

Gospel of Mark Study Guide

Biblical scholars mostly believe that the Gospel of Mark to be the first of the four Gospels written and is the shortest of the four Gospels, however the precise date of when it was written is not definitely known, but thought to be around 60-75 CE.

Scholars generally agree that it was written for a Roman (Latin) audience as evidenced by his use of Latin terms such as *centurio*, *quadrans*, *flagellare*, *speculator*, *census*, *sextarius*, and *praetorium*.

This idea of writing to a Roman reader is based on the thinking that to the hard working and accomplishment-oriented Romans, Mark emphasizes Jesus as God's servant as a Roman reader would relate better to the pedigree of a servant.

While Mark was not one of the twelve original disciples, Church tradition has that much of the Gospel of Mark is taken from his time as a disciple and scribe of the Apostle Peter. This is based on several things:

1. His narrative is direct and simple with many vivid touches which have the feel of an eyewitness.
2. In the letters of Peter he refers to Mark as, "Mark, my son." (1 Peter 5:13) and indicates that Mark was with him.
3. Peter spoke Aramaic and Mark uses quite a few Aramaic phrases like, Boanerges, Talitha Cumi, Korban and Ephphatha.
4. St Clement of Alexandria in his letter to Theodore (circa 175-215 CE) writes as much;

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed. But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge.

Mark is represented in iconography as a calf or ox - a creature of labor or service. It is also thought that the person referred to in Acts as John-Mark (Acts 12:25 and 15:36-41) and (2 Timothy 4:11) is the same Mark.

In his Gospel, Mark moves quickly from one event to the next unlike Matthew or Luke who go into detail regarding the events of Jesus, however Mark does provide certain details not found in the other Gospels. One of the key words used in the Gospel of Mark is "εὐθύς" (*immediately*) occurring more than 40 times. Also, the emphasis is on the works of Jesus more than on the words of Jesus since Mark paints a picture of a Christ in action.

The Gospel of Mark can be divided into three (3) sections:

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| a) Chapters 1-8:26 | Baptism, Ministry of Healing and Preaching in Galilee |
| b) Chapters 8:27-16:8 | Christ's suffering predicted, His death in Jerusalem, and His resurrection |
| c) Verses 16:9 – 20 | Potential post-additions to Mark |

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Mark 1:1-20 Introduction, Preparing the Way, and Temptation

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ²as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way.” ³“a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” (see Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3)

⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁶John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

¹²At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

1. Matthew begins with the genealogy of Christ. Why does Mark omit this?

Mark wrote for mainly for Gentile readers and Roman readers in particular. Genealogy would not be particularly interesting to a Gentile audience. Romans were more interested in what someone can do rather than their past. Mark’s slant to a Roman audience is also evidenced by his lack of Jewish references (Old Testament) which would not be of interest to the Romans. There are only about 63 OT quotations or allusions from the OT in Mark as compared with about 128 in Matthew and almost 100 in Luke."

2. What is the significance of describing what John the Baptist wore?

- This links John the Baptist, as a prophet, to another significant prophet in the Old Testament, Elijah who wore similar clothing that set him apart from everyone else.

*“He wore a **garment of haircloth**, with a **girdle of leather** about his loins.” And he said, “**It is Elijah the Tishbite.**”*
(2 Kings 1:8)

- In Matthew, Jesus contrasts the mission of John the Baptist with the “soft” garments of royalty.

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? ... To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings’ houses. Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.”
(Matthew 11:7,9)

- Coarse garments, such as those of John the Baptist, symbolize repentance. Coarse garments like sackcloth are referred to in the Old Testament as being worn when in mourning or in a public show of repentance for sin. (Gen 37:34, Daniel 9:3 and Jonah 3:5-7)

3. What was John the Baptist's role? What was the essence of John's message? (1:2-9)

- John’s destiny, as prophesied by Isaiah and Malachi, was known to him from the beginning.

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
(Luke 1:41)

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- Upon John's birth his parents knew of what their son's purpose. Luke tells us that "Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, *"What then is this child going to be?"* John's father, Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit spoke his purpose.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins...

(Luke 1:76-77)

- John knew himself that his mission was only to point people towards the Messiah, the Christ. Many people asked John who he really was, wondering if he was Elijah and even the Messiah, yet John clearly and firmly answered "No" to all of these, repeatedly pointing to Christ. (Mark 1:7-8 and John 1:20-23) John also resisted to baptize Jesus, but relented at Jesus' insistence. (Matt 3:14-15)

4. What is significant in verses 1:10-11

- Fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 42:1.
- First New Testament indication of the presence of the Holy Trinity.
- Early heresy saw this verse as a human Jesus receiving His divinity from the Father through the descent of the Holy Spirit. Compare this with Luke 3:21.

