and was often referenced by the people primarily involved in the incident.

2:28—We meet the second of the “Son of Man” saying in Mark, here asserting this “Son of Man” as the Lord of the Sabbath.

Pause and ponder—The Sabbath was for people, not vice versa. It is a privilege to worship. It is a perspective builder and provides a cadence for our living. It is an occasion for experiencing the dynamic presence of God which ministers to our deepest needs. The Pharisees were guardians of a tradition, not a terrible thing to be sure. But they were missing the sense of God in their midst. The key to worship is relationships, not hind-bound rituals, or legalistic customs. It is not a transaction where we get tanks filled or our needs met (albeit that does happen). God invites us into his presence. Worship is a means of celebration of the Lord’s centrality in the lives of his people.

III. Later Galilean Ministry (3:7-6:13)—This section begins with Jesus withdrawing to Lake Gennesaret (3:7-12), continues with the selection of the Twelve disciples (3:13-19), then the Beelzebub controversy (3:20-30), and records an incident with Jesus’ family (3:31-35). Mark 4 relates a series of parables concerning the kingdom of God (4:1-34) and calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee (4:35-41). Mark 5 continues with the Lord Jesus healing a demon-possessed man (5:1-20), raising Jairus’ daughter (5:21-24, 35-43), and healing a woman with a hemorrhage (5:25-34). This portion of Mark’s narrative continues with the sad episode of the Lord’s rejection at his hometown of Nazareth (6:1-6a) and concludes with the sending out of the Twelve (6:6b-13).

A. Withdrawal to Lake Gennesaret (3:7-12; see Mt. 12:14-21)—Lake Gennesaret is another name for the Sea of Galilee. Jesus withdraws to essentially Gentile areas. Idumea was south of Galilee; Perea east of the Jordan River; Tyre and Sidon were northwest. Galilee, Idumea, and Perea were Jewish territories once dominated by Gentiles. Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities. He knows that the Jewish authorities were out to get him and the time for serious confrontation had not yet come. A large crowd followed and Jesus healed many. Once again he encounters a demoniac, heals him, and orders silence from the demons.

B. Selection of the Twelve (3:13-19; see Mt. 10:1-4; Lk. 6:12-16)—The designation of twelve suggests the foundations of a new Israel. The twelve apostles mirrored the twelve tribes of Israel. Israel had failed in her mission to the world and now something new and restorative was happening. The apostles were to be brought within close association with the Lord Jesus and learn from him and then to be sent out to preach the Good News of salvation. There are three other lists of the apostles in the New Testament (Mt. 10:2-4; Lk. 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). These lists are divided into four sections with Peter heading the first, Philip the second, James the Less the third, and Judas Iscariot listed alone in the fourth. They were all lay people. None were preachers or biblical scholars. Four were fishermen, one was a tax collector, and one a Zealot. Of the other six we know next to nothing of their backgrounds. Thaddeus in Mark’s list corresponds to Judas, son of James in Luke’s list.

The Twelve were his apostles, his ambassadors, if you will. The term apostle (*apostello*) simply means “sent one.” It came to identify the group who held leading positions in the church after the resurrection of Jesus. The number of apostles corresponds to the number of Jewish tribes thereby establishing a correspondence between the Old and the New Testament. Jesus was sending them out a mission modelled after his own ministry. They would continue his work in the power of the Spirit after his earthly ministry was over and would also be able to train others to continue with the ministry after them (2 Tim. 2:2).

C. Jesus and Beelzebub; Jesus and family (3:20-35; see Mt. 12:22-32, 46-50; Lk. 11:14-23, 27-

28)—This text combines an incident between Jesus and his family (3:20-21, 31-35) and the Lord responding to Jewish religious teachers accusing him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons (3:22-30). This text is the first example of Mark's sandwich structure (see 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-31; 11:12-26; and 14:27-52). The account of the Jesus and his family (3:20-21, 31-35) is divided by the account of the Beelzebub controversy (3:22-30).

3:20-21, 31-35—The Lord's mother and brothers travel thirty miles from Nazareth to plead with him to come home (3:20-21). Mark implies that his family thought that he had lost it. They were not believing the religious leaders' demonic accusations but were concerned about the Lord's mental balance. After dealing with the religious leaders' accusations, the Lord will turn his attention to his family's concerns. His true family were those who do the will of God. It is about spiritual, not physical descent. He was not trying to be rude to his physical family. He knew their motives were right, but their purpose was wrong. In this incident, the Lord is not suggesting that we ignore or abandon our immediate families. Not at all! However, God's purposes are above all and that is our lodestar.

Jesus redefines family in his response, identifying them as all who obey the will of God. Allowing ties to the religious community to take precedence over family ties was unheard of in Judaism. Many of Mark's readers may have had broken family relationships because of their faith and were being persecuted. This would be an encouraging word. They had an intimate relationship with the Son of God himself to be the center of their lives through tough times and amid ugly accusations.

3:22-30—The Pharisees attempt to explain away Jesus' miracles of casting out of demons by saying he was in league with the prince of demons, namely Satan. The term "Beelzebub" means "master of the house." Jesus replies by pointing that a house divided against itself cannot stand. He illustrates this inconsistency in his statement about the strong man guarding the house (3:27). If he was casting out demons by the power of Satan than the evil one was fighting against himself. The incident concludes with the Lord's warning the religious leaders against the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (3:28-29), an eternal and unforgiveable sin.

The spiritually blind are the first opponents of Jesus' ministry. This state is usually a willful one. The early church fathers considered willful ignorance the essence of sin. People watch a healing miracle and immediately attribute the healing to evil. The Bible warns repeatedly that by calling evil good and good evil, we endanger our very souls.

3:28-30—"Blaspheming the Spirit" is opposing Messiah so firmly that one resorts to demonic accusations to confuse the Spirit's signs as to the Lord's identity.

The unforgiveable sin is often debated. Look closely at the context. The religious leaders had painted themselves into a corner. Once you label what clearly is a restorative ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit as the work of the devil, there is no way back. It is like holding a conspiracy theory. All the evidence that you will allow to be evidence confirms your preconceived conclusion. You simply will not consider anything that contradicts your theory. You no longer have an objective vision. No longer have eyes to see the truth. If you convince yourself that the doctor who wants to perform a life-saving operation to heal you of a deadly disease is a sadistic murderer, you will never permit the good doctor to operate and thus suffer the deadly consequence. To identify the source of good with the embodiment of all evil reveals a moral wreck for which the Incarnation provides no remedy. If people, by repeated refusals of God's guidance, have lost the ability to recognize goodness when they see it, if they have got their moral values inverted until evil to them is good and good to them is evil, then, even when they are confronted with the Lord Jesus, they are conscious of no sin. They cannot repent and therefore they can never be forgiven. Unforgivable sin refers to people becoming so hard of heart so as never to think of repenting.

D. Parables of the kingdom (4:1-34)—This section contains four of Jesus' parables—the sower and the soils (4:1-20), the lamp on the lampstand (4:21-25), the growing seed (4:26-29), and the mustard seed (4:30-32)—before providing a concluding statement about teaching in parables (4:33-34).

1. Sower and the soils (4:1-20; see Mt. 13:1-23; Lk. 8:4-15)—Jesus relates the parable (4:1-9), describes the function of parables (4:10-12), before explaining the parable of the sower (4:13-20). The parable begins and ends with a call to careful attention. In ancient Palestine, seed was sown in broadcast fashion over a wide area. The sower is the Lord; the seed is the good news of the kingdom. The parable is a simple description of the varying fortunes of seed scattered over a field with various kinds of soil—on the wayside, on rocky soil, among thorns, and on good soil. Only the seed on good soil produced results (8:4-8). The wayside (4:4, 15) represents the hard-hearted ones cynically dismissing the Word. The rocky soil (4:5-6, 16-17) represents the impressionable ones who immediately respond but do not follow on in faith. They lack roots. The thorny soil (4:7, 18-19) represents those who allow the cares of life to choke out the concerns of God. Good soil (4:8, 20) represents those who respond and keep on responding. God's word must be accepted with faith and perseverance to produce good fruit in the hearers.

4:10-12—Why does Jesus teach in parables? He cites Isaiah 6:9-10 in reply. At face value, that text seems to say that the purpose of parabolic teaching is so unbelievers may not receive the truth and be converted. Perhaps 4:12 simply teaches that one of the reasons for parabolic instruction is to weed out persistent unbelief. The word is proclaimed to all, but only those with faith hang in there to understand the meaning. Jesus' teaching technique is challenging his followers to penetrate beneath the surface of the story to grasp its import. The Lord's teaching must be embraced with endurance and without distraction from the world to produce its intended effect.

Let us linger here a bit. Jesus' vision of how God was moving was politically incorrect in the day. People were expecting God's kingdom to explode onto the world stage and exalt the Jewish people. Jesus demurs. It is more like a farmer sowing seed, much of which goes to waste because the soil is not fit for it and cannot sustain it. The Lord uses parables because what the Lord is saying is such dynamite and so politically incorrect in the nationalistic fervor of the day, that the truth could not be heard if stated straight-forwardly. Any kingdom talk was dangerous, the politics of the era being what it was. But even more, Jesus' kingdom vision was so radically unlike what most of the people wanted and expected, that the ordinary folk would be as furious as the authorities. So, we have the Lord Jesus teaching in parables:

- They make people listen. The crowds in the open air were free to go away, unlike the common experience in the synagogue. Tell them engaging earthly stories with heavenly meaning.
- His audience was familiar with this type of approach. There are parables in the Old Testament (see Nathan's approach to David in 2 Sam. 12:1-7).
- Parables make abstract ideas concrete.
- Parables make people think for themselves to arrive at the meaning of the story.

He not only teaches in parables, but he also teaches in a new environment. Like the preachers of the Great Awakening, he takes religious preaching and teaching out of its conventional setting in the synagogue into the open air and among the crowds of ordinary men and women.

2. Lamp and the lampstand (4:21-25; see Lk. 8:16-18)—Lamps at the time were small clay pots that had to be set on a stand to shed any significant light in a room. A bushel basket placed over the lamp would extinguish it. So too the teaching and ministry of the Lord Jesus. If people did not obey what light they had received, they would not receive more. Similarly, the disciples must reveal to others the light they have received. They need to pass it along.

4:24-25—Jesus is emphasizing spiritual perception. The grasp of truth grows with attentive listening. Verse 25 speaks of a life truth in this earthly tent. Our getting will be determined by our giving. This is true of study, worship, and personal relationships. In worship, we must come to contribute, come with expectant hearts, and come prepared.

3. Growing seed (4:26-29)—The mysterious power of seed to produce a crop is compared to the hidden kingdom of God which will one day burst forth into full glory. The point is the power for growth is inherent in the gospel. We cannot make the seed grow in other human hearts. In fact, we cannot even explain how it grows.

4. Mustard seed (4:30-32; see Mt. 13:31-32; Lk. 13:18-19)—The mustard seed was tiny but grew into a sizeable tree-like shrub. While the kingdom of God may look like it has insignificant and weak beginnings, a day will come when its greatness and power will be evident. The word of encouragement here is that, from small beginnings, the kingdom will grow in size and influence.

5. Summary (4:33-34)—Mark concludes with a statement about Jesus' use of parables. The crowds were not ready for direct revelation of truth. By veiled statements of truth, he meant to stimulate their thinking and awaken their spiritual perception. With the disciples, Jesus explained things directly.

E. Triumph over hostile forces and diseases (4:35-5:43)—This section involves Jesus calming a storm at sea (4:35-41), healing a demon-possessed man (5:1-20), healing a woman with a hemorrhage (5:25-34), and healing the synagogue official's daughter (5:21-24, 35-43). Each of these incidents announce a defeat of an enemy—danger, demons, and disease.

1. Calming a storm at sea (4:35-41; see Mt. 8:23-27; Lk. 8:22-25)—The Lord Jesus is not only Lord over the church, but also over all creation. Mark's inclusion of the details of the story suggests the report of an eyewitness (e.g., Peter). The Sea of Galilee is situated in a basin surrounded by mountains with narrow ravines in between. These form channels through which the wind can rush down in sudden gusts, making the sea susceptible to sudden, violent storms. To be caught in one of these storms could be traumatic. Such was the experience of the apostolic band one time while Jesus was asleep, probably near the helmsman's seat with the seat's cushion as a pillow. The boat is nearly swamped before the disciples awaken the Lord. Jesus arose and commanded the wind and waves and calmed the sea.

The apostles' startled response is "Who is this?" The answer is that it is God who rules the wind and waves and sea, and whose power is at work in the Lord. This occasion revealed to them the majesty and power of the Lord Jesus over nature that they had not experienced before. For Mark's readers, the persecuted Roman church, this story assured them of the power of the Son of God over all opposition and trials.

4:38—Note the disciples' question to the Lord: "Don't you care if we drown"? How often when we face trials in our lives, do we ask the same question? The Lord had instructed them to go to the other side of the lake. The disciples could see that the Lord was with them and that he was perfectly at peace. Indeed, he was asleep! Of course, the Lord cared and immediately rebuked the storm and then rebuked their fear.

In our lives, wind and storms may come our way. The power of evil has been broken at the cross of Christ, but that power still has a shrill malevolence about it. Mark's Roman readers were in the thralls of that very reality. They could easily identify with the frightened men in the boat, as we can. Wake Jesus up, pray to him in your fear and anger. But don't be surprised when the storm subsides, that he asks you—When are you going to get some real faith?

2. Healing a demon-possessed man (5:1-20; see Mt. 8:28-34; Lk. 8:26-39)—On the other side

of the lake, Jesus meets a demon-possessed man (5:1-5). The demons recognize Jesus' identity and authority (5:6-10) and are allowed to enter a herd of pigs who are drowned in the lake (5:11-13). The incident occasions a fearful reaction by the local people, who are more concerned about the regularity of their lives and their economic loss than the miraculous healing and deliverance of an enslaved man (5:14-17). The former demoniac begs the Lord to be allowed to follow him. The Lord sends him home (the Decapolis) and the former demoniac testifies to all the Lord had done for him (5:18-20). This contrasts with other incidents where Jesus commands the healed person to remain silent. Since the demoniac was in Gentile territory, there was little danger that popular messianic ideas (i.e., the kingdom in power now) about him might circulate.

5:1—The locale described is uncertain. Gerasa was a city some thirty miles southeast of the lake whose territories could hardly have stretched so far. Some manuscripts give Gadara, which was six miles from the lake, or Gergesa (modern Khersa) on the lakeside, as the place.

5:3-5—The effects of demon possession are described: social isolation; retreat to the simplest kind of shelter; extraordinary strength; self-abuse. Many think that at least some of these reports of demon possession were the Lord dealing with mental illness in people, be it paranoia, manic-depressive, schizophrenia, etc. It is difficult to characterize this incident this way. This demoniac living among the tombs had completely lost his own identity and many demons were dividing him, leaving him a human wreck. He was naked, isolated, lonely, and living on society's fringe. In the presence of Jesus, this man found integration and wholeness. The miracle vividly describes Jesus' power over the forces of evil.

5:7—This is an attempt at magical self-protection against a more powerful spiritual opponent. The demons are appealing to the only one higher than Jesus to keep Jesus from driving them out of the man.

5:11-13—It is uncertain why the Lord allowed the stampede of the pigs after the demons entered them. Perhaps he wanted to give tangible evidence to the former demoniac and to the other people that the demons had left him.