5. Why do you think the Holy Spirit "sent" Jesus into the desert? (1:12-13)

The desert, throughout the Bible, is presented as a place of testing and preparation. Many people, both before and after Christ experienced time in the desert before setting out to do God's work. Moses spent 40 years in the desert before leading the people of God out of the enslavement of Egypt. After the Exodus, the nation of Israel spent 40 years in the desert before entering the promised land and John the Baptist lived in the desert until his public appearance to Israel. Many of our saints have experienced the solitude of the desert such as Anthony, Mary of Egypt, and Simeon the Stylite.

St John Chrysostom makes the point that solitude is when the devil's power is magnified and that this temptation was directed towards Christ's humanity.

And the Spirit led Him up, when He had taken Him; not into a city and forum, but into a wilderness. That is, He being minded to attract the devil, gives him a handle not only by His hunger, but also by the place. For then most especially does the devil assail, when he sees men left alone, and by themselves. Thus, did he also set upon the woman in the beginning, having caught her alone, and found her apart from her husband.

6. What is the message for us in Jesus' temptation in the desert?

We should recognize that solitude is dangerous in that it makes us vulnerable to temptation as we don't have the strength in numbers which made Eve vulnerable. However, solitude is also where we discover God as our source of strength, truth, and as a means by which we resist sin.

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Mark 1:14-20 Jesus Announces the Good News and Calls His First Disciples

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

¹⁶As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Questions

7. What was Jesus' early message? And what did the people of Jesus' time believe His message to be?

και λεγων οτι πεπληρωται ο καιρος και ηγγικεν η βασιλεια του θεου. Μετανοειτε και πιστευετε εν τω ευαγγελιω
And He said, The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news!”

8. Why do you think Simon and Andrew, James and John answered Jesus' call? (1:16-20)

- Chrysostom points out their both their faith, and their obedience.

For though they were in the midst of their work (and you know how greedy a thing fishing is), when they heard His command, they delayed not, they procrastinated not, they said not, let us return home, and converse with our kinsfolk, but they forsook all and followed.

Even as Elisha did to Elijah. (1 Kings 19:20-21) Because such is the obedience which Christ seeks of us, as that we delay not even a moment of time, though something absolutely most needful should vehemently press on us.

- Reading in the Gospel of John we see that Jesus' call is a second calling, indicating that Andrew and Peter had heard about Jesus as Messiah from John the Baptist earlier, so that they knew who Jesus was.
- It is interesting that in Mark, the calling of the disciples after John was arrested and put into prison.
- Mark also adds that they left their father, *with hired men*, meaning that their fishing business was not a small family business and thus they were not leaving their father without help.
- Also consider Jesus' words in Matthew 10:37

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

9. How do we interpret verses 18 and 20 today as Christians answering God's call?

That we also should be attentive to the call of our Lord, for we do not know the time and place of our departure.

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Mark 1:21-45 Jesus Begins His Healing Ministry

1. What is the significance of Jesus casting out an evil spirit? What was the demonic spirit trying to find out?
2. How did Jesus heal Peter's mother-in-law? (1:29-33) What effect did this have on the town? How do we pray for sick people?
3. Why did Jesus disappear after His healings? What did his disciples want him to do?
4. What kind of faith did the leper have? What was Jesus' instructions to the man after He cured him? What was the effect of the leper's disobedience? (1:40-45)

Verses 1:21-28 Mark indicates that Jesus taught in a manner more powerful from those Jewish leaders and Rabbis of the Law had been teaching. Mark ensures that we understand this when he adds that the people were astonished. The verb **εξεπλησσαντο** translates to be struck with force of His teaching.

Jesus' authority is immediately put to the test with the demon possessed man. The demon's request indicates their desire that Jesus reveal Himself to discover if the time of Judgement had come.

Recall Matthew 8:29; *And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"*

Jesus' response to them is the same as it will be throughout Mark as Jesus does not want to reveal who He is. His rebuke to the demons is harsh using the word **επειτιμησεν** from *ἐπιτιμάω* which means to warn in order to prevent something from occurring and **φμωθητι**, to be muzzled as you would an ox (1 Tim 5:18).

While exorcisms were not uncommon there was much ritual and preparation that preceded the expulsion of demons however here we have an exorcism only with the words "Be quiet and get out!" indicative of Jesus' divinity authority and power.

Verses 29-31 Mark here uses "immediately" (*ευθεως*) three times; leaving the synagogue, the disciples telling Jesus about Peter's sick mother-in-law and when his mother-in-law is cured. Mark is clear to tell us that her sickness is strong (*was in bed with a fever*) and that her cure was complete (*she began to serve them*). And in this case the cure was similar to the woman with the hemorrhage in that Jesus didn't speak but just cured through touch.

Verses 32-39 Even though Jesus now heals many, His warning is still the same, *και ουκ ηφιεν λαλειν* (*and He did nor allow them [demons] to speak*). Also important is that Jesus did not behave like an expected Messiah in that He did not make His power known to the people and just the opposite fled from recognition.

Verses 40-45 In the case of the man suffering from leprosy, the Law outlined a very involved process which spanned several days;

The Lord said to Moses, "These are the regulations for any diseased person at the time of their ceremonial cleansing, when they are brought to the priest." Leviticus 14

Jesus however, through mere touch, was able to accomplish the cure in the same manner as He did for Peter's sick mother-in-law.

In verse 41 there is some debate regarding Jesus' answer to the man's request to be cleansed, some using the term "indignant" (**οργισθεις**) and other translations using the term "with compassion" (**σπλαγχνισθεις**) depending on which Codex is used. While this could be the case of a Biblical scribe softening Jesus' words it is possible that Mark actually meant to use the term indignant since it uses this term in other parts of his Gospel.

Jesus, in obedience to the Law told the man to go and show himself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing as is required in Leviticus;

On the eighth day they must bring two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old... to the priest who pronounces them clean... Leviticus 14.

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Note the dichotomy of Jesus' command to the man to visit the priest who, on one hand, could restore him to society, but on the other hand, condemn the priest, who will certify the healing and thus Jesus' Godly power, and use this to continue to oppose Jesus.

Mark Chapter 2 Jesus Encounters Opposition from the Pharisees

1. What was significant about Jesus healing the paralytic?
2. What was the social standing of tax collectors? How did the tax collector respond to Jesus' call? Who did Jesus come for?
3. Why did the Pharisees criticize Jesus about eating with sinners and fasting? What was Jesus' answer? What is the lesson to us of the old and new wineskins?
4. What is the significance of Jesus claiming to be master (Lord) over the Sabbath?

Verses 2:1-12 Cure of the Paralytic Here we see Jesus not only healing but also forgiving sins. Jesus' healing is motivated by the faith, not of the paralytic, but of those who brought him. This healing reminds us of the healing of another paralytic at the Pool or Siloam (John 5) with Jesus' words and immediately and complete healing. As Mark did in verse 1:22 he uses a strong verb **εξιστασθαι** (literally to be beside oneself) to indicate the astonishment of the people who witnessed Jesus' miracle.

While healing could be a power granted by God, forgiving of sins was reserved for God alone (verse 2:7). Mark next records that *"immediately Jesus knew their thoughts"* (και ευθεως **επιγνους** ο Ιησους). The term *επιγνους* is important as the root word *γνους* is amplified by the preposition *επι* and means to become thoroughly acquainted with through a direct or personal relationship. Mark is once again alluding to Jesus' divine authority.

Verses 13-14 Calling of Matthew Mark then relates Jesus calling a tax collector named Levi, son of Alphaeus whom Jesus calls in a similar way (walking along) as He did the other disciples in verses 16-20 and is believed to be the same Levi that Jesus called as recorded in the gospel of Matthew 9:9.

Verses 2:15-28 Continuing Discussions with the Pharisees Here Jesus continually performs actions that run contrary to established Mosaic Law; eating with sinners, preventing His disciples from fasting, and working (picking corn) on the Sabbath which continues to scandalize the Pharisees. Jews had a fasting regime which, like Orthodox, was done twice per week; Mondays and Thursdays. Note that in each case Jesus' mastery of Scripture allows Him to use Scripture to turn the arguments of the Pharisees against them.

Also note Jesus' claim that the "Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath," further inciting the Pharisees as He clearly implies that He supersedes the Sabbath. The dramatic implication of this is seen;

- In Deuteronomy God says, "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe Shabbat"
- In the Jewish tradition of associating the Sabbath with the figure of the bridegroom. According to the Talmud, rabbis used to dress in white garments, as a bridegroom calling out, "Come my Beloved, let us greet the Shabbat bride!" Shabbat is also associated with the tangible presence or "in-dwelling," of God and thus Shabbat was thought of as a day of mystical union between the Jewish people and God.

Jesus' use of the bridegroom analogy reminds us of the hymn of Holy Sunday, Monday and Tuesday; *Thy Bridal Chamber I see adorned, O my Savior...*

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Mark Chapter 3 Jesus' Continuing Ministry, His Family, and His Disciples

1. Why were the Pharisees upset about Jesus healing the man with the withered hand? Why did they consider this such a serious challenge? (3:1-6)
2. What effect did the crowds have on Jesus' ministry? How did his disciples assist with the crowds? (3:7-12)
3. How did his family respond to his popularity? How did the religious leaders respond? Who are Jesus' new family?
4. Why did Jesus tell the parable of the kingdom divided? Who is the "strong man" in the parable?
5. What does this mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit?