5:14-17—The people of the entire region come out to see this remarkable transformation in the former demoniac. He was seated and acting responsibly. He was clothed, no longer shameless, flaunting morals and conventions. The demoniac is in his right mind. He sees the world as it really is and not through the eyes of paranoia or another unhinged state. The response of the people was to ask Jesus to leave (5:17). The healing had come at great cost to the townspeople, an entire herd of pigs. Jesus was bad for the local economy!

Pause and ponder—The Gerasenes banished the disturbing Christ. And today, there are those who seek to do the same. We do not want to be disturbed. Don't you dare disturb my comfort! Do not disturb my possessions. Do not disturb my religious status quo, my personal relationships, my set opinions, and routines. Don't you dare!

5:19-20—Jesus kept his messiahship a secret in predominately Jewish areas. However, in non-Jewish Decapolis, where people would view him as wonderworking magician, Jesus urges the healed demoniac, to go ahead and spread the word about what God had done for him. In Mark 8:1-10, Jesus feeds four thousand people who spent three days listening to his message on the back side of the Sea of Galilee in the district of Decapolis. How could a crowd of that size assemble in such an area? Did the testimony of this man to his healing by Jesus arouse that interest and help gather such a crowd?

3. Raising Jairus' daughter and healing a woman with a hemorrhage (5:21-43; see Mt. 9:18-26; Lk. 8:40-56)—Here we have yet another Marcan sandwich. The account of the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:21-24, 35-43) is divided by the healing of a long-ailing woman with a hemorrhage (5:25-34).

Jesus is met by a synagogue official seeking help for his sick daughter (5:21-24). On the journey to the official's house, Jesus is touched by a woman with a hemorrhage for twelve years and senses healing power flowing from him. He calls the woman into the open and completes the cure (5:25-34). However, with the delay, the official's daughter passes away. Jesus goes quietly to the official's house anyway and with a simple word of command raises the girl from the dead (5:35-43).

The two people coming to Jesus in great need in this story could not be more different. Jairus is a man of stature, wealth, and social and religious standing. In the synagogue, he was in charge. The woman would not even be allowed in the synagogue. Her constant issue of blood made her ceremonially unclean. They were at opposite ends of the social and religious spectrum of the day, but both met Jesus in a faith-filled ambience. The woman, forbidden by the law to have social intercourse with anyone, defies the law in reaching out to touch Jesus. In her desperation, she does not dare to touch him, just his robe. Jesus' stern insistence for the person who touched him to come forward is an act of gracious kindness. It may have taken the healed woman a long time to convince her friends and neighbors of her cure had Jesus not announced it. She is instantly healed and restored to an active place in normal society.

Jesus then proceeds to Jairus' home. The word comes that the girl had died, Jesus had not made it in time. He needed to make faster house calls. The crowd laughs at Jesus when he tells them that the girl is not dead but only sleeping. They knew better! However, the Lord has power over life and death. He goes to the girl's room with only her parents and the disciples who with him and raises Jairus' daughter from the dead. Jesus miraculously brought Jairus' daughter back to life, but her astounded and emotionally drained parents needed to be reminded to rustle up some grub for her. God is the almighty sovereign and can do anything. Yet often the things he wants done, he assigns to us and expects us to get to it.

5:21-24—What about Jairus? An established pillar in a small Jewish community would have been naturally suspicious of the young teacher, this upstart. However, his beloved daughter was dying, and he comes to the Lord Jesus in his dire need. His prejudice was sidelined. His dignity and pride were forgotten. What other people might think, just did not matter anymore.

5:37-43—Jesus selects Peter, James, and John to be with him on several special occasions (here at the raising of Jairus' daughter, at the Transfiguration (9:28), and at Garden of Gethsemane (14:33)). The secrecy invoked here and the command to silence is consistent with Jesus' frequently expressed desire to avoid publicity to prevent premature or misguided declarations of his Messiahship.

5:38-39—Because bodies decomposed so rapidly in Palestine, mourners assembled immediately upon someone's death. In this passage, they had gathered even before word reached Jairus that his daughter had died.

Pause and ponder—The touch of Jesus in a faith-filled ambience leads to restoration. What are the ingredients of a touch from Jesus in a faith-filled ambience today? Exhaustion? Desperation? You have blown it and you have no place to turn? The one constant in the equation is Jesus who is there, who loves us, who tells us, "Do not be afraid; only believe" (5:36).

F. Rejection at Nazareth: Prophet without honor (6:1-6a; see Mt. 13:53-58)—The Lord's returns to his hometown. He had been rejected by the people and evicted from the synagogue a year before (see Lk. 4:16-30). Now, he was permitted to teach, and the people were astonished at his wisdom. Then they start asking questions. They thought they knew him. He had been a neighbor for several decades, just another guy. Why does he put on such airs now? They were offended by him (literally, stumbled over him). Last time, they ran him out, this time they simply did not take him seriously. Familiarity breeds contempt, not among noble souls, but among those baser. The attitude and

conduct of the townspeople of Nazareth spoke volumes!

6:3—Jesus’ brothers and sisters mentioned here are undoubtedly children born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus’ birth. The Greek word translated “brother” (*adelphos*) and “sisters” (*adelphai*) are the typical words used for one’s physical brethren.

6:5-6—Mark specifically mentions that Jesus did not do many miracles at Nazareth. There is an emphasis in Mark between an atmosphere of faith and belief, and the occurrence of miraculous powers exercised by the Lord. To heal without morally directed faith would be to act like the pagan magicians of antiquity.

G. Sending out the Twelve (6:6a-13; Mt. 10:5-15; Lk. 9:1-6)—The Lord sent out the disciples, two by two, to preach the gospel and heal people. Their mission was clearly patterned on the Lord’s mission which they had been observing. Inherent in this commission was absolute trust in God to supply their physical needs (6:8-11). The first place to offer hospitality to them was to be their abode until they moved on, even if more comfortable lodgings were offered later. They were to operate differently than the wandering teachers of the day.

The differences in the gospel accounts on instructions to the disciples may be that Jesus gave similar instructions for bearing witness on various occasions. The common theme is that the servants of Christ should go forth, not seeking support from unbelievers but trusting God completely to supply their needs through his people.

The word “send” is *apostello* in the original language. They are sent with a special mission to represent the Lord Jesus and to assist in his work. It is remarkable that a band of ordinary men would be commissioned by Almighty God in this manner. Reports of Christ’s ministry, augmented by that of the apostles reached Herod Antipas. This leads to Mark recounting the death of John the Baptist and the vile role of Herod in that murder.

IV. Withdrawal from Galilee (6:14-8:30)—Jesus withdraws from Galilee for the purpose of further instructing his disciples. While there is an incident of public teaching in Mark 7, the focus of his instruction is now on the Twelve. Mark reports the sad story of the execution of John the Baptist (6:14-29), the feeding of the five thousand (6:30-44), the Lord walking on water and his healing ministry summarized (6:45-56). He continues by reporting the Lord’s teaching on true and false defilement (7:1-23). He then records three of the Lord’s miracles performed in the region of Tyre and Sidon, the only occasion in Mark where the Lord is outside of Palestine. First, he heals the demon-possessed daughter of a very persistent Syrophenician woman (7:24-30). Then he heals a deaf-mute (7:31-37). Next, he feeds four thousand (8:1-10) in Decapolis before warning his disciples of false teaching and the worldliness of the opponents (the Pharisees and the Herodians (8:11-21). This section continues with Mark’s report of a healing of a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26), before concluding with Peter’s confession of the Lord Jesus as Messiah (8:27-30).

A. Death of John the Baptist (6:14-29; see Mt. 14:1-12; Lk. 3:19-20, 9:7-9)—Mark devotes much more space to the death of John the Baptist than to his ministry. He records Herod’s perplexity as to Jesus’ identity (6:14-16), believing him to be John the Baptist raised from the dead. Mark then recounts the sad episode of John the Baptist’s execution (6:17-29). Herod Antipas had John arrested after he married Herodias, wife of his half-brother Herod Philip. John fearlessly denounced the king for violating the law (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). Herodias hated John and waited for her opportunity to have him eliminated. She received it on an evening of revelry for the king’s birthday when Salome, her daughter, pleased the lascivious king with her lewd dancing. Herod promised her a gift up to half his kingdom. Prompted by her mother, the girl made a most macabre request—the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Because of his oath made before a host of guests, Herod complied. Now, he feared that Jesus

was John resurrected.

Royalty, sex, and religion form an explosive mixture, and we should not be surprised at the checkered history of court intrigue, scandal, and disaster that has dogged the steps of the church ever since royalty became interested in Christianity in the fourth century.

6:14-16—The popular opinions of Jesus’ identity were John the Baptist raised from the dead, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Herod himself believed the first of these. Herod’s perplexity concerning Jesus’ identity helps Mark focus on that vital question. Herod’s motives are not from redemptive yearning, but from a guilty conscience for murdering John. However, his perplexity raises the serious question for the ages.

Pause and ponder—Strange that we humans can be haunted by both sin and goodness. Robert Louis Stevenson spoke of people “clutching the remnants of virtue in the brothel or on the scaffold.” A noted jurist of yesteryear described some of the criminals he had encountered in the following way: “They may seek to escape but they cannot; they are condemned to some nobility, all their lives long. The desire for good is at their heels, the implacable hunter.” Herod Antipas was such a man.

6:22-24—Note the moral decrepitude of Herod Antipas. After hitting up on the wife of his stepbrother Herod Philip (he seduced Herodias while she was married to Herod Philip), he now lusts after Herodias’ daughter Salome (probably a young girl in her teens). Herodias’ hatred of John is such that she will subject her teenage daughter to the whims of this leech of a king. The promise of the king “up to half my kingdom” was a proverbial reference to generosity, not to be taken literally. Herodias and Salome show their colors with the gruesome request for John’s head on a platter. That the king granted such a vile request speaks to the man’s poverty of soul, as well as that of his wife and her daughter.

Pause and ponder—Let us flesh this out a bit to elaborate how much this scene stinks! Following the Herods makes for a very sordid read. Herod the so-called Great (ruling in Palestine from 37-4 B.C.) married many times with five wives bearing on the biblical situation—Cleopatra of Jerusalem, Doris, Mariamne the Hasmonean, Mariamne the Boethusian, and Malthake. By Cleopatra, he sired Philip the Tetrarch who later married Salome. By Doris, he sired Antipater, whom he murdered. By Mariamne the Hasmonean, he sired Alexander and Aristobulus, both of whom he murdered. Aristobulus married Herodias before his death. By Mariamne the Boethusian, he sired Herod Philip, who also married Herodias after Aristobulus’ murder, and from which union came Salome. By Malthake, he sired Herod Antipas and Archelaus. Herod Antipas, the Herod described in Mark 6, seduced Herodias, the wife of his stepbrother Herod Philip, which led to their divorce. Herod Antipas then married Herodias and was entertained by the lascivious dance of Herodias’ daughter by Herod Philip in the scene described in Mark 6. Herod Antipas’ marriage to Herodias was the union that John the Baptist denounced. Archelaus inherited part of Herod the Great’s domain and was such an evil and inept ruler that the Emperor Augustus deposed him upon the vigorous appeals by his subjects. Nice guys, these Herods. Their lives are a study in the descent into moral decrepitude while following the path of money, sex, and power.

B. Feeding the five thousand (6:30-44; see Mt. 14:13-21; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-14)—Jesus intended to take the Twelve away by themselves for some rest after their preaching tour. Another factor was the growing opposition of both the political and religious leaders (6:30-32). However, the crowds prevented this. Jesus took advantage of this teaching opportunity (6:33-34). At the end of the day, the disciples urge him to send the crowds away to get something to eat. However, Jesus used what was available to feed the multitudes. The people are like the new people of God and Jesus is like a second Moses, feeding and transforming them with ample supply left over. This miracle appears in all four gospels, attesting to its importance. The crowd was much greater than five thousand since there were that many men alone. When we do what God asks, we can trust him to provide for us. God is urging us to launch out and do what he has called us to do, and he will take care of us.

Mark concludes his account of this miracle by noting how plentiful the provision was even though there were only five loaves and two fish to begin with. However, in John's account this miracle occasioned the crowd raising the question of Jesus' identity (see Jn. 6:14-15). John uses this miracle as the starting point of the Lord's bread of life discourse (Jn. 6:22-71).

6:37—A typical daily wage was a denarius. Eight months wages would be around two hundred denarii.

C. Walking on water; Gennesaret healings (6:45-56; see Mt. 14:22-36; Jn. 6:15-21)— After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus directed his disciples to go to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowd and then went to a mountainside to pray (6:45-46). The crowd had just witnessed a great miracle. Was a popular uprising at hand as John suggests (see Jn. 6:14-15)? The hurried departure of the disciples to Bethsaida suggests that there may have been danger of a messianic uprising with Jesus staying behind to dismiss the crowd and defuse the situation. He sought time alone to pray. On each of the occasions in Mark when the Lord does this, there is a crisis at hand (see 1:35; 6:46; 14:32-36).

He comes to the disciples walking on the water during the fourth watch (between 3 am and 6 am) while they were straining at the oars facing a headwind. He calms the wind while climbing into the boat (6:47-52). Mark underlines the point that the disciples still lacked faith by noting their amazement. Had they understood the significance of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on water would not have surprised them so. Mark concludes his account by noting the tremendous response people were giving to the Lord Jesus because of the miracles and healing he was performing (6:53-56). For similar summaries, see 1:32-34 and 3:7-12.

These last two miracles (the feeding of the five thousand and the Lord walking on water and calming the sea) highlights that Jesus brings provision and protection to his own.

D. True and false defilement (7:1-23; see Mt. 15:1-20)—Jesus encounters yet another delegation from Jerusalem with questions about ceremonial purity and defilement. The ritual washing of hands before eating food and of cooking vessels was a key part of a complex system of purity regulations. At this time, they were known in a form of oral tradition. It would be another two hundred years before they were codified and written down in the Mishnah.

This encounter immediately precedes Jesus' ministry to the Gentiles in 7:24-8:10. The Pharisees confront the Lord with queries about the disciples eating with unclean hands, not following rabbinical traditions (7:1-5). Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 and then contrasts the commands of God with the traditions of people. A sizeable body of Jewish tradition had failed to get to the heart of God's commands (7:6-9). These practices were certainly not wrong in themselves, but they did demonstrate wrong attitudes. First, those who practiced such outward measures were seen as superior to those who did not. They were "clean" as against those who were "unclean." Tut! Tut! Second, these practices conveyed the wrong idea of sin and personal holiness. The Pharisees thought they were clean because they obeyed the law in an external way and avoided external defilement. People obeying the law externally can violate it internally in their hearts and souls. In addition, external defilement had little to do with the internal spiritual disposition of a person.

The Lord then cites an outstanding example of human tradition negating God's commands, that of corban (7:10-13). The Lord then moves on and describes true defilement as coming from the heart of people, not because they did not obey finicky external laws (7:14-23). Once again the crowd gets the summary (7:14-16), while the disciples receive the longer explanation (7:17-23).

The passage breaks down as follows:

- Accusation—The Pharisees accuse the disciples of failing to practice the proper ceremonial washing (7:1-5);

- **Condemnation (7:6-13)**—Then the Lord Jesus vigorously defends his disciples. He quotes Isaiah 29:13 and then the Mosaic law (Ex. 20:12; 21:17; Deut. 5:16) to condemn their bogus spirituality. First, they were honoring their traditions above Torah. Second, they were setting aside prescriptions of the law by using their traditions. Here, the Lord takes to task the Jewish practice of corban, where a person would dedicate his wealth to God and thus weasel out of his responsibilities to his parents or other family obligations.
- **Declaration (7:14-16)**—The Lord will identify the source of holy living as being within. It is what is in the heart that causes a person to be clean or unclean.
- **Explanation (7:17-23)**—Jesus explains what he means more plainly to the disciples. Jesus is replacing traditional Jewish understandings of defilement from the exterior to the interior. Defilement comes from an impure heart, not from the violation of external and often persnickety rules.