Verses 3:1-6 Cure of the Withered Hand

Here Mark offers us more than just another healing narrative but specifically draws us in to the increasing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus calls the crippled man to the center of the synagogue and confronts the people present with another practical application of what He said in verses 2:27-28.

He waits for a compassionate answer to His question and is met with *πρωσει της καρδιας*. The term *πρωσις* comes from the noun *πρωωξ* which is a type of marble which later was used to describe the callus that develops on a fractured bone. So, the literal translation of the verse is a callousness or hardened heart of (seemingly) all those present.

Angered at their resistance to answer His question He commands the man to stretch out his hand so that Jesus can effect the cure to demonstrate the answer to His original question and this begins the plot to end Jesus' life.

More follow Jesus and the 12 disciples are appointed

Verses 3:7-12 Mark now indicates the ever-widening attraction of people to Jesus' ministry and Jesus' continued rebuking of the demons to keep silent about the Messianic Secret.

Verses 3:13-19 Mark also lists out the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus, however this list differs from the other Gospels indicating that by the time the Gospels were written recollection of more minor members was not certain.

Mark 3:13-19	Matthew 10:2-4	Luke 6:13-15
Simon (Peter)	Simon (Peter)	Simon (Peter)
James	James	James
John, brother of James	John, brother of James	John, brother of James
Andrew	Andrew	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew
Matthew the Levi	Matthew the Levi	Matthew the Levi
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas
James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus
Thaddeus	Thaddeus	Judas son of James
Simon the Cananean	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot

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Verses 3:20-21 and 31-35 Jesus' family is concerned

As with his frequent use of “ευθύς” (immediately), Mark repeats the use ἐξίστημι (to be beside oneself) or in this case to not be in “in Himself when describing how Jesus’ relatives react when trying to understand this new ministry of His. Later when Jesus’ mother and brothers arrive Jesus acknowledges that His ministry of preaching of the Kingdom of God, has replaced blood relations so that all are included in His family. The harshness of this will be seen later when, in Matthew, Jesus states “*He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...*”

Verses 22-30 Allegations of the Scribes

Sandwiched in between the family narratives is the allegations by the Jewish scribes that Jesus power of healing and authority over demons comes from Satan. Jesus argues this point, in parables, saying how could He command demons who are lorded over by Satan, if He Jesus, serves Satan. Jesus, using the analogy of the household, argues that the head of the household must be bound if another is to take over the house. This imagery of binding the “strong one” (Satan) is expressed in the icon of the resurrection.



The imagery of a house divided was famously used by Abraham Lincoln to his Republican colleagues when he was running against Democrat Stephen A. Douglas. Speaking about the future of the United States, he used Jesus’ words from Mark saying;

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved -- I do not expect the house to fall -- but I do expect it will cease to be divided."

Verse 28-30 Jesus then mentions the unpardonable sin which is to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. Mark however gives us the definition of this sin when he records in verse 30, “He said this because they were saying, He has an impure spirit.” Thus, the scribes and Pharisees were actively setting themselves up against the work and will of God.

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Mark Chapter 4 Jesus Teaches in Parables and the Miracle of the Storm

1. Why did Jesus teach with parables?
2. Why did Jesus say to His disciples about parables? What was he trying to teach them?
3. In the calming of the storm what was intended to teach about faith? About fear? About Jesus' power?

Verses 4:1-34 Jesus' teaching authority has become so well known that He needs to conduct His teaching in a manner similar to a large auditorium. Mark demonstrates Jesus' skill as the Master Teacher by presenting Jesus' use of parables. Mark shows that while Jesus is fully capable of speaking to those schooled in high theology (His teaching and discussions in the synagogues), He is also fully capable of speaking to the common person so as to appeal to his mind and his heart.

Additionally, the fact that the parable accounts differ slightly in detail between the Gospels, speaks to the creative use of tradition by the Gospel writers to suit their particular pedagogical purposes.

In verses 4:11-12, Jesus explains to His disciples His purpose in teaching in parables when he says'

"The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing και μη συνιωσιν μηποτε επιστρεψωσιν και αφεθη αυτοις τα αμαρτηματα

but never being of the same mind; otherwise they might return and be forgiven of their sins."

From a non-biblical perspective these words can seem harsh, if not insulting to purposefully speak in a manner which would prevent someone from understanding the true meaning of what is being said. Often in the Bible resultant events are presented as divine foresight into God's purpose. Examples of this are God telling Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart and Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams.

In verses 4:21-23 and 4:33-34 Jesus explains that His purpose is not to hide or obscure the truth of the Kingdom of God but ελαλει αυτοις τον λογον καθως ηδυναντο ακουειν. Meaning Jesus spoke to the people in a manner (λογον) equal to their ability (ηδυναντο) to hear.