7:10-13—The Lord cites the tradition described as corban. First he quotes Exodus 20:12 and 21:16, underlining the serious obligations of children to their parents. Then he describes the tradition allowing children to easily circumvent their responsibilities to their parents by declaring what they intended to give to their parents' support as "corban," a gift to God instead. This declaration did not necessarily mean an immediate gift to the Temple or even prevent the child's use for himself in some devotional manner. All it really did is legally exclude one's parents from benefitting from what was declared "corban."

7:14-15—The Lord makes clear to the Pharisees and the crowd that real defilement is not about external matters. True defilement comes from within, the heart and mind of a person.

7:17-23—The Lord elaborates on the lesson for the disciples. The heart is the center of the human personality and determines action and inaction (see Prov. 4:23; Isa. 29:13). The source of defilement is the heart for it is there that the true issues of life lie (see Jer. 17:9). The poisoned well of false human motivation is what the purity laws were pointing to. Furthermore, the purity regulations in society reflected the concerns of Jewish society for marking boundaries. The purity codes were a powerful cultural symbol—the Jews were different. They did not live like everybody else. In moving past the dietary restrictions, Jesus was eliminating a cultural boundary that had divided Jew and Gentile.

Let us take a closer look at the things Mark records Jesus listing as coming from the heart and making people unclean (7:20-23):

- Evil thoughts and designs (*dialogismoi*)—Vile inner musings that precede outer acts.
- Fornications (*porneia*)—Encompasses every kind of traffic in sexual vice.
- Theft (*klopai*)—Acts of a deceitful and dishonest pilferer.
- Murder (*phonoi*)—Taking life in an utterly unlawful manner.
- Adultery (*moicheiai*)—Taking sexual pleasure in an utterly unlawful manner.
- Greed or covetous deeds (*pleonexai*)—The spirit that snatches what it has no right to take. The baneful appetite for that which belongs to another.
- Malice (*poneros*)—Wickedness, baseness. The desire to harm. An aptness to shrewd designs. A delight to do ill to others.
- Deceit or guile (*dolos*)—A word that comes from a word which means "bait." It is crafty, cunning, clever treachery.
- Lewdness or wanton wickedness (*aselgeia*)—A disposition that resents all discipline and acknowledges no restraints. Sensuous debauchery.
- Envy (*ophthalmos poneros*)—The evil eye. The green monster.
- Slander (*blasphemia*)—Insulting other people or God.
- Arrogance or pride (*huperephania*)—Acting or showing yourself above others. It was described

as the peak of all the vices.

- Folly (*aphrosune*)—Mindless fools, practitioners of moral folly.

Wow! Unclean indeed!

Pause and ponder—Who speaks for God? Scripture authentically interpreted or our own comfortable (or not so comfortable) traditions?

E. Syrophenician woman's faith (7:24-30; Mt. 15:21-28)—The Jews normally had no relationship with Gentiles because such associations made them ritually unclean. After the previous sections' clarification of what constitutes defilement, Jesus continues to show Jewish tradition as invalid as he deliberately associates himself with a Gentile woman. The Lord's hope of a quiet time of retirement is again thwarted by genuine human need (7:24). The Gentile woman's daughter was cruelly demon possessed, and she comes pleading for Jesus to heal her (7:25-26). Jesus puts her off with what seems an insensitive reply (7:27-28), but her persistence and faith are rewarded (7:29-30).

7:27-28—Samuel Rutherford once remarked "It is faith's work to claim ... God's loving-kindnesses out of the roughest strokes of God." He was speaking of those times when God seems distant, and we are in deep need. This incident seems like such a situation. The Lord is exhausted and just wants to be left alone. When the woman first asks Jesus for help, the Lord does not even answer (see Mt. 15:23). When he does answer, he defers (see Mt. 15:24). His disciples want him to send her away. She was being a serious bother. She continues, now on her knees. His reply seems unduly harsh. "It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs?" (7:27). Jesus' reply compares the children of the household (the privileged position of Israel) with little dogs that were kept as household pets (less privileged Gentiles). She was the wrong nationality, she was a woman, and the Lord needed down time. She may not have a special place in the nation of Israel, but could she have some crumbs from the table? Her faith triumphed and was commended (see Mt. 15:28). Note the contrast of the Gentile woman's realization of her need and Jesus' ability to meet that need with the Jewish leaders' blindness to their own need for repentance.

F. Healing a deaf-mute (7:31-37)—This healing occurs in the Decapolis, largely a Gentile area, and provides another account of the Lord healing in Gentile territory. The unusual manner the Lord employed in this healing may have been done to help the deaf mute to exercise faith. The Lord put his fingers in the man's ears and his saliva on the man's tongue, indicating that these organs were going to be restored to normal use. Jesus pronounces a single Aramaic word "Ephphatha" (be opened), which Mark translates as he typically does, and the man's tongue was loosed and his ears opened.

Pause and ponder—Let us pause here and note the structural arrangement of this part of Mark's gospel. There are parallels between Mark 6:31-7:37 and 8:1-30:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|
| • Feeding of a multitude | 6:31-44 | 8:1-9 |
| • Crossing water and landing | 6:45-56 | 8:10 |
| • Conflict with the Pharisees | 7:1-23 | 8:11-13 |
| • Conversation about bread | 7:24-30 | 8:13-21 |
| • Miracles of healing | 7:31-36 | 8:22-26 |
| • Confession of faith | 7:37 | 8:27-30 |

The theme behind this arrangement is spiritual perception, or the lack of it. Jesus sounds a call to spiritual understanding in 7:14-18, but the disciples fail the call after each feeding (6:52; 8:14-21). The miracles of healing (7:31-36; 8:22-26) seem symbolic of preparing the way for spiritual enlightenment of the disciples.

7:31—The Lord Jesus and his disciples went north from Tyre to Sidon (approximately twenty-five miles) and then southeast through the territory of Herod Philip to the east side of the Sea of Galilee where the region of Decapolis is located. The Lord may have taken this circuitous route to avoid going into Galilee again (Galilee was in the realm of Herod Antipas).

G. Feeding the four thousand (8:1-10; see Mt. 15:32-39)— Jesus lingered in the Decapolis after the healing of the deaf mute. He taught another large crowd for an extended period. They had not eaten in three days, and Jesus' compassion is stirred (8:1-3). Some have attempted to identify this miracle with the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. While there are similarities, note the clear differences:

<i>Feeding of the 4,000</i>	<i>Feeding of the 5,000</i>
• Near Decapolis, involving Gentiles	• In Galilee, involving Jews
• Seven loaves and a few fish	• Five loaves and two fish
• Had been with him three days	• Had been with him one day
• Twelve baskets (<i>kophinos</i> =small wicker lunch baskets) left over	• Seven larger baskets (<i>spuris</i> =hamper-type baskets) left over

The disciples' reaction to Jesus' intention to feed the crowd with only seven loaves and a few fish is the strongest argument for seeing the two feedings as one. Could they really have forgotten such a tremendous miracle as the feeding of the five thousand? However, the details are significantly different (locale, loaves, fish, baskets leftovers). The decisive factor seeing these as separate feedings is Jesus' comment to them after warning them of the yeast of the Pharisees (see 8:18-21).

Pause and ponder—Is there a connection between the size of this crowd and its interest and the healing of the demoniac in Mark 5? Jesus had urged the healed demoniac, to go to his home in Decapolis and spread the word about what God had done for him. In Mark 8:1-10, Jesus feeds four thousand people who spent three days listening to his message on the back side of the Sea of Galilee in the district of Decapolis. How could a crowd of that size assemble in such an area? Did the testimony of a deaf-mute to his healing by Jesus arouse that interest and help gather such a crowd?

H. Warning against the teaching of the Pharisees and the worldliness of the Herodians (8:11-21; Mt. 16:1-12)—This segment begins with a request for a sign from the Pharisees. This was not a sincere request but a weaselly, unbelieving one. They had deliberately looked past every miracle and now were requiring an indisputable sign of what they refused to believe. Ancient literature sometimes used the denseness of an opponent to underline the virtue of a protagonist as Mark does here. Jesus leaves them to their doubts, boards a boat, and crosses to the other side of the lake (8:11-13).

Back in the boat and crossing to the other side of the lake, the disciples realized they had forgotten to bring food. They had only one loaf. Jesus used the occasion to warn them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians. In Scripture, leaven is often used metaphorically for false teaching (Gal. 5:1-9), unconfessed and unjudged sin in the church (1 Cor. 5), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1), and evil more generally. Jesus was warning the disciples about the false teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the worldliness of the Herodians. The disciples completely missed the point, still preoccupied with their lack of food. The Lord rebuked them for their spiritual dullness. They were worried about food after he had fed more than ten thousand people on two occasions with meager resources (see 6:30-44; 8:1-9). Did they still not understand (Mk. 8:21)? Their lack of spiritual perception was the issue, not their lack of chow.

I. Healing a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26)—This miracle is recorded only in Mark. It is one of three miracles when Jesus withdraws to heal (Jairus' daughter (5:35-43), and the deaf-mute (7:31-37) are the other two). This is a miracle that occurs gradually. First he spits on the man's eyes and puts his hands on the man. Then Jesus puts his hands on him again. Why do double action and heal gradually? Perhaps to show that Jesus could heal in many ways and was at full liberty to do so.

Or this is an acted-out parable. Prior to the healing, the apostolic band had taken a long walk from the area of Caesarea Philippi to Bethsaida. That is a trip by car on modern roads of an hour or two. A lot of time to chat. Mark does not elaborate on any conversations that were had. What he does is place the healing of a blind man receiving his physical sight (8:22-26) and the spiritually dull disciples receiving spiritual insight (8:27-30) side by side. Both stories have a two-stage process of illumination. The importance of the healing and its placement in Mark's gospel is that it anticipates the opening of the spiritual eyes of the disciples to the reality who was with them.

J. Peter's confession (8:27-30; Mt. 16:13-20; Lk. 9:18-21)—Jesus queries the disciples as to his identity. First he asks who the people say he is. The familiar answer is provided John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets. Now the matter at issue—who did the disciples say he was? Peter answers by identifying the Lord Jesus as the Messiah (8:27-30).

Note the close connection between 8:27-30 and 8:22-26:

• Circumstances described	8:22	8:27
• Partial sight/understanding	8:23-24	8:28
• Fuller sight/understanding	8:25	8:29
• Silence commanded	8:26	8:30

The two part, gradual healing of the blind man reflects the slow progress of the disciples' spiritual understanding. Peter's confession is something of a linchpin in Mark's presentation. It concludes the first part and begins the second part where Jesus' mission comes more to the fore.

8:29—The Greek word *christos* translates the Hebrew *mashaich*, meaning anointed one of God. The term was used in the Old Testament of anyone anointed with holy oil, the priests, and kings of Israel. The term carries the idea of being chosen by God, consecrated to his service, endued with power to accomplish a task assigned. All the current Jewish view of Messiah revolved around an earthly deliverance and an earthly kingdom. What Peter meant by Messiah at this stage is very different than what the Lord Jesus meant. The term was political and national in nature, which is why Jesus shied away from using the term. Of the seven occurrences of the term in Mark, only three appear in the sayings of Jesus (9:41; 12:35; and 13:21). However, Jesus did indeed see himself as Messiah, the fulfillment of all those prophets, priests, and kings anointed in the Old Testament. He was bringing into existence a new Israel, comprised of people who are new creatures in Christ.

8:30—Jesus commands the disciples' silence on the matter of his identity because the Jewish people, chafing under Rome's rule, were all too ready to join a messianic revolutionary. That was not the Lord's agenda.

Pause and ponder—Key to understanding the so-called messianic secret in Mark is to understand how the Jews misunderstood the coming of Messiah. Contemporary Jewish ideas of Messiah included:

- Before Messiah came, there would be a time of terrible tribulation. The Mishnah would later enumerate many of the signs that Messiah was near at hand.
- Into chaos Elijah would come as the forerunner and herald of Messiah.
- Then came Messiah, the Anointed One.
- The nations would then ally themselves and gather against the champion of God.

- The result of this struggle would be the destruction of hostile powers.
- Then there would be the renovation of Jerusalem.
- Then the Jews dispersed over the world would be gathered into the new Jerusalem.
- Palestine would be the center of the world, and the rest of the world would be subject to the Jews. All nations would be subdued.
- Then the new age of peace and goodness would last forever.

These were the popular messianic ideas of the Jewish people. They were violent, nationalistic, destructive, and vengeful. True, they ended in the perfect reign of God, but a reign that came in violently and without any apparent appreciation of the Jewish redemptive mission to the world (see Gen. 12:3).

V. Journey to Jerusalem (8:31-10:52)—The structure of this portion of the text centers around three Passion predictions by the Lord Jesus (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). The Lord was to go to Jerusalem, suffer and die, and be raised on the third day. Throughout this portion of the text, the Lord speaks of true discipleship, with a stress on suffering. This emphasis on the suffering of Messiah and of those who follow him must have had a special meaning for Mark's audience, persecuted believers in Rome. Mark is reminding them that following the Lord may mean following a path of suffering and even death.

The text moves from the Lord's first Passion prediction (8:31-33), to a discussion of the requirements of discipleship (8:34-9:1), to the story of the Transfiguration (9:2-8), to the coming of Elijah to prepare for Messiah (9:9-13), to healing a boy with an evil spirit (9:14-29), to a second Passion prediction (9:30-32), to the first query about greatness in the kingdom (9:33-37), to another exorcism by the Lord (9:38-42), to another elaboration on the requirements of discipleship (9:43-50).

Chapter 10 opens with an extended discussion in response to a question by the Pharisees (10:1-12), moves to a story of Jesus blessing the children (10:13-16), to teaching on wealth and the kingdom of God (10:17-31), to the third Passion prediction (10:32-34), to a request for prominent places in the by John and James which incurred the anger of the other ten disciples (10:35-45), to a concluding miracle of healing blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52).

A. First Passion prediction (8:31-33; see Mt. 16:21-23; Lk. 9:22)—The Lord's designation for himself as the "Son of Man" has Daniel 7:13-14 in the background, depicting the "Son of Man" as a heavenly figure who at the end of time brings the kingdom to the oppressed on the earth. The designation combines the theme of eschatological glory with the suffering and death which characterizes the idea of the Son of Man in Mark and the other synoptic gospels. The term "Son of Man" occurs approximately eighty times in the gospels, almost exclusively used by the Lord Jesus of himself. The Son of Man must suffer and die, rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law egging the Jewish nation on in the failure to recognize their Messiah.

Jesus stuns the disciples with this Passion prediction (8:31). Steeped in Jewish traditional interpretation, they were unable to understand how Messiah could suffer and die. But there was also a terrifying practical problem as well. The Lord Jesus had called them to follow him, and they knew that whatever happened to the Lord could happen to them. If there was a cross in his future, would there be one in theirs?

True to character, Peter blurts out the concern the disciples shared. He rebuked the Lord. One minute he is confessing the Lord Jesus as Messiah and the next minute he is rebuking God incarnate. His heart is in the right place, but his head is all mixed up. His protest was born of a love of the Lord and a deep ignorance of the divine will. That the cross precedes the crown, that suffering leads to glory was not on

his radar screen. In his rebuke of the Lord, he moves from being the rock confessing Christ, to the mouthpiece of the evil one and a stumbling block. Jesus recognizes in Peter's rebuke the same temptation that he encountered from Satan in Luke 4:1-10.