Verses 4:35-41 The humanness of Jesus is seen here when Jesus is able to remain asleep (verse 38) throughout a heavy blowing storm indicating the heavy toll that came from seemingly endless healing and teaching.

In this narrative Mark points out several important observations:

- Jesus as Παντοκράτωρ (co-creator with God the Father and the Holy Spirit) has authority over all of creation and not just living things but natural elements also.
- This authority, as with His authority over healing and demons, is enacted with a simple command, σιωπα (be quiet) and πεφιμωσο from φιμώω meaning to "be muzzled." This is the same verb used by Jesus to the demons He rebuked in Chapter 1.
- Jesus' frustration with His disciples who have been personal witnesses to His authority and power, which Jesus expresses to them when he calls them δειλοι. While this term is similar to φοβος, there is a distinction. Φοβος refers to a fear, as one would fear when confronted by a dangerous situation or in battle. Δειλός refers to an excessive fear or dread of losing something (in this case their life) resulting in faint heartedness or cowardice.
- The disciples lack of faith in He who they had immediately left their home, family and trade to follow, thus emphasizing Mark's earlier reference that the disciples had yet to understand fully who Jesus is.

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Mark Chapter 5 Miracles of Healing and Resurrection

1. What does the story of the Gerasene demon possession teach us about demons?
2. What did pigs mean to Jews? What is the element of the pigs add to the story? (5:11-13)
3. Why didn't Jesus have the man accompany him? What was his mission instead? (5:18-20)

This chapter continues Jesus' ministry of healing, both physically (Woman with the flow of blood and Jairus' daughter and spiritual (Gerasene demons).

Verses 1-20 Gerasene Demoniac

The chapter opens with Jesus encountering a man with an unclean spirit after entering the territory of Gerasene. When comparing Mark's account to Mathew's there are some interesting points to note.

1. **The name of the territory that Jesus visits.** Γαδαρηνων versus Γερασηνων. Gadara was a city not far from the Lake Gennesareth, one of the ten cities that were called Decapolis. Gerasa was a city about 12 miles to the south-east of Gadara, and about 20 miles to the east of the Jordan. Luke identified the location the same as Mark. (see Figure 1)

Matthew and Mark were writing of the same general area. The Roman city Gerasa was a famous city that would have been familiar to a Gentile audience, but Gadara, as the capital city of the Roman province of Perea, was the chief of the ten cities in Decapolis, so those who lived in Gerasa could have been called Gadarenes.



Figure 1

2. **Both the man and the demons recognized Jesus.** The man, whom would not allow other to approach and was feared (being bound in chains), ran to Jesus and worshipped Him (και προσεκυνησεν αυτω) AND the demons referred to Him as "Son of the God most high."
3. **The number of men being healed of demons.** Mark records only one man while Matthew reports two (δυσο) men. While it has been proven that eye witness accounts often have difficulty with recalling specific details, Mark's account just states ανθρωπος which could be read as "a person" approached him and does not rule out that there could have been others.
4. **The name Legion.** A legion of soldiers among the Romans consisted of between 5000-6000 thousand men and therefore indicates that demons are organized in a military fashion so as to war against God and men. St. Paul even refers to this military struggle when he tells us to "put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the methods of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil." The use of the pronoun "I" in verse 5:7 and the pronoun "we" in verse 5:9 also alludes to a large, cohesive military unit all acting in unison to attack us. Against such an organized force, in our own strength we are no match for our spiritual enemies, but in the Lord, and in the power of his might, we are able to stand against them, even though there are legions of them.

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In verses 11 and 14 we are told about a herd of pigs (swine) into which the demons asked Jesus to let them enter.

This probably indicates that the people of this village were probably not Jewish as swine is a prohibited animal by Levitical Law, but Gentiles or Hellenizing Jews, lured by the good market for swine flesh in the cities of the Decapolis, and may have been raising pigs for financial gain.¹ If such were the case, the Savior's economic "rebuke" certainly would have been warranted.

This could offer insight into why Jesus would have allowed the destruction of God's creation. Some scholars imply that Christ *permitted the destruction of the swine knowing that it would awaken the Gergesenes from their indifference and ultimately assist in the salvation of a multitude in the community.*²

Orthodox theology recognizes that suffering and hardship can many times have a positive result in the ordering of one's life priorities.

The "violation" of the Messianic Secret. When the now-healed man asks Jesus if he can accompany Him, Jesus refuses and "violates" the previous *Messianic Secret* telling him instead to "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." In this way the people of Decapolis might be shaken from their spiritual sleep.

Lest we judge the people of the village harshly for not receiving this message and asking Jesus to leave, an interesting and thoughtful commentary is offered by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh of Russia on the people who, after witnessing the loss of the swine herd (δισχίλιοι – two thousand) said to Christ "Get out of our territory." Metropolitan Anthony asks us to look inside ourselves before judging them harshly.

The salvation of one man at such a price, at such an impact on our wallets—no, we do not agree to this. We read such a story with horror and we think: how is this possible? But in actual fact, are we really willing in every individual case to sacrifice our prosperity and property so that one person becomes well, enters into life, regains consciousness? Not always. And therefore, let's not reproach these Gadarene people too much, but think about ourselves. How would I answer? If suddenly all my property — everything I had put my hopes on in order to grow rich and live well—were taken away from me only so that one person could become normal, healthy, could begin a new life—what would I say to this? Let's reflect on this, because we are not better than these people in everything.

Verses 21-43 Woman with the flow of blood and Jairus' daughter

4. What was wrong with the sick woman? How long had she been sick? What is significant about her touching Jesus?

5. What was the focus of her faith? How did Jesus not know who He healed? What is the role of faith in her healing?

6. Who is Jairus? What is his position in the community? What are the obstacles to his faith? How does Jesus encourage him?

As in chapter 3, we find here another example of the Markian Sandwich. It begins with a leader of the synagogue, Jairus, asking Jesus to heal his daughter and is then interrupted by the story of the woman with the flow of blood, after which Mark returns to close the story of Jairus' daughter.

Rather than investigate each account separately, we will look at significant similarities between these two women.

¹ *Commentary on Mark*, Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994, p. 133

² *Studies in the Life of Christ*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971, p. 599

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1. As with the leper in chapter 1, verse 40, both the woman and the daughter are ritually unclean according to Jewish Law; the woman due to the implied menstrual issue and the daughter who is dead. Contact with any of these three people makes a person unclean and places them outside of the Jewish community until they become clean. Here Mark shows that Jesus transcends the Law and is in fact the Lord of the Sabbath.
2. Each is cured by Jesus' touch, which is both prohibited by the Law and an indication of His divinity. He restores the people of Israel for whom He was sent which includes those who are excluded from Jewish society.
3. Both stories explore the response of faith. In the case of the woman; "your faith has restored you to health" and in the case of the daughter; "Do not be afraid, only have faith."
4. In the case of the woman, Mark allows us to listen in to her inner thoughts and reactions.
5. Both the woman and the daughter had/have wealth. For the woman with the flow of blood Mark hints at this when he writes "...after long and painful treatments by various doctors she spent all she had..." And in the case of the daughter, her father is a leader of a synagogue and lives in a house with separate rooms (5:40)
6. Mark's account includes the daughter's mother whereas Matthew leaves out this detail. It is thought that Mark does this to teach an equality of status between men and women which is reflective of the community Jesus is building around Himself.
7. The woman knowingly breaks with Jewish Law in an attempt to touch Jesus and shows an initiative to seek healing, although in secret. To describe the healing Mark uses the term "δύμιν" (power) which speaks to the power of God and that this power is for restoring humanity from disease and points to the future Kingdom of God where "all pain, sorrow, and suffering" are no more.
8. Mark records that Jesus is unaware of who He has healed which seems to speak to Jesus' lack of divinity. Matthew's account eliminates this issue by having Jesus turn to the woman and speak to her. Some scholars conclude that Jesus does this on purpose to have the woman reveal herself so as to bring her from a superstitious spirit to a more true spiritual relation. Mark's description of her actions when revealed by Jesus, *φοβηθεῖσα καὶ τρέμουσα* (fear and trembling) are used consistently by Mark throughout his Gospel to indicate "awe" of the miracle and an incomplete understanding and trust in God's actions and desire.
9. A return to the **Messianic Secret** – "He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this,..."

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Mark Chapter 6

1. Why did people in Nazareth have a hard time believing in Jesus?
2. Why did Jesus send out the Twelve? What were his instructions to them? What was the purpose of these instructions?
3. Why does Mark spend so much space telling about the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist?

Jesus continues His miracles of healing but also adds two other miracles to help His disciples in their understanding and faith in Him. Now with His 12 disciples, Jesus begins to prepare them in what will be their ongoing mission. Mark also relates, through the stories of Jesus' rejection in His hometown and the beheading of John the Baptist, the fact that this mission of the disciples is often not well received and dangerous.

Verses 6:1-6 Jesus visits Nazareth

Mark begins with Jesus' rejection in his hometown of Nazareth. However, Mark contrasts this with His acceptance by the people of Gennesaret at the end of the chapter. (Figure 2)

Moreover, just as in chapter 1, Mark describes the reaction of the people who hear Jesus teach by using the same verb, *εξεπλησσαντο* (to be struck with force) as he used in chapter 1:22. However even with this, was Jesus rejected in his home town, by even those closest to him, so much so that Jesus marveled at their unbelief.