8:31—This is the only place in Mark where the so-called “messianic secret” is explained. The Lord Jesus did not want his messiahship to be disclosed because it involved suffering, rejection, and death contrary to popular expectations. Premature announcement might hinder the accomplishment of his messianic mission.

B. Requirements of discipleship (8:34-9:1; see Mt. 16:24-28; Lk. 9:23-27)—The Lord now delivers a stern talk about the requirements of discipleship to both the disciples and the crowd that had gathered. There was a cost to pay to be a true disciple. The disciples must surrender themselves completely to the Lord, identify with him in his suffering and death, and follow him wherever he leads (8:34). The Lord certainly does not sweet-talk his followers. Jesus' words to the disciples warn them that all that is the Lord's journey is in theirs as well. Suffering and glory, the cross and the crown, humiliation and exaltation. The coming of the kingdom of God was going to mean more than a few adjustments in their ordinary lives and those adjustments were not going to be all glorious.

The remainder of chapter 8 highlights the cost of not following the Lord Jesus. One might gain the entire world, but at the cost of one's own soul. And what can person give in exchange for his soul (8:35-37)? Those who are ashamed of the Lord Jesus in this present age, the Lord will be ashamed of in the future age (8:38).

8:34-37—The denial of self that Jesus requires is not the same thing as self-denial. Denying self is not focused on foregoing things or activities so much as it is in renouncing self, ceasing to make self-fulfillment your life's goal and the center of your life's activity. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up allowable things or activities. We deny self when we surrender our hearts, our wills, and our lives to Christ and determine to follow him obediently. From an eternal perspective, this question is one of whether we will invest our lives or spend them. Losing one's soul is missing the opportunities God gives you to make your life count.

9:1—The time interval between the Lord's first Passion prediction and the Transfiguration recorded here (six days) differs from the one recorded in Luke 9:28 (eight days). Luke's number is inclusive of the day of the Passion prediction and the day of the Transfiguration.

Pause and ponder—What application from this passage on the costly consequence of discipleship? One author distinguishes between thorns (unchosen suffering) and crosses (difficult things that we chose because we are his people and think that he wants us involved). Unchosen suffering is not itself a noble thing. It is part of life. Enduring these gracefully can be a great testimony to God's sufficient grace. We can and ought to be burden bearers with each other in this kind of suffering. However, crosses are different. We choose a hard place, remain in a difficult relationship, or do a thankless job because we believe that is what the Lord wants from us. We do things we do not have to do because we are convinced that it is God's agenda for us.

C. Transfiguration (9:2-8; see Mt. 17:1-9; Lk. 9:28-36)—Mark places the Transfiguration here as a confirmation of the difficult teaching of the immediately preceding passage (8:31-38). The revelation is given to Peter, James, and John, most likely on Mount Hermon, located near Caesarea Philippi. The term “transfigured” describes Jesus changing into another form. The word is later used to denote the believer's progressive change into the moral likeness of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

The disciples are dazzled to see the Lord Jesus in the company of Old Testament superstars, Moses, and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets. The voice of the Father himself echoes from a cloud

underlining his identity. The glorious transfiguration of the Lord is the most significant event between his birth and his passion. This event contains several motifs of significance: the mountain, Moses and Elijah, Jesus' impending departure, and the cloud. Two realities frame this event: the exodus from Egypt with the events at Mt. Sinai and the Second Coming of Christ. In this scene of supernatural glory, Moses is a typological figure who reminds us of the past (Exodus). He had a mountaintop experience at Sinai, his face shone (Ex. 34:30; 2 Cor. 3:7), and he was both lawgiver and prophet—indeed, the prototype of the Lord Jesus (Deut. 18:18). Elijah is an eschatological figure who points us to the future as a precursor of Messiah. He was not only a prophet but was also the one who would one day turn people's hearts back to the covenant (Mal. 4:5-6).

In summary, Moses and Elijah on the Mount draws attention to (1) the place of Jesus in continuing the redemptive work of God from the Exodus to the future eschatological consummation; (2) the appropriateness of Jesus' association with heavenly figures; and (3) the superiority of Jesus over even these great and divinely favored heroes of Israel's past as revealed by the voice from the cloud informing the disciples that Jesus "is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him".

9:2—Jesus waits six days to ascend the mountain, paralleling the six days that the Lord God's glory covered the mountain in the Exodus account (see Ex. 24:16).

9:5-6—Peter's suggests building temporary shelters, such as used at the Feast of Tabernacles. His suggestion of three shelters implied a leveling perspective, putting Jesus on a par with Moses and Elijah. Peter once again blurts out something before thinking through things. It reflects an immediate human impression rather than divine wisdom.

9:7-9—The cloud symbolizes the glorious presence of God (see Ex. 19:16). It could also symbolize the cloud in the desert (Ex. 13:21-22; 16:10; 24:16; 40:34-38), the coming of the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13; Mk. 14:62), and the two prophets in Revelation 11:12. The voice is the awesome voice of God the Father expressly declaring Jesus to be the unique Son of God. The supreme person and glory of Jesus is focal throughout the Transfiguration.

D. Coming of Elijah (9:9-13; see Mt. 17:10-13)—Jesus invokes silence from the disciples of what they just witnessed (9:9-10). Proclaiming the Lord's full glory before the cross would have been too much in keeping with the popular ideas of messiahship. He then continues and answers the disciples' query about Elijah (9:11-13). The disciples knew the prophecies in Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 concerning the messenger which Jewish tradition identified as Elijah coming before Messiah. They ask the Lord for clarification. The Lord tells them that Elijah had come, indicating that prophecy was fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist (see Mt. 17:13). He then reiterates that the Passion preceded the exaltation, the cross before the crown. The disciples still did not have a handle on the idea of a suffering Messiah.

E. Healing of a demon-possessed boy (9:14-29; see Mt. 17:14-21; Lk. 9:37-43)—The boy's physical situation is described to the Lord as well as the disciples' inability to heal him (9:14-18). Mark 9:19 is directed at the disciples and expressing Jesus' disappointment for their lack of faith. They believed that the power to heal was inherent in themselves and they did not prayerfully depend on the God (9:27-28). The conflict between the Lord Jesus and the demonic powers is intense (9:20, 26-27) but victorious.

9:23-24—The confession of imperfect faith by the boy's father is so very real and representative of us all.

Pause and ponder—How wonderful it is to stay on the mountaintop and bask in glory! However, the disciples did not stay on the mountaintop, but descended into the valley where life was real, life was earnest. We are not made to stay on the mountaintop but to live in the valley below, for taking up our

crosses, and following him and serving in the nitty gritty stuff of life.

F. Second Passion prediction (9:30-32; see Mt. 17:22-23; Lk. 9:44-45)—The disciples had not understood the Lord’s first Passion prediction. So, the Lord serves up another one. The disciples miss it again and Mark bluntly records their fear in raising their questions.

9:32—“Betrayed” seems to imply Judas as the subject of the action. However, the verb means “to be delivered up” or “to be handed over.” As early as Origen (185-254) the church interpreted this to mean “delivered up by God”.

G. Greatness in the kingdom (9:33-37; see Mt. 18:1-5; Lk. 9:46-48)—The disciples are arguing about who is the greatest among them right after the Lord’s second Passion prediction. Talk about not getting it! Jesus reveals to them his destiny of suffering and death and they occupy themselves with self-centered arguments about greatness. The disciples were thinking of Messiah as a triumphant ruler and wanted their privileged positions assured. Jesus clarifies that greatness is tied to service, turning the world’s values upside down (9:35). He illustrates this with a little child perhaps from the family in whose house he was teaching (9:36-37). True greatness is about caring for and serving other people.

Pause and ponder—When Jesus spoke of the supreme greatness and value of the one whose ambition was to be a servant, he laid down one of the greatest practical truths in the world. Many economic, political, and social problems would be solved if people lived for what they could do for others and not for what they could get for themselves.

H. Driving out demons in Jesus’ name (9:38-42; see Lk. 9:49-50)—John objects to an unknown exorcist casting out demons in Jesus’ name. Jesus takes a contrary attitude to John’s parochial spirit. Whoever was not against them should be seen as a potential friend. The disciples were to be bridge-builders, not turf defenders. A tribal spirit that shuts down genuine ministry because it is not “one of us” can be a very real stumbling block that hurts the church of Jesus Christ. Casting out demons was done by God’s power and that power was not limited to the band of disciples.

9:40—Sectarian attitudes were as common in Judaism then as they are in Christianity now. “Whoever is not against us is for us” seems at odds with Matthew 12:30 “he who is not with me is against me.” What the two statements together indicate is that it is impossible to be neutral about the Lord Jesus. The healer in Mark may not be one of the disciples, but he was acting with the power of God. The situation in Matthew is vastly different. There, the Pharisees were identifying the Lord’s powerful healing miracles as being the power of Satan.

I. More requirements of discipleship (9:43-50; see Mt. 18:7-9)—The main point of this portion of the text is that it is so important to receive the gift of eternal life that radical means must be taken to remove the sin that prevents it. The Lord elaborates on the importance of not being stumbling blocks to others or of stumbling yourself by tolerating sin in your life. These commands are not to be taken literally. They refer to parts of our personality which may cause us or others to stumble in our spiritual living. The disciples were to beware. Discipleship is difficult, demanding commitment and sacrifice. We may well be asked to give up things that are not wrong in themselves but are not profitable for spiritual living.

9:47—“Hell” is *gehenna*, a Greek form of the Hebrew *ge himmon*. This was the valley along the south side of the city of Jerusalem, used in Old Testament times for human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech. This valley came to be used as a place where human excrement and rubbish were disposed of and burned.

9:50—Salt played a key role in the ancient world. It was necessary for life and was used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. Jesus is warning his disciples not to lose their spirit of

devotion and self-sacrifice to the Lord and the gospel.

J. Teaching on divorce (10:1-12; see Mt. 19:1-12; Lk. 16:18)—The Pharisees come with a question meant to trap Jesus in saying something that would get him into trouble (10:2). The reason the Pharisees asked this question at this point in Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem was because he was in the territory of Herod Antipas, the ruler who put John the Baptist to death because he had denounced Herod's marriage with Herodias, the former wife of Herod's brother, Herod Philip. Would the Lord repeat what the Pharisees saw as John's outspoken mistake and suffer the same cruel fate as John?

On the question of divorce itself, the Jews were not in agreement. The Mosaic law allowed divorce for something deemed indecent (Deut. 24:1). The stricter school of Shammai understood this to mean something morally indecent, namely adultery. The more lenient school of Hillel interpreted this very loosely. Anything about a wife that a husband found not to his liking were suitable grounds for divorce.

Jesus first appeals to the law, not to question it but to put it in perspective. Moses allowed for divorce as an accommodation to human weakness. But that is not what God intended in marriage. In the Lord's good intention, marriage was to be a lifelong union, not a temporary arrangement terminated at the will of the husband.

10:6-9—Jewish scribes appealed to the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2 to argue against polygamy. Jesus uses this text to argue against divorce.

10:10-12—Jesus elaborates on his teaching for the disciples. This is a stern word from the Lord on the indissolubility of marriage. Divorce and remarriage by husband or wife is adultery. The interesting aspect of this is that the Lord broadens adultery's offense. In rabbinical Judaism, a woman by her infidelity could commit adultery against her husband. However, a man's infidelity with another person's wife was understood as adultery against that other man. Jesus sees this as an offense against his wife. By putting the husband under the same moral obligations as his wife, the Lord raised the status and dignity of women.

This stern word is not the only word in the New Testament on divorce and remarriage. Like many wisdom sayings of ancient Jewish teachers, this saying is a general rule. The word is hyperbolic; it is exaggerated to give it "bite." In Matthew's account of this incident, the Lord allows divorce (and remarriage) for adultery (see Mt. 19:9-10). Paul allows it from the abandonment of the marriage by an unbelieving partner (see 1 Cor. 7:12-16). The church has also allowed divorce for abusive situations.

K. Blessing the children (10:13-16; see Mt. 19:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17)—This story lacks detail regarding time and place. Mark does not identify who brought the little children—the mysterious "they" did the task. The Lord is indignant that his disciples hindered the access of the children, implying that they were unimportant and bothersome. The Lord uses the occasion to reiterate that the kingdom of God must be received as a child. To picture receiving the kingdom like a child would arrest attention. The Jewish people, unlike the Greeks, respected humility but could not imagine such a powerless entry into the kingdom. It is not age that is in view, but childlike qualities of trust, openness, and guilelessness. We enter God's kingdom by childlike faith: helpless, unable to save ourselves, and dependent on the grace and mercy of God. Being childlike can be a great protection in life. It means we can receive God's unconditional love and just say thank you. We are not suspicious, doubtful, calculating, and conniving. We can live without a hidden agenda.

L. Riches and the kingdom of God (10:17-31; see Mt. 19:16-30; Lk. 18:18-30)—This story proceeds in three parts: Jesus' encounter with a rich young man (10:17-22), a comment on the difficulty of wealthy people entering the kingdom of God (10:23-27), followed by Peter's statement about leaving all to follow the Lord and the Lord Jesus' reply to it (10:28-31). This teaching underlines the impossibility of wealth, status, and human effort as a means of gaining the kingdom. The rich young

man wanted to do something to merit eternal life whereas Jesus taught that eternal life is a gift to be received.

10:17-22—An earnest young man asks a very direct question: What must I do to inherit eternal life (10:17)? Jesus answers in the traditional Jewish way, speaking of keeping the commandments, especially those of the second part of the Decalogue that could be evaluated (more or less) by a person's outward behavior (10:18-19). When the young man claims to have done that, Jesus gets to the pith of the matter. The young man was wealthy and his personal well-being and his wealth, not God, were at the center of his affections. Jesus commands a radical cure (sell all he owns and follow the Lord Jesus) that drives the young ruler sadly away (10:20-22).

10:21—Our Lord's directions to the rich young man are not to be applied to everyone who desires to be a disciple. This requirement is addressed to the specific needs of this wealthy and self-satisfied young man. He did not have an idea of his own sinfulness nor of how he had made an idol of his wealth.

10:23-27—The Lord's interaction with the wealthy young man amazed the disciples, reflecting their Jewish background. That background placed great emphasis on the privileged position of the rich. Their wealth was a sign of having pleased God. Jesus was undermining the Jewish attitude about the significance of wealth. Indeed, it turned the attitude on its head. Salvation was totally the work of God. Dependence on wealth can get in the way of human receptivity born of a sense of deep spiritual need.

Pause and ponder—The peril of riches—

- Material possessions tend to fix our hearts and minds on this world.
- If material possessions are our main interest, it makes us think of everything in terms of price.
- The possession of material goods is not sin, but an acid test of character and responsibility.

10:28-31—Peter reminds the Lord that the disciples had left everything to follow him. Jesus does not rebuke Peter's inherent desire for reward. Those forsaking things for the Lord Jesus will—

- Have a hundredfold return on their "investment." This must be understood in terms of the riches of relationships in the new community into which believers enter.
- Suffer persecution. The Lord never soft-shoed this. The cross comes before the crown for the Master and for the servant.
- Have eternal life.

M. Third Passion prediction (10:32-34; see Mt. 20:17-19; Lk. 18:31-34)—The Lord's Passion prediction is repeated for the third time. Each prediction increased the disciples' perplexity and doubtless, their anxiety. In the first two predictions (8:31; 9:31), Jesus told them what would occur. Now, he goes into much more detail than the other two. The Lord was to be betrayed, sentenced to death, handed over to the Gentiles, mocked, spit on, flogged, executed, and raised from the dead. This was not what the disciples expected for Messiah.

Critics assert that this passage was a post-Resurrection church tradition put into the mouth of the Lord Jesus. They deny that Jesus, the unique Son of God, could predict his Passion in detail before the fact.

N. James and John: Greatness in the kingdom revisited (10:35-45; see Mt. 20:20-28)—This passage parallels 9:30-37. Both contain discussions of true greatness, both follow a passion prediction, and both reveal how spiritually dense the apostles were at times. James and John are anticipating that Jesus would reveal his messianic glory at Jerusalem, and they wanted prominent places in the soon-to-be-realized kingdom. James and John are ridiculously over-confident that they would be able to manage such pre-eminence. All the disciples are clueless at this point. James and John overtly asked for what all of them wanted. The other ten disciples show their colors by their indignation at the request (10:41; see Mt. 20:24). Jesus once again must explain that the way to privileged position in the

kingdom is not by grabbing power but by relinquishing it through service, suffering, and even death.

The disciples are missing the meaning of the cross for both the Lord Jesus and themselves. After the first Passion prediction, Peter rebukes the Messiah right after he acknowledged Messiah (8:27-33). The reader's immediate action is—how clueless! After the second Passion prediction, disciples have a full-on argument about who will be greatest in the kingdom (9:30-34). Did they even hear what the Lord had predicted? Now this, the third time around. The disciples were making the mistake of following the wrong leadership model. They were admiring the glory and authority of worldly models, be they Roman or Jewish, people who loved position and power. The Lord redefines greatness in terms of service (10:43-44). God's pattern is that his followers must be servants to be rulers. People who exercise authority must know what it means to be under authority.

O. Healing blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52; see Mt. 20:29-34; Lk. 18:35-43)—The last healing miracle in Mark occurs near Jericho. It is possible that the miracle was done somewhere between the old Israelite city and the new city because Luke records this miracle as Jesus went into the city and Mark as he was leaving it. Bartimaeus, when he hears of Jesus coming into the town, starts shouting “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Jesus stops, calls for him, asks what he wants, and heals him with a word. Matthew records that there were two blind beggars by the road (Mt. 20:30). Both Mark and Luke focus on one blind man who Mark identifies as Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus' insistent calling highlights his faith and his receptiveness to receiving God's grace. He recognized a moment of opportunity and seized it. He broke the rules of polite society and created a scene. Matthew specifically points to Jesus' deep compassion as he heals these beggars.

10:50—Note that Bartimaeus threw his cloak aside when Jesus called him. The cloak was an outer garment used as a coat in chilly weather and as bedding at night. He spread the cloak before him when begging during the day. Was the act of casting it aside a narrative device to signify Bartimaeus' forsaking dependence on anything else and trusting only in Jesus? Does Bartimaeus show us the pathway of discipleship—beginning with a need, continuing in gratitude, and finishing with loyalty?

Pause and ponder—Mark 10 gives us a series of statements about the kingdom that seem to contradict themselves but express valid truths.

- Two shall be one (10:1-12);
- Adult believers must be childlike (10:13-16);
- The first shall be last (10:17-31);
- Servants shall be rulers (10:32-42);
- The poor will be rich (10:46-52).

VI. Jerusalem Ministry (11:1-13:37)—Believers have historically described the period beginning with the Lord Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and ending with his crucifixion and resurrection a week later as the Passion week. This section of Mark's gospel leading up to the Lord's Passion is made up of three parts:

- The initial entry into the city and the cleansing of the Temple (11:1-19);
- Instructions to his disciples (11:20-25; 12:35-44; 13:1-37);
- Conflict with the religious leaders (11:27-12:34).

A. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11; see Mt. 21:1-11; Lk. 19:28-44; Jn. 12:12-19)—The Lord approached Jerusalem from the east, on the side with the Mount of Olives. On that road a traveler would first arrive at Bethany and then come to Bethphage, about two miles from Jerusalem. The elevation at that point is about 2,600 feet, providing the visitor with a breathtaking view of the city. He sends two of the disciples to a nearby village (probably Bethphage) with instructions to find and bring a donkey colt to him. This seemed to be prearranged by the Lord for the owners did not object

(11:1-6).

The Lord entered the city mounted on a colt of a donkey, a symbol of peace, not a warhorse used by conquering generals (fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9). In fulfilling this prophecy, Jesus was declaring himself to be king and Messiah and was deliberately challenging the Jewish religious leaders. The crowd spontaneously responds to the Lord, growing boisterous, praising God and hailing Jesus as the coming king with the words of Psalm 118:25-26. Jesus had planned his own parade. He was implicitly declaring himself to be Messiah, albeit the master of a spiritual kingdom at present and not a political one (11:7-10). Jesus goes into the Temple to take in the scene in preparation for his cleansing of the Temple the following day (11:11).

11:7-10—Because of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, the donkey was considered the beast of the Messiah. The response of the people underlines that they understood the Lord's implicit statement of being Messiah. They shout "Hosanna," meaning "save now" and quote Psalm 118:26 (11:9), a customary religious blessing pronounced on pilgrims entering Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Mark sees it a fulfillment of the passage in Jesus' entry into the city as he continues in 11:10: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David."

11:8—The crowd spread their clothes on the road, typically done for significant leaders entering a city (see 2 Ki 9:13). It was a chance for the crowd to recognize their king.

11:11—Jesus examines the Temple and its operation to see whether it was fulfilling its divinely appointed mission. His conclusion on this matter is clearly seen the following day with his cleansing of the Temple.

B. Unfruitful fig tree (11:12-14; 20-25; see Mt. 21:18-22)—Mark employs a sandwich structure in this text as he often does in this gospel (see 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-31; 14:27-52). The account of Jesus' judgement on the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-25) is divided by the account of his cleansing the Temple 11:15-19). Both episodes signify God's impending judgment on Israel for religious hypocrisy.

This is a rare destructive miracle that wraps the cleansing of the Temple, both events having to do with judgment. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem from Bethany. Hungry he approaches a fig tree. It was in full leaf but without any figs. He pronounces a curse on the tree—no one would ever eat fruit from it again (11:12-14). When they return the next morning, Peter notes that the tree had withered from its roots (11:20-21). Jesus used the tree as a teaching device in what amounts to an acted-out parable. The tree was Israel, fully leafed out in a state one would normally expect to find fruit. But its fruitlessness symbolized the hypocrisy and knavery of the nation and its leadership.

11:13—This verse is problematical. The tree was leafed out but did not show fruit because it was not yet the season for figs. Fig trees around Jerusalem usually leaf out in March and April, but do not produce figs until June. Why then is the Lord declaring a curse on the tree for not producing fruit prior to the season for fruit? It is best to understand this text as Mark's explanation to people not familiar with the characteristics of fig tree production. The fig tree represents a nation long fruitless in the eyes of the Lord.

11:22-25—These sayings are found elsewhere in the Synoptic gospels in various contexts (Mt. 6:13-14; 7:7; 17:20; 18:19; Lk. 11:9; 17:6). Jesus uses the incident of the fig tree to teach lessons on faith and prayer. He is bringing home the point that believing prayer taps God's power to accomplish the humanly impossible. This promise is based on the premise that the petitions must be in harmony with God's will (see 14:36; Mt. 6:9-10; Jn. 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23-24; 1 Jn. 5:14-15). The Lord also underlines that a forgiving attitude towards others as well as faith in God are essential to effective prayer.

As for the reference to mountain and sea, Jesus was standing on the Mount of Olives, from which the Dead Sea is visible on a clear day. He is using hyperbole to say that the greatest possible difficulties can be removed when a person has faith. The image of God's Spirit bringing down a mountain before a faithful servant also appears in the famous text of Zechariah 4:6-7: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit".

C. Cleansing the Temple (11:15-19; see Mt. 21:12-17; Lk. 19:45-46)—All three Synoptics place this incident at the end of Jesus' ministry. John recorded an earlier incident at the beginning of the Lord's public ministry (see Jn. 2:13-22). The judgment symbolized by the cursing of the fig tree is initiated by the cleansing of the Temple, and the cleansing of the Temple is prophetic of the judgment and destruction of Jerusalem.

Jesus' action in 11:15-17 must have created quite a scene! He quotes Isaiah 56:7, a text predicting that non-Jews would be allowed to worship in the Temple, and Jeremiah 7:11, emphasizing the Temple as a place of prayer. Instead, the Jewish practice had turned it into a place of heartless merchandising full of noise of bargaining and the stench of animals being sold. Initially, these practices were instituted for the convenience of pilgrims. The dealers in livestock and the moneychangers set up shop in the Court of the Gentiles, selling animals for sacrifice and changing the pilgrim's money into the currency required to pay the Temple tax and its ritual practices. Exorbitant prices were charged for sacrificial animals and for changing money into the proper currency. This was done under priestly authorization and lined the pious pockets of Jewish religious leaders. Jesus is directly and forcefully challenging priestly authority.

The Lord was angry—

- At the exploitation of devout pilgrims;
- At the desecration of God's holy place;
- At the exclusiveness of Jewish worship. He wished to remind them that God loved the Jews and the world and wished to use them to reach the world.

There is something of a chronological puzzle with respect to the cleansing of the Temple. The Synoptics record this event as occurring during Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem just before his death (see Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-46). John records it early in Jesus' ministry. Explanations vary around two general approaches: (1) John transplants the account for topical or theological reasons (John's writing is theologically, not chronologically, driven); or (2) there were two such occasions, one of which was recorded by John and the other by the Synoptics. Mark and the other Synoptics only record one visit by the Lord to Jerusalem. So naturally they recorded the cleansing of the Temple upon that visit.

11:18-19—The chief priests and teachers of the law come to the same conclusion that the Pharisees and Herodians had come to during the Lord's Galilean ministry (see 3:6). Jesus needed to be killed in their estimation, but they waited for an opportune time.

11:27-12:44—Mark arranges five episodes in 11:27-12:37 around the theme of conflict between the Lord Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. The Jewish religious leaders question Jesus' authority to function as he had in cleansing the Temple and the Lord places them in an embarrassing position in his counter-question regarding John the Baptist (11:27-33). The Lord then gives his parable of the vineyard clearly addressing the parable against the religious leadership of the day (12:1-12). This is followed by the Jews attempt to entrap the Lord with their question concerning paying the Roman poll tax (12:13-17), the Sadducees' question regarding the resurrection (12:18-27), and a seeming sincere query about the greatest commandment (22:34-40). Jesus then stumps them with his question concerning Messiah's sonship (12:35-37) before condemning the leadership's pride, greed, and hypocrisy (12:38-40) and commending true, if very modest, devotion (12:41-44).

D. Jesus' authority challenged (11:27-33; see Mt. 21:23-27; Lk. 20:1-8)—The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders of the nation, the groups making up the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews, challenge Jesus' authority to cleanse the Temple and teach as he did. Jesus met their question with a question of his own. Was John the Baptist's ministry from heaven or from men? John had clearly testified to the divine source of Jesus' ministry. If they acknowledged divine authority in John's ministry, they would logically need to recognize the same for that of the Lord Jesus. They certainly did not want to do that, but they did not want to antagonize the Jewish people who saw John as a prophet from God. They weasel out of the question and plead ignorance. Their pitiful reply effectively discredited their challenge to Jesus' authority.

E. Parable of the tenants (12:1-12; see Mt. 21:33-46; Lk. 20:9-19)—This parable draws its imagery from the song of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7). It tends toward allegory more than most parables do. The vineyard was a familiar symbol for the nation of Israel. The owner of the vineyard is God; the son is Jesus; the tenants are the religious leaders of Israel charged with cultivating the religious life of the people; and the servants are the prophets. When the vineyard was prepared the owner rented it to tenants and went on a journey. This reflected the situation in Galilee at the time. Much of the land was in the hands of absentee landlords. Wealthy foreign landlords owned large estates which they leased to tenant farmers to cultivate as vineyards. Contracts typically designed a portion of the crop to be paid as rent. At harvest time, the owners would send their agents to collect the rent.

In the Lord's parable, the owner sent his agents to collect what was due and they were denied, mistreated, and even killed (12:2-5). The allusion to the Israel's prophets was clear to the audience. Finally, the owner sent his son and heir, thinking that surely they would respect the son (12:6). However, the lawless tenants thought very differently. In Palestine at that time, a piece of land could be possessed lawfully by whoever claimed it first if it were "ownerless property." Kill the son and take the land was the tenants' agenda (12:7-8). The Lord knew the leaders were plotting against him and he quotes Psalm 118:22, warning them of the severe consequences that attended such a vile plan (12:9-11). The rulers immediately recognized that Jesus had spoken the parable against them. They continue their plotting, seeking an opportune moment to rid themselves of one who they regard as an insolent upstart.

Pause and ponder—Jesus is speaking to a basic problem in the church. To whom does the vineyard belong? The church belongs to the Lord, but we tend to forget that. We function as if it belongs to us or to our faction. Deep-seated vested rights lurk just below the surface in many communities of faith.

F. Paying taxes to Caesar (12:13-17; see Mt. 22:15-22; Lk. 20:20-26)—The Pharisees and the Herodians, unlikely allies, thought they had the ultimate entrapment question for the Lord Jesus. Introducing their query with sycophant flattery, they ask about paying the tax imposed on the Jews by the Romans. An annual poll tax (head tax) had been required by the emperor since 6 A.D. The Roman taxes were burdensome and were bitterly resented by the Jewish people. Either way Jesus answered, they figured they had him. Speak about a duty to pay taxes and you lose the people. Speak otherwise and they would report the Lord to the Roman authorities. The leaders were sure that Jesus' answer would alienate either the Roman authorities or the pious people and zealots who opposed foreign domination.

Jesus called out their hypocrisy. He asked them to bring him a denarius; a common coin used for payment of the tax. A denarius bore the image of Caesar on one side and on the other the goddess of peace and an inscription of the reigning emperor. The coin had Caesar's image upon it and therefore belonged to Caesar. Human beings have God's image upon them and therefore belong to God. If the priests and the people used Caesar's coinage, they were under obligation to pay back what was owing to him. But they were not to forget that they were made in the image of God and must live under God's

authority as well. Once again, Mark has his Roman audience in mind in relating this incident. Christianity did not foster disloyalty to the State, nor did it countenance overreaching demands by the State.

Jesus does not define the respective spheres of God and Caesar, church, and state here. His point is simply that people who benefit from Caesar must pay him for it. To give what the government legitimately requires is part of one's religious duty. Today, we may not agree with the way all our tax dollars are used and should express our views by voice and vote. However, God has established human government for our good (see Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 1 Pt. 2:13-17) and we must respectfully render our duties to it.

G. Marriage and the resurrection (12:18-27; see Mt. 22:23-33; Lk. 20:27-40)—The Sadducees were the urban, wealthy, sophisticated class in Judaism, centered in Jerusalem. The name “Sadducee” is usually traced back to Zadok, high priest during the time of David. The Sadducees were a small group numerically but exerted major influence politically and religiously. They accepted only the material world and denied the resurrection, angels, and spirits (see Acts 23:8).

They present the Lord with a hypothetical based on the custom of levirate marriage (see Deut. 25:5-10). When a man died childless, his brother was to marry the deceased's widow, and the first son of that union was to be given the name of the deceased brother and be considered his son. This was meant to prevent the extinction of a family line and thereby keep a family inheritance intact. The Sadducees offer a hypothetical involving seven brothers marrying the same woman and all dying childless. At the resurrection, whose wife would the widow be?