This attitude is not totally unwarranted for circulating through the Mediterranean World at this time were "mystery religions" such as the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Athenians had the sophists and Eleusinian Mysteries, and early Gnosticism, so that Jesus could be seen by some as demonstrating some "secret abilities." Christianity would later be identified as one of these Mystery religions as people tried to accuse Christians of practicing secret rites such as "eating flesh and drinking blood."

Jesus' answer to this lack of faith, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town..." is reflected in Jeremiah 11:21 and John 4:44.

Verses 6:7-13 Jesus instructs His disciples

Once again we find another *Sandwich* text. The section begins with Jesus giving instructions to His twelve disciples in preparation to "send them out two by two." This is then interrupted by the account of Herod and John the Baptist after which Mark returns to the disciples; "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught." (verse 6:30)

Jesus' instructions to take only the simplest and least amount of clothing and footwear, no money except for what they earn through their own labor and only enough to subsist is mirrored in Orthodox monasteries throughout their existence. Even the comment about "to those who refuse to listen shake off the dust from under your feet and walk away" is typical of monastic responses to requests from visitors who question the rules of a monastery or their harsh way of life; except of course that at the monasteries, the visitors are asked to leave.

Mark's account has several pieces of information not found in the other Gospels such as a) Jesus sending them out two by two and that the disciples anointed the sick with oil. As there are no accounts of Jesus using oil in His healing, it is thought that this practice was in place at the time that Mark wrote his Gospel.



Figure 2

Gospel of Mark Study Guide

Verses 6:14-29 Beheading of John the Baptist

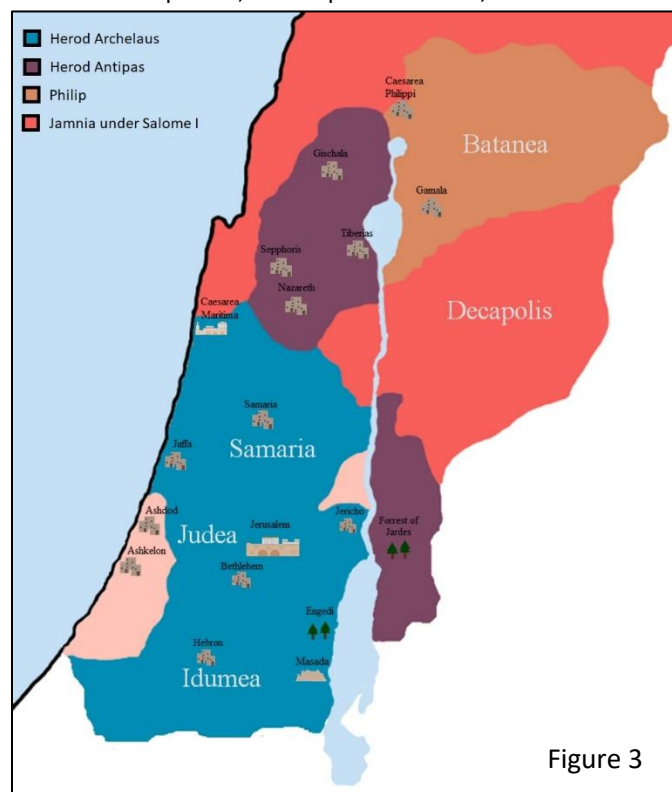
After the death of Herod the Great, a Tetrarchy of power existed in Israel. Each of the four kings ruled over specific areas as indicated in figure 2. The area in which Jesus and His disciples were traveling (region indicated in blue in figure 3) was governed by one of Herod the Great son, Herod Antipas.

Herod of Antipas ruled the areas of Galilee and Perea as a client state of the Roman Empire. Herod of Antipas was responsible for building projects at Sepphoris and Betharamphtha, and more important for the construction of his capital Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Named in honor of his patron, the emperor Tiberius, the city later became a center of rabbinic learning. Herod of Antipas divorced his first wife Phasaelis, the daughter of King Aretas in favor of Herodias, who had been married to his half-brother Herod II. The title of “king” given by Mark to Herod is actually a misnomer as each of the Tetrarchy were actually governors of their respective provinces. This is the same Herod that Jesus will be sent to later during His trial by Pilate. King Herod was also ruthless with many of his rivals disappearing, including his wife’s brother and two of his own sons. The dark joke at the time



was *κρεῖσσον Ἡρώδου ὕα εἶναι, ἢ υἱά*. Translated this read, “I would rather be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son.” This being a play on the similarity of the Greek words for pig and son and the fact that Jews did not kill and eat pork. This ruthlessness combined with John the Baptist’s condemnation of Herod’s marital arrangement that led him to have John arrested and subsequently put to death.