Jesus replies in a twofold manner. First, conditions in the resurrection are not like those on earth. Since there is no death and hence no need to replenish the race, there is no need for procreation. This may mean that earthly relationships like marriage will end or that all human relationships will be lifted to such an elevated level in heaven that the exclusiveness of marriage will not be the kind of factor in heaven as it is on earth. Second, Jesus gave an argument for the resurrection based on the law of Moses. In Exodus 3:6, God describes himself in the present tense as the God of Abraham centuries after the patriarch died. The implication is that Abraham was still alive and able to worship God. God was Abraham's God during his lifetime and would not let death interrupt that relationship but would resurrect the patriarch. Believing in the resurrection does not just offer the best hope for our ultimate future, it gives to the present created order its full value. What God made, he will remake. His response silences the Sadducees and puts an end to entrapment type questions.

H. Greatest commandment (12:28-34; see Mt. 22:34-40)—This is a refreshing difference in the nature of the questioning by the religious authorities. A teacher of the law was impressed with Jesus' answers and ventures a question of his own. Rabbinical tradition counted 613 legal precepts, 365 negative precepts and 248 positive precepts. Can you imagine the burden of taking this type of hair-splitting legalism seriously? One of the favorite exercises of the religious teachers was to discuss which one was the greatest commandment, to differentiate between “great” and “little” commandments and to formulate principles central to the whole of the law. The teacher asks the Lord Jesus which was the most important commandment.

The Lord replies by quoting two passages from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. The first is the Shema, a confession of faith recited by pious Jews every morning and evening, affirming the unity of God and the covenant relationship of God with the Jewish people. The second speaks of loving your neighbor, which is the natural and logical outgrowth of love for God. Neighbor to a Jew meant their fellow Jews and proselytes. Jesus broadens the meaning to include anyone we deal with.

This raises the practical application question. When crisis looms, what remains solid in your life and the life of your community? Whole-hearted love of God and neighbor? Or the mad scramble of everyone trying to save their own skin?

12:32-34—The teacher responds affirmatively to the Lord’s instruction. He got it and the Lord remarks that he had replied wisely and was near to the kingdom of God. There still was sincerity among the Jewish teachers.

I. Messiah: David’s son and David’s Lord (12:35-40; see Mt. 22:41-46; Lk. 20:41-44)—Jesus has deftly managed the insincere and entrapping questions of the religious leaders. Now he takes the initiative and poses his own question. The Jews awaited the coming of an earthly deliverer who would be a king descended from David. The Davidic sonship of Messiah was a firm Jewish belief based on numerous Old Testament texts (see 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Ps. 89:3-4; Isa. 9:2-7; 11:1-9; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:15-17, 22; Ezek. 34:23-24; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11). Jesus noted that it was equally true that Messiah was David’s Lord, quoting Psalm 110:1. How can Messiah be both David’s Lord and his son. The Jewish notion of a father’s superiority to his son is inherent in this argument. The implication is that Messiah is more than an earthly descendant of David. Paul will flesh this out in Romans 1:3-4 where he declares that Jesus was a descendant of David as to his human nature but the Son of God by his resurrection.

This interaction delighted the crowd and must have been an unforgiveable affront to the power mongers. Not only did their shrewd questions fail to trap him, but his questions embarrassingly stumped them before the very audience before whom they typically strutted their superior religious acumen.

12:35-37—Messiah was the son of David, a God-sent deliverer who would be from the line of David (see Isa. 9:2-7, 11:1-9; Jer. 23:5ff, 33:14-18; Ezek. 34:23ff, 37:24; Ps. 89:20ff). The trouble with the title the Son of David is that it was inextricably entangled with the idea of a conquering Messiah.

J. Warning against teachers of the law (12:38-40; Mt. 23:1-29; Lk. 20:45-47)—After exposing inadequate ideas of Messiah, Jesus turns his scrutiny on the failings of the teachers of the Jewish religion. They were proud of their status and loved the respect it gave them. They loved their distinctive dress, their honored greetings, and their preferential places in synagogue and banquets. Some of them took advantage of their status in abusing the hospitality of pious Jews and exploiting the generosity of people of modest means. Not all of them were frauds. However, some were hypocrites who cheated the poor and made an empty show of ritualistic religion.

K. Widow’s offering (12:41-44; see Lk. 21:1-4)—This story contrasts the greed of the teachers the law with the liberality of the indigent widow. The setting is the court of women where the Treasury was located. Jesus was watching people bring their offerings and place in the trumpet-shaped containers used to collect the gifts. It was not the rich with their showy offerings that caught the eye of the Lord, but the mite of a poor woman. The widow’s offering was more than all the others in proportion to what she had and in the spirit in which she gave. The poor widow set an example of sacrificial giving.

L. Olivet discourse (13:1-37; see Mt. 24:1-25:46; Lk. 21:5-36)—Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple (13:1-2) which engenders the disciples’ questions of when and how they might know that will happen (13:3-4). They were not to be deceived by the claims of false Messiahs (13:5-6) or by wars and natural disasters (13:7-8). Persecution, betrayal, and hatred may be their lot, but God would be with them enabling their testimony. There is the call to stand firm (13:9-13). The Lord examines the dire conditions of the last days, the abomination that causes desolation (13:14-20), and the disciples are advised to remain vigilant for false Christs will appear (13:21-23). Jesus then describes his coming

(13:24-27), advising them to learn the lesson of fig tree (13:28-31). Since no one knows the day or time of his appearing except the Father, the disciples are exhorted to be alert and be watchful (13:32-37).

The Lord's teaching in this discourse provides a realistic warning about future events with a strong encouragement to persevere and to be watchful. While there is disagreement on this point, the prophetic perspective Jesus portrays involves two perspectives: a near event, the destruction of the Temple in 70, and a far event the return of the Son of Man at the end of the age. The former local event is the prelude to the latter universal event. The text is full of imperatives, warning and exhorting the disciples. They are exhorted to be on their guard (*blepete*) at four significant junctures of this discourse. Note the practical exhortations:

- Do not follow false leaders (13:5-6, 21-22);
- Do not be awed by events associated with the end (13:7-8);
- Expect opposition and persecution and do not worry about your legal defense when charged (13:9-13);
- Persevere when all turn against you (as they will) (13:12-13);
- Take heart when end time events come upon you, for the return of the Son of Man is at hand (13:24-27);
- Be on your guard, be watchful (13:9, 23, 33-35, 37).

1. Fate of the Temple and signs of the end (13:1-8; see Mt. 24:1-8; Lk. 21:5-11)—Jesus discusses the fate of the Temple and the signs of the end. The disciples are awed by the beauty and massiveness of the Temple. Herod the Great had rebuilt it and vastly enlarged the Temple building and precinct. It covered approximately one-sixth of the city of Jerusalem, dominating the ancient city. It was an architectural wonder of the day. However, Jesus did not share the enthusiasm of the disciples for the magnificence of Herod's Temple. Instead, he prophesies its complete destruction (13:1-2). Their follow-on question shows that they thought that the destruction of the Temple would be one of the events associated with the end of the age and the disciples wanted to know the time and the details (13:3-4). The Lord tells the disciples that the precise timing of the end days cannot be forecasted. False messianic claims that imitate the teaching of Jesus should not mislead them (13:5-6). In addition, end-time events from a near or far perspective should not terrorize them. Wars, revolutions, and natural calamities must happen and do not signal an immediate end of history (13:7-8).

13:5-8—The disciples are warned against deception. "Watch out," "be on your guard," "take heed" (*bleped*) is a call to vigilance repeated throughout this discourse (13:9, 23, and 33), and 35 (while using another Greek term). Jesus warns them against misinterpreting contemporary events such as wars and natural disasters as indications of the end. Each generation will have its share of these. These are the beginning of birth pains of the end, which suggest that an extended period will precede the end.

2. Persecution and witness of the disciples (13:9-13; see Mt. 24:9-14; Lk. 21:12-19)—Next, Jesus predicts the persecution of the disciples. He does not provide a chronology for the traumatic events he prophesies but does tell the disciples that these events will provide them with an opportunity for witness. In the hour of crisis, the Spirit would reveal to them what they were to say (13:9-11). The breach of ties of natural affection will also be their lot (13:12). However, the disciples will be under the hand of God and those who endure faithfully to the end will be saved (13:13).

3. Abomination of desolation; flight enjoined (Mk. 13:14-23; see Mt. 24:15-28; Lk. 21:20-24)—The key phrase in this passage is the abomination of desolation, an expression derived from Daniel (see Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). It is something repugnant to God that desecrates the Temple akin to the desecration that occurred in the time of the Maccabees by representatives of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 B.C. Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled in the time of the Maccabees, but the fact that the Lord used the same expression suggests that its fulfillment was not restricted to the time of the

Maccabees. This matter has been debated extensively. Some see it as a reference to the fall of Jerusalem when the Roman military standards were brought into the Temple precinct (Lk. 21:20). Others see it as referring to the end times by the Antichrist. It is best to understand this reference as having a multiple fulfillment in Maccabean times, at the fall of Jerusalem in 70, and in the end times. The expression “the abomination that causes desolation” (see Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) links the historical (near) and eschatological (far) perspectives.

13:14-18—These warnings and woes seem appropriate to what occurred at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The admonition stressed the urgency of the situation as the Romans approached the city. The Christians in the city fled to the mountains, to Pella, a site hewn in the foothills of Perea.

13:19-20—These verses have End Times in view.

4. Coming of the Son of Man (13:24-27; see Mt. 24:29-31; Lk. 21:25-28)—The Lord’s coming will be associated with celestial phenomena. The imagery and language are derived from Old Testament descriptions of the Day of the Lord (see Isa. 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Amos 8:9). The emphasis is upon the Lord’s disclosure and triumph. The Lord was veiled in his first coming, he will be fully revealed in his second. The people of the earth will see who he really is. His focus will be on gathering his own people.

5. Lesson of the fig tree (13:28-31; see Mt. 24:32-35; Lk. 21:29-33)—The fig tree is the first to show its leaves in the spring and indicates that summer is coming. So, the dreadful events Jesus prophesied are a sign of hope that the coming of the kingdom is near at hand. The vital thing is not to engage in speculation or give way to despair. The disciples should pray for the strength to remain faithful until the end.

13:29—To what does the phrase “these things” relate? Does it refer to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 or to the Lord’s return in the End Times or to both? It is best to understand this reference as having a multiple fulfillment in a near sense at the fall of Jerusalem in 70, and in a far sense at the end of the age.

13:30—“Generation” can refer to a span of time or to a class or race of people. In the former sense, it may refer to the decades following Jesus’ lifetime. If so, this entire passage refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the heavenly portents understood figuratively. But “generation” as a span of time might also refer to the period following the initial events of the end time. The passage implies that once the described sequence begins, it will proceed to completion without delay. If “generation” refers to a class or race of people, the passage makes more sense if it refers to the Jewish people. The Jewish people will endure until the end of the age.

6. Watchfulness enjoined (13:32-37; see Mt. 24:42-44; Lk. 21:34-36)—The Lord’s call to vigilance pervades this passage: “Be on guard! Be alert (13:33); “Therefore keep watch” (13:35); “[D]o not let him find your sleeping (13:36); “I say to everyone: Watch!” (13:37). The Lord’s people must be watchful because we do not know the appointed time.

Pause and ponder—This chapter warns us against minimizing the teaching of the Lord’s return. How unwise to forget God and his purposes for this earthly realm or put him off and become immersed in material concerns. It also warns us of knowing too much and speculating about end times as to its timing and manner of unfolding.

VII. Passion and Resurrection (14:1-16:8 [or 16:20])—Mark devotes almost forty percent of his gospel to Jesus’ last week in the Passion and Resurrection narratives. The church proclaimed a crucified and living Savior and reflected on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus for its inner

life. Mark focuses on two themes: suffering and triumph. The suffering of the Lord Jesus is highlighted by his betrayal by Judas, denials by Peter, his trials and treatment by the Sanhedrin and Pilate, and the brutality and shame of his crucifixion. The Lord's triumph was his glorious resurrection on the third day after his crucifixion.

The Passion week probably unfolded as follows:

- Arrival in Bethany on Friday (Nisan 8);
- Sabbath rest on Saturday (Nisan 9);
- Triumphant entry on Sunday (Nisan 10);
- Cleansing the Temple on Monday (Nisan 11);
- Day of controversy and parables on Tuesday (Nisan 12);
- Day of rest on Wednesday (Nisan 13);
- Last Supper on Thursday (Nisan 14);
- Crucifixion, death, and burial on Friday (Nisan 15);
- In the tomb on Saturday (Nisan 16);
- Resurrection and initial appearance on Sunday (Nisan 17).

Chapter 14 covers the first part of the week leading up to the trials, condemnation, and death of the Lord Jesus and consists of three cycles of events:

- 14:1-11 and the plot to kill Jesus sandwiched around his anointing at Bethany;
- 14:12-26 and the Passover meal as the Last Supper, including the preparation for the meal (12-16), announcement of the betrayal (17-21), the institution of the Eucharist (22-26), and
- 14:27-52 and Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial and the disciples' desertion (27-31), the Lord's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (32-42), and the Lord's betrayal and arrest and the disciples' desertion (43-52).

Note the responses of various people to the Lord as he steadfastly sets about doing the Father's will:

- Adored in Bethany (14:1-11);
- Betrayed in the Upper Room (14:12-26);
- Forsaken in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:27-52);
- Rejected, mocked, and abused in the palace of the High Priest (14:53-72), and;
- Condemned by Pilate (15:1-20).

A. Plot to arrest Jesus (14:1-2, 10-11; see Mt. 26:1-5, 14-16; Lk. 22:1-6)—This text is another example of Mark's sandwich structure (see 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-31; 11:12-26; and 14:27-52). The account of the conspiracy by the religious leaders and Judas (14:1-2, 10-11) is divided by the account of the anointing of the Lord Jesus at Bethany (14:3-9). Mark draws a striking contrast between the hostility and hatred of those plotting the Lord's death and the loving devotion of one who recognized him as Messiah.

Once the Jewish leaders had decided to get rid of Jesus, the main problem was to do so without creating an uprising among his supporters (14:1-2). Passover, like the feasts of Tabernacles and Pentecost, were pilgrimage feasts on the Jewish calendar, and great throngs of people descended on Jerusalem to celebrate them, vastly swelling its population. As many as one hundred thousand people could be in and around Jerusalem during Passover, so that the chances of the authorities unobtrusively arresting and ridding themselves of the Lord Jesus without insider help were nil. Judas' offer to betray of the Lord (14:10-11) presented them with the opportunity to arrest Jesus quietly. The Lord's popularity with the people was a deterrent to pursuing this dastardly scheme openly, so Judas looked for an opportunity to betray Jesus when no crowds were present.

Pause and ponder—What motivated Judas? Jealousy, greed, and disappointed messianic expectations may have played a role. None of the gospel writers answer this query, other than to say that Satan entered him (Jn. 13:27). A sad descent. From one of the apostolic band, to a Satanically induced betrayal, to a despairing suicide (Mt. 27:3-5).

B. Anointing at Bethany (14:3-9; see Mt. 26:6-13; Jn. 12:1-8)—Mark places Mary's act of devotion (14:3-9) right after the religious leaders' scheming treachery (14:1-2) and right before Judas' plot to betray the Lord (14:10-11). Mark contrasts Mary's love and loyalty with the ugliness and baseness of their scheme. The contrast enhances the beauty of Mary's sacrifice.

This is the second time the Lord Jesus was anointed by a woman (see Lk. 7:36-50). Luke does not name the person anointing the Lord in this scene, but John does (Jn. 12:3). It was Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, the man Jesus raised from the dead (Jn. 11:38-44).

Mary anoints the Lord with costly perfume (14:3). The disciples (in Mt. 26:8-9), notably Judas Iscariot (in Jn. 12:4-5), protest the alleged wasteful expense, saying that the money should have been given to the poor (14:4-5). The insensitivity of the disciples is quite remarkable. As for Judas, his true colors are shown in this incident for John reports that Judas was pilfering from the apostolic band's money bag (Jn. 12:6). Jesus quickly defends Mary's devotion, interpreting her act as preparing his body for burial and saying that her act of devotion would be told far and wide (14:6-9). This was yet another prediction of the Lord's upcoming Passion. Mark immediately transitions from this scene of lovely devotion to Judas' infamous betrayal that the craven religious leaders were so delighted to receive (14:10-11). Mary gave her best in faith and love. Judas gave his worst in unbelief and hatred. He sold his master, Messiah himself, for the price of a slave (Ex. 21:32).

14:7—The contrast here is not between Jesus and the poor but between having the poor always around and but not having Jesus always around. We are called to minister to the poor and never use this episode as an excuse not to. However, the motives of the critics (namely Judas) were entirely bogus.

C. Lord's Supper (14:12-26; see Mt. 26:17-30; Lk. 22:7-30; Jn. 13:1ff)—Lord sends his disciples ahead to confirm arrangements for the Passover meal (14:12-16). At the meal, Jesus predicts his own betrayal (14:17-21) and institutes the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper (14:22-26).

14:13-16—The instructions to the two disciples at the outset suggest that Jesus had already made the arrangements. Luke identifies the disciples as Peter and John (Lk. 22:8). Meeting a man carrying a jar of water was an easier assignment than it appears on the face of it. Women almost always performed this task. The room may have been the one mentioned in Acts 1:13, located in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (see Acts 12:12). Note that it was an upper room. Anyone with a two-story house, containing a large upper room, would have been considered well off by the standards of the day.

14:17-26—Mark abbreviated the events of the meal (see Lk. 22:14-16, 24-30; Jn. 13:1-20) to focus on two aspects: Jesus' announcement of his betrayal (14:18-21) and his institution of the Eucharist and his interpretation of the bread and wine after the meal (14:22-25). The original Passover feast consisted of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and a dish of bitter herbs. The lamb reminded the participants of the blood applied to the doorposts of the Jewish homes in Egypt to save their firstborn from the angel of death. The unleavened bread reminded them of the forefathers' haste in leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:39). The bitter herbs spoke of the suffering of the Jews as Pharaoh's slaves. The normal procedure at the Passover meal was to have an opening prayer followed by the first of four cups of wine and a dish of herbs and sauce. The Passover story was told, Psalm 113 was sung, and a second cup of wine was drunk. After grace, the main course of roast lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs was eaten, followed by another prayer, and a third cup of wine. Then, Psalms 114-118 were sung and the fourth cup of wine drunk.

Sometime between Mark 14:17 and 18, the Lord would have washed the disciples' feet and spoke to them about humility (Jn. 13:1-20). Then he predicted his betrayal to the stunned dismay of the disciples (14:18-22). To betray a friend after eating a meal with him was regarded as the worst kind of treachery. Judas compounds that sense when joining in with the rest of the apostles and exclaiming "Surely not I?" Men who had debated which one of them was the greatest now queried which one of them was the vilest. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are joined in the words of 14:20-21. The Son of Man will go as divinely decreed, but the human agent of betrayal has a "woe" pronounced upon him.

14:22-26—Then the Lord took bread and wine, gave thanks, and gave them to disciples, declaring them to be his body and blood broken and poured out for many. The bread was a thick unleavened bread typically used at Passover. The cup referred to in 14:23 may be the first of the four traditional cups taken during the Passover meal or the third cup mentioned in connection with the Passover setting and again in connection with its place in the Eucharist. This cup signifies the new covenant in Jesus' blood. That new covenant (see Jer. 31:31-34) carried with it the assurance of forgiveness through Jesus' blood shed on the cross and the inner working of the Holy Spirit in motivating and enabling us to respond and fulfill our covenant responsibilities. Thus, he instituted the Eucharist (from *eucharisteo*=to give thanks (14:23)), also commonly referred to as the Lord's Supper and Communion. Christian practice has made this a central ordinance or sacrament commemorating the supper shared by Jesus and His disciples (Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-26; Lk 22:14-20; 1 Cor 1:23-26). The Passover meal ended with the singing of the second part of the Hallel (Pss. 115-118). Jesus and the disciples probably sang them on the way to the Mount of Olives, a walk that took at least fifteen minutes.

Christians have differed in their understanding of the nature of the Eucharist, the import of the bread and wine declared to be his body and blood:

- Transubstantiation (Roman Catholics)—The elements (bread and wine) change and become the body and blood of the Lord.
- Consubstantiation (Lutherans)—Christ is bodily present in, under, and with the elements of bread and wine. The elements do not become the Lord's body and blood but, nevertheless, participants in the sacrament do "eat and take to [themselves] Christ's body truly and physically." Luther was a passionate defender of the "real presence" of the Lord Jesus at the Eucharist.
- Memorialism (Zwingli)—The sacrament or ordinance memorializes Christ's sacrifice. The Lord's Supper is primarily an occasion to remember the spiritual benefits purchased by Christ's death.
- Spiritual presence (Calvin)—There is a real reception of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament only done in a spiritual manner.

D. Peter's denials and disciples' desertion predicted (14:27-31; see Mt. 26:31-35; Lk. 22:31-34; Jn. 13:36-38)—Jesus predicts Peter's denial. This was probably spoken by the Lord as he walked with his disciples from the Upper Room to the Mount of Olives. The prediction that they would "fall away" does not suggest that the disciples lost their faith in the Lord, but that their courage would fail and they would forsake him. Zechariah 13:7 had predicted that when the shepherd (the Lord Jesus) was struck by God, the sheep (the disciples) would be scattered. Peter could not accept that and vehemently protested his loyalty unto death. His overconfident reply would come back to haunt him (14:72).

Once again we have a "Marcan sandwich." The Lord's prediction of the disciples' denial and desertion (14:27-31) and the account of the Lord's arrest (14:43-52) is separated by the account of his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42). Mark emphasized that the Lord Jesus faced his final hour of testing alone with his Father and without human sympathy or support.

E. Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42; see Mt. 26:36-45; Lk. 22:39-46)—The

Garden of Gethsemane was at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Conscious of the temptations surrounding them all, Jesus urges his disciples to pray. Taking Peter, James, and John with him, the Lord withdrew and prayed that, if possible, the cup of suffering and wrath be averted. Nevertheless, not his will, but the Father's will be done. Returning to the disciples, he found them asleep on three separate occasions, doubtlessly exhausted by sorrow and emotional strain. Mark does not dwell on the weakness of the disciples but merely describes it.

The story of the disciples in Gethsemane must have had a powerful effect on persecuted believers in Rome and elsewhere. It helped forge the spirit that would shape their own suffering and martyrdom—to depend on God, to watch, and to pray.

14:32—Gethsemane means press of oils, a press for crushing oil out of olives. An apt name for the Lord's crushing experience in the Garden.

F. Betrayal and arrest (14:43-52; see Mt. 26:47-56; Lk. 22:47-53; Jn. 18:1-11)—Judas leads the Jewish multitude to Jesus to arrest (14:43-40). The fact that Judas brought such a large group of armed men is evidence that neither he nor the religious leaders understood the Lord Jesus. The identification of Jesus is carried out by a kiss (14:44-45) in the darkness of night. It was cruelly hypocritical. Jesus points out the underhandedness of such an armed arrest of a peaceable teacher at night when he was teaching freely in public places during the day. Darkness was Satan's hour and theirs and Jesus was content to obediently go to the cross on God's plan of salvation. Mark records that the disciples deserted the Lord and fled (14:50).

14:47—Mark does not tell us who drew his sword and severed the ear of the high priest's servant. John supplies the details and names. Peter was the swordsman and Malchus the victim (Jn. 18:10-11). Peter comes off being cowardly in his later denials, but at the time of Jesus' arrest, he is the one that resists. Luke alone tells us of Jesus' healing the ear of the high priest's servant (Lk. 22:51).

14:51-52—Unique to Mark's gospel is the account of a young man following Jesus, wearing nothing but a linen garment, leaving his garment and fleeing the scene naked. Many argue that this young man was Mark. Why else would such a trivial detail be included in so solemn a story? Fleeing from such a scene naked was particularly abhorrent to Jewish sensitivities. If Mark was speaking of himself, he was being remarkably vulnerable.

G. Jesus before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65; see Mt. 26:57-68; Lk. 22:54, 66-71; Jn. 18:12-27)—Taking the gospels in stereo, the probable order of the Lord's ecclesiastical trials was:

- Informally before Annas (Jn. 18:10-11);
- Informally before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Mk. 14:53-65; see Mt. 26:57-68; Lk. 22:54-65; Jn. 18:24);
- Formally before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin before dawn (Mk. 15:1; see Mt. 27:1; Lk. 22:66-71).

The charges against Jesus when brought before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin were twofold: threatening to destroy the Temple and blasphemy.

After the preliminary hearing before Annas (recorded in Jn. 18:12-14, 19-23) Jesus was taken to the high priest (Caiaphas, although Mark does not mention his name) and the Sanhedrin. The hasty night trial was deemed necessary because the Romans held their legal trials shortly after sunrise, so the Sanhedrin needed a binding verdict by daybreak. They wanted to get rid of this petulant preacher as soon as possible. Mark describes a parade of false witnesses to underline just how rigged this procedure was (14:55-56). More charges followed, including that he would destroy the Temple, but the testimony of the witnesses were not in accord (14:57-59). Finally, the high priest asked the Lord directly whether he was the Messiah (14:60-61). When the Lord affirmed that he was (14:62), the Sanhedrin condemned

him and let loose with their pent-up hostilities against the Lord, spitting on him and hitting him (14:63-65). When they had had their fill of brutality and mockery, they turned the Lord Jesus over to the guard who continued the beatings.

This trial breaks all the rules. Jewish tradition forbade trials at night and usually required trials to be deferred when occurring around feasts such as the Passover. It also forbade interrogation by the high priest who was presiding at the trial and would have required punishment of false testimony instead of merely ignoring it. The way this was managed demonstrated severe bias.

14:65—The post-verdict scene is a sad one. The Sanhedrin demonstrates that it has devolved into something less than a wise council of the elders of the land. They are cruel, oafish, small-souled political goons. The Sanhedrin's behavior here mimics the cruelty of the Roman execution squad (15:16-20).

H. Peter's denials (14:66-72; see Mt. 26:69-75; Lk. 22:54-62)—When Jesus was taken first to the high priest's residence, Peter followed at a distance, warming himself at a fire in the courtyard. His denials were threefold: first, in response to a servant girl in the courtyard; second, to a servant girl in the entryway; and third, to a group identifying Peter as a Galilean and an associate of the Lord Jesus. Peter's denials on this third occasion were with oaths and curses. A rooster crowed a second time upon the third denial. Peter remembered the Lord's prediction and broke down and wept bitterly. The story of Peter's denials presents a sober and utterly realistic picture of the apostle and offers a deep spiritual lesson about humility and spiritual conflict.

Pause and ponder—It also says something profound about Peter, the person that emerged from the fires of sorrow. Peter was the source of Mark's account of his failure, his denial of the Lord. He used his own shame as a magnet to draw others to Christ. The story of his shame became a tale of glory.

14:71—Peter was not being vulgar but placing himself under the curse of God if he was lying, which he most certainly was. He was placing himself under a courtroom-type oath to confirm the veracity of his denial and perjuring himself in the process.

14:72—Only one rooster crowing is mentioned in the parallel passages (Mt. 26:74; Lk. 22:60; Jn. 18:27). Mark is simply more specific than the other gospels, reflecting Peter's vivid memory of this incident. Some commentators suggest that this was a reference to the earlier crowing of the Palestine rooster between 12:30 am and 2:30 am.

Pause and ponder—It is easy to get high and mighty and judge Peter. But seriously, how many times have we denied the Lord in less dramatic ways? How many opportunities have we lost in not stepping up or speaking up? Are we not a lot like Peter, talking when we should listen, arguing when we should obey, sleeping when we should pray, and fighting when we should submit. Peter wept bitterly over his sins. After his resurrection, Jesus will meet privately with Peter (see Lk. 24:34) and then publicly restore Peter to the apostolic number (Jn. 21:15-19). That restoration was an intense moment. The Lord's questioning enabled Peter to realize that he did love the Lord Jesus more than anything, and that it went to the core of his being to have failed the Lord so miserably in the Lord's hour of need. Peter's mission was clear (feed my lambs, tend my sheep) and that was tied inextricably to his heart's orientation. He would love his Lord right to the end of his days, and that meant serving his church. Tradition has it that Peter met a martyr's death by crucifixion. He requested that he be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died.

I. Jesus before Pilate (15:1-15; see Mt. 27:11-26; Lk. 23:1-25; Jn. 18:28-19:16)—Taking the gospels in stereo, the probable order of the judicial trials was as follows:

- First appearance before Pilate (Mk. 15:1-5; see Mt. 27:2, 11-14; Lk. 23:1-5; Jn. 18:28-38);
- Proceeding before Herod Antipas (Lk. 23:6-12);

- Final appearance before Pilate (Mk. 15:6-15; see Mt. 27:15-26; Lk. 23:13-25; Jn. 18:39-19:16).

The charges against the Lord before Pilate were threefold: subverting the Jewish nation; opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar; claiming to be king and thus guilty of sedition.

The Jews accuse the Lord Jesus of high treason, not blasphemy. Rome did not consider blasphemy a punishable crime. The situation is quite ironic. The Lord Jesus disappointed the crowds for not leading a political revolt. Now he was being charged with that very crime. The passage unfolds with the Sanhedrin reaching their verdict and delivering Jesus to Pilate (15:1), Pilate's initial query and the additional accusations by the Jewish authorities (15:2-5), Pilate's attempt to release Jesus (15:6-14), before finally giving in to the Jewish demands to crucify the Lord Jesus (15:15).

The real saga of this portion of the trial is the difficulty the Jewish authorities had in trying to convict an innocent man. The authorities did not want justice; they wanted the sanction of law in disposing of an inconvenient troublemaker. The condemnation of Jesus is done in a way that everyone can rationalize. The priests do it for the good of the nation (in their eyes), Pilate to avoid a ruckus on Passover, the crowd wanted someone who was really going to fight Rome (Barabbas) rather than some spiritual Messiah (Jesus), and the soldiers were just doing their duty (the mocking and cruelty is more than that but rationalized as an excusable outlet while performing a grim task).

There are really two struggles going on here. One is a struggle between Jesus and his accusers—the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and the people. But the deeper struggle is between principalities and powers. All the primordial forces are here as God and Satan act out this drama on a puny stage in a distant corner of a self-absorbed empire on earth. God takes all of Satan's ploys and weaves them into a gloriously redemptive act. He uses evil to accomplish his purposes.

15:1—The night trial before the Sanhedrin was illegal and therefore the officials reconvene sometime about dawn (5:30 am) to quickly make their preconceived verdict official. Roman officials often would meet with clients and members of the public from just after dawn to sometime near noon.

Pilate's question to Jesus shows that the charges against the Lord were already made known. According to Luke (Lk. 23:2) the charges were threefold:

- Subverting the nation;
- Opposing payment of taxes;
- Claiming to be a king.

15:5—Pilate is quite amazed with the Lord Jesus' majestic serenity in the face of vicious accusations. Christ's silence before Pilate was the silence of tragedy. The die was cast. There was nothing more to be said.

15:6-14—Pilate attempts to release him by reverting to a festival custom of releasing a prisoner. His own unwise behavior through the years puts him in a bind with the Jews. Soon after becoming procurator, he enraged the Jews by bringing imperial standards into the city. More recently he built an aqueduct with funds from the Temple treasury. His insensitivity had put his relations with the Jews more on edge than normally. He did not want a ruckus at Passover that could be reported to the emperor at Rome. However, he realized that Jesus is an innocent man, delivered up by the religious authorities out of spite and envy. One almost gets the sense that Pilate is on trial here, not the Lord Jesus.

15:8-11—The crowd demands the release of a noted insurrectionist, Barabbas. He was a zealot and was apparently involved in a recent uprising in Jerusalem and was guilty of murder (see Lk. 23:19). How odd that a Roman procurator would release a known insurrectionist and execute a man he very well knew was not an insurrectionist at all. Mark omits the crowd's grisly reply to Pilate's washing his hands

of executing an innocent man: “Let his blood be on us and our children” (Mt. 27:26). However, he does point out the veniality of the chief priests in stirring up the crowd (15:10).

J. Jesus mocked and scourged (15:16-20; see Mt. 27:27-31; Jn. 19:1-3)—The scourging of Jesus took place in the Praetorium, which designated the governor’s residence in Jerusalem. The soldiers who scourged and mocked the Lord Jesus were auxiliary troops that Pilate had brought with him from Caesarea, non-Jews recruited from Palestine and other parts of the empire. Their treatment and mockery of Jesus was viciously cruel. Purple robes and laurel crowns were what marked Greek vassal princes. The soldiers took a purple robe, put it on him, and crowned him with thorns in mockery of his claim to be a king. They struck his head, driving the thorns into his skull, doubtless with copious bleeding. They spit at him, struck him, and bowed before him in vicious mockery. It is difficult to imagine a greater demonstration of cruel insensitivity. When finally done they led him out to be crucified. The Lord’s behavior while subjected to this vile cruelty was exemplary. Mark’s Roman audience may well have been or would be subjected to similar ridicule and brutality.

K. Crucifixion and death (15:21-41; see Mt. 27:32-56; Lk. 23:26-49; Jn. 19:17-37)—This passage encompasses compelling Simon of Cyrene to carry the Lord Jesus’ cross (15:21), the grisly scene of the actual crucifixion (15:22-24), the insults and mockery from the robbers he was crucified with, from those passing by, and from the high mighty chief priests and teachers of the law (15:25-32), the death scene itself (15:33-37), the rending of the Temple curtain (15:38), the observation of a Roman centurion (15:39), and the presence of the Lord’s faithful women followers (15:40-41).

15:21-32—Crucifixion was a terrible way to die. The victim carried his own cross to the place of execution where nails were driven through his wrists and feet to fasten him to a wooden cross. The victim was stripped of his clothing, exposed naked to mocking people, and was subject to the heat of the day and the chill of the night. The tension on the victim’s arms caused by the weight of the body prevented normal breathing and caused the lungs to fill with fluid. Thirst, exposure, loss of blood, and impaired breathing due to slow affixation contributed to a lingering, painful death.

Mark mentions three specific hours: the third (15:25), the sixth hour (15:33), and the ninth hour (15:33-34). Mark follows the Jewish measure of time which reckons time from 6 am to 6 pm. Thus, the third hour was 9 am, the sixth was noon, and the ninth was 3 pm. John uses the Roman measure of time in his gospel account thus explaining the differences.

Jesus was so weakened by the abuse prior to the crucifixion that the soldiers had to impress Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross for him (15:21-22). The Lord was crucified at the third hour and Mark records that the charge was summarized “the king of the Jews.” He was crucified between two robbers (15:25-27). The scene was one of mockery and hateful ridicule from the crowd and especially the religious leaders (15:29-32).

15:21—Capital offenders condemned to crucifixion were required to carry their crossbar to the scene of crucifixion. Jesus was weakened by abuse and Simon of Cyrene is pressed into service to help carry the cross. Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus whom Mark mentions because they were known to the Roman church (Rom. 16:13), the primary initial recipients of this gospel. Mark omits the Lord’s conversation with the wailing women en route to Golgotha recorded in Luke (Lk. 23:27-31).

Pause and ponder—Let us pause again and consider the lot of Simon of Cyrene. Simon was enlisted to carry the cross of Christ. He must have bitterly resented it. He had come from Cyrene in Africa, from a far-off land, to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. He may have scraped and saved for years to be able to come and satisfy an ambition of a lifetime. Instead, he is enlisted to bear a cross for a capital offender. When he got to Golgotha, did he fling the cross down and hasten as quickly as he could from the scene? Or did he linger because something about Jesus fascinated him? Mark describes Simon as

the father of Alexander and Rufus. In Romans 16:13, Paul greets Rufus as one chosen in the Lord and his mother as so dear to Paul that he could call her his own mother. Did something happen to Simon at Golgotha that had a profound effect on him and then on his family? In Acts 13:1, one of the chief teachers at Antioch was Simeon who was called Niger. Simeon is another form of Simon. Niger was a name for a man with dark skin from Africa. Cyrene was in Africa. Could we be meeting Simon of Cyrene again in Acts 13? This is probably a reach. Simon was a common name and a number of completed Jews hailed from Cyrene. But what if?

Could Simon's enlistment to carry the Lord's cross bind him forever to the Lord Jesus? Did his spiritual journey lead him to Antioch to become a leader and teacher there and instrumental in the mission to the Gentiles? Could his devotion to the Lord lead to the devoted service to the Lord of his sons in the church at Rome? Did Simon become the carrier of the real kingdom "disease" because of an enlistment to carry the cross that he initially resented?

Undoubtedly, pure speculation! But would it not be grand to discover that this was true!

15:22—Golgotha is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for "skull." Calvary is the Latin word for "skull." Two modern sites are commonly mentioned as possible sites of the Lord's execution—a site known as Gordon's Calvary and a site in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

15:23—It was customary for victims to be given a mixture of wine and myrrh to deaden the pain, but the Lord Jesus refused this. Myrrh allegedly had narcotic effects. The Lord chose to drink to the dregs the cup the Father appointed to him.

15:24—The soldiers gambling for the Lord's clothes unwittingly fulfill prophecy of Psalm 22:18: "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

15:27—Mark notes that the Lord was crucified between two robbers, which fulfilled Isaiah 53:12: "[B]ecause he poured out his life unto death and was numbered among transgressors." The word translated "robbers" is the same one that Josephus used for insurrectionists or revolutionaries. The two men crucified at on either side of the Lord Jesus may have been colleagues of Barabbas and were originally meant to be crucified with him that day.

Luke reports the conversation between the condemned and dying men and the Lord Jesus (Lk. 23:39-43). One criminal protests Jesus' innocence and then receives the incredible grace of God in the assurance of joining Jesus in paradise that very day.

15:31-32—The cruel, sanctimonious hatred of the religious leaders is seen in their presence at the cross, hurling insults at the Lord. Thomas Carlyle described their base ridicule as "the language of the devil." In their mockery, the religious leaders unconsciously bear witness to the Lord's miraculous powers that they had attributed to demonic activity ("He saved others"—a reference to his healing miracles and perhaps to the raising of Lazarus). Their statement that he could not save himself is both false and true at the same time. He certainly could have saved himself; it was within his power. He did not and would not save himself because he was intent on fulfilling his messianic mission.

15:33-41—Mark records that darkness came over the entire land for a period of three hours (15:33) during the Lord's suffering on the cross and that the Temple veil rent in two at his death (15:38). These are clearly presented as supernatural events. Darkness emphasizes the somberness of the event and links Jesus' death with the experience God's judgment on our behalf. The darkness was not only over the land but in the hearts and minds of the people. Perceptive Jews certainly would recognize similarities to darkness, the ninth plague on Egypt, which was followed by the last plague, the death of the first-born (see Ex. 10:22-11:9). Jesus shouts out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," quoting the first line of Psalm 22, which would evoke the whole psalm of the righteous sufferer and its

hope for divine vindication. Then he shouted again and breathed his last. Jesus' loud shout was unusual for crucifixion victims because they usually had no strength left at the end.

15:34—Mark records only one of the last seven words of the Lord Jesus from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” The horror that overwhelmed the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane comes back in all its terror. The Lord drank the cup of God's wrath on the sin of humanity. The other words from the cross include:

- “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk.23:34);
- “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk.23:43);
- “Dear woman, here is your son ... “Here is your mother” (Jn. 19:26-27);
- “I am thirsty” (Jn. 19:28);
- “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30);
- “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk. 23:46).

15:35-36—Jewish tradition led some to believe that Elijah was sent like an angel to rescue famous teachers.

15:37-39—Crucifixion normally killed by asphyxiation. The victim became too weary to keep pulling his frame up the crossbeam to get a breath (15:37). The curtain referred to in 15:38 was the one that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Temple. Mark notes this without drawing its theological significance. Hebrews 10:19-22 explains that the veil and the prescribed cultic rituals which had separated the people from the awesome, holy presence of God, were no longer barriers. Believers in Jesus now had perfect access to God's presence. The centurion in command of the soldiers at the cross was deeply impressed with the manner of the Lord's death (15:39), a telling difference from the earlier disdain and mockery. From his pagan background he probably viewed the Lord Jesus as an extraordinary man, the way a Roman emperor was acclaimed “son of God.” Mark quotes him as speaking more truthfully than he knew in a way similar to John quoting Caiaphas in John 11:49-50.

15:40-41—The faithful women were Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and Salome, the mother of James and John. These were the same people who discovered the empty tomb a couple of days later. They were the last at the cross on Friday and the first to the tomb on Sunday.

Women were much less likely to be indicted for identifying with a crucified victim than men, but it was still courageous for these women to be at the scene. However, the scandal was greater than the risk of formal accusation. By the persnickety standards of the strict Jews, it was scandalous for women to identify and travel with an entourage of male disciples.

L. Burial (15:42-47; see Mt. 27:57-61; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:38-42)—This officially confirms the death of the Lord Jesus, identifies the place of burial, and highlights a big step of faith by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Under Roman law, the release of a crucified person's corpse was only determined by an imperial magistrate. The Romans typically left the bodies of crucified criminals on the crossbar and then cast them into a common grave. Joseph of Arimathea, a dissenting member of the Council, takes quite a chance in requesting the body of Jesus. It was dangerous to be associated with a person executed for treason. In addition, as a member of the Sanhedrin, this act was tantamount to an open confession of personal loyalty to one convicted of blasphemy by that very council. He also incurred ceremonial defilement in handling a dead body at Passover.

Jewish burials were done in two phases. The first phase involved wrapping the body and covering it with spices to offset the smell of decomposition and laying it on a shelf or niche of the tomb. The second phase occurred a year or two later when the body had fully decomposed when a family member or friend would open the tomb, gather the bones, and place them in an ossuary stored on yet another shelf. Joseph could not complete the first phase of the burial in the short time between the

Lord's death and the beginning of Passover. The women would come to the tomb to anoint the Lord's body and complete that phrase after the Passover was celebrated, or so they thought.

John tells us that Joseph was assisted by Nicodemus (Jn. 19:39-40), also a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus had come to Jesus privately (Jn. 3:1-21) and had defended the Lord before the council (Jn. 7:45-53). These men did not suddenly decide to bury the Lord on a sentimental whim. A burial required much preparation. Preparing the tomb, getting permission to take the body, and preparing the body for burial such as they could before Passover began, required a sound plan efficiently executed to be accomplished in the short time the two men had to bury the Lord. All this had to be done without the Sanhedrin's knowledge and at a time when the shops were closed for Passover. Had these men not acted boldly, the body of the Lord Jesus might have been disposed as rubbish. Also, the way the Lord was buried fulfilled prophecy (Isa. 53:9) and proves that Jesus did die on the cross. The Roman officials would not have released the body without proof that the Lord Jesus was dead.

15:46—Matthew tells us that the tomb belonged to Joseph (Mt. 27:60) and that it was new. The tomb was located near the site of the crucifixion. There is archaeological evidence that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the traditional site for Jesus' burial, was indeed a cemetery during the first century of our common era.

Pause and ponder—A haunting thought concerning Joseph of Arimathea. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and did not support that council's verdict concerning the Lord Jesus. But we have no hint that he spoke up in Jesus' favor at the Lord's trial or intervened in any way on his behalf. This observation is not offered with the sanctimonious unction of spiritual superiority. Each of us has failed the Lord in not speaking or stepping up because of our fear. We are all such debtors to grace!

M. Resurrection (16:1-8; see Mt. 28:1-10; Lk. 24:1-12; Jn. 20:1-10)—The four gospel accounts of the Resurrection contain differences in the recorded details (e.g., the number and names of the women coming to the tomb, the number of angelic messengers, and the women's reaction). None of the writers reported all the data. They were free to summarize, particularize, and emphasize various aspects of the same event. The differences reflect the natural effect of this unique event on different eyewitnesses.

After the Sabbath, the women went to the tomb to complete the burial. They had witnessed Jesus' death and burial (15:40, 47) and brought spices and aromatic oils to anoint Jesus' body. They were unaware of the official sealing of the tomb or of the posting of a guard (see Mt. 27:62-66). Their chief concern approaching the tomb was how to roll away the large stone at its entrance. (16:1-3). That usually required several strong men to accomplish. They were surprised to see it rolled away and a young man (an angel) sitting nearby as if waiting for them (16:4-5). The angel informs them that the Lord Jesus had risen and to go and tell his disciples, particularly Peter, that he was going ahead of them to Galilee and they were to meet him there (16:6-7). The account ends with the women, bewildered and terrified, fleeing from the tomb (16:8).

N. Longer ending—Post-Resurrection appearances, commission, and Ascension—Mark has four different endings in the various manuscript traditions, but only two have any significant claim to authenticity. The first is the ending that concludes the gospel with Mark 16:8 and the second is the longer ending summarized below. Most contemporary scholars think that the gospel ends in 16:8. That is supported by the oldest and best attested manuscripts, by internal evidence, including vocabulary and style, and because of certain concerns relating to the content of 16:9-20.

There are four sections to the longer ending:

- Appearance to Mary Magdalene (16:9-11);
- Appearance to two men (16:12-13);

- Appearance to the eleven and the giving of the Great Commission (16:14-18);
- Ascension and the disciples' response (16:19-20).

The early church was uneasy with accepting 16:8 as the conclusion of the gospel. Why end with the women who witness the Lord's resurrection fleeing the scene in fear? Why no record of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples and to other believers? It may have been that Mark did write an ending to his gospel, but that ending was lost in early transmissions of the text. The longer ending we now have is an attempt by the early church to supply what was obviously missing. The longer ending leaves the people of God with a preaching task, a healing task, a source of power for life and ministry, and the assurance that we will never be left alone in our work.

The historicity of the resurrection story has often been questioned. Those challenging the historicity suggest that the women went to the wrong tomb, without attempting to explain how all subsequent visitors made the same mistake. Others argue that stories of "resurrection appearances" may be "broadly historical," but the story of the empty tomb developed later and is legendary. However, the tradition of the empty tomb developed early and presented as central to the message (1 Cor. 15:3-7). To hold that Jesus "resurrected" but that his bones remained buried in Palestine rests on sheer supposition or on a vastly different idea of resurrection than the one that graces the pages of the New Testament. There are issues in harmonizing the various accounts of the Resurrection. But this certainly would be true with any modern earth-shattering account witnessed by different people. The variances in the story certainly absolve any charge of collusion with one another, but it does leave loose ends.

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