Titus Flavius Josephus³ the Jewish historian, confirms that Herod imprisoned and executed John the Baptist, but his details differ as to why exactly John was killed. Josephus chooses to emphasize the political dangers that John posed to Herod, while Mark chose to emphasize the moral dimension, however the two accounts are essentially in agreement. Herod’s immoral dismissal of his wife and his unlawful marriage to Herodias his sister-in-law prompted John’s condemnation which focused on the immoral and unlawful aspects brought out by Mark, while Herod’s fears focused on the political dangers, indicated by Josephus, although Josephus later mentions the inappropriateness of Herod’s divorce and remarriage.



³ Josephus recorded Jewish history, with special emphasis on the first century CE and the First Jewish–Roman War (66–70 CE). His most important work in which he recorded the ministry and Passion of Jesus Christ is the *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. AD94).

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Verses 6:30-52 Jesus performs additional miracles

4. How did Jesus characterize the people (6:34)
5. Why do you think Jesus assigned the disciples to feed the multitude? (6:37)
6. Why did Jesus have the disciples collect the leftovers? (6:43-44, see 8:19-20)
7. Why did Jesus pass by His disciples when walking on the water?
8. What was the response of the disciples to Jesus walking on the water.

Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes

This miracle takes place in Bethsaida (which we only know through Luke's account of this miracle, see Figure 4). Here Jesus is moved with compassion to perform a miracle in which His power is used, not to heal but to feed. This mass feeding of the hungry has echoes of the Old Testament; Moses feeding of the Israelites in the desert with manna and quail (Ex 16:4-5) and Elisha's overflowing of oil for the widow and the feeding of the people with 100 loaves. (2 Kings Chapter 4).

This particular miracle is radically different from previous miracles done in private or with a small group present and represent individual acts of compassion. With this miracle of the loaves and fishes Mark is making a bold statement to the universality of Jesus' coming and of the opportunity for redemption of all.

Jesus' actions with the breaking of the bread and giving thanks and blessing is a foreshadowing of His actions at the Last Supper and an anticipation of the Messianic Banquet. Mark's language to describe both the breaking of the bread (κατεκλασεν – to break into very small pieces) and εχορτασθησαν – to have eaten so as to be abundantly satisfied). Also note the similarity between the 12 baskets of bread leftover and the 12 disciples, which could indicate that Jesus also feed His disciples who seemed to have no provisions for themselves.

This picture could even be extended to our gathering together in a single place of communal love (the Church) to hear the word of God preached (Gospel reading), being taught (the sermon) and be given (spiritual) nourishment in the form of Holy Communion.

Walking on the Water

In the Bible, the sea often represents Gentile nations. Isaiah 17:12 says, "The thunder of many peoples, they thunder like the thundering of the sea! The roar of nations, they roar like the roaring of mighty waters!" The verse provides a comparison between the "nations" and the "sea." Symbolically, Israelites are people of the land (Genesis 15:18-21), and the Gentiles (Mark's audience) are the sea.

Walking or "trampling" are also symbolic of kingship and ruling. If something is under your foot, you have victory over it. (Psalm 110 and 1 Corinthians 15) Mark is relating to the reader that Jesus is the messianic king, ruler of Israel and all the nations.



Gospel of Mark Study Guide

Only in Mark's account does it specifically states that Jesus *ἠθέλην παρελθεῖν αὐτοῦς* (meant to pass them by). Recall that the disciples had already seen Jesus calm a storm on the water (4:35-41) and He is now testing their faith again. The disciple's response to seeing Jesus indicates their superstitious nature but Jesus wants the disciples to understand the deeper meaning of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes and of who He is. This is thought to be the reason Jesus says to the disciples, *Θαρσείτε, Ἐγώ εἰμι* (Have courage, I am), in the same way God identified Himself as "I Am" to Moses.

Mark closes this story with *αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη* (*hardened in their heart*) to drive home the point of the lack of understanding of the disciples to what is happening and who Jesus is. Mark uses the exact same term (from the noun *πῶρος* – marble or callus) to explain the response of the disciples that he used to describe the people in the synagogue (3:5).

The answer to Jesus' question to the disciples in the calming of the storm story (4:35-41) - *οὐκ ἔχετε πίστιν* (Have you no faith?) seems to still be "*not really*" as Mark relates that just like the earlier account at sea, the disciples were terrified and amazed at the actions of Jesus.

Also note that Mark excludes the entire account given in Matthew of Peter getting out of the boat to come to Jesus only to be rescued by Him due to his fear when Peter once again noticed the wind.

Verses 6:53-56 Jesus performs additional cures at Gennesaret

This story is only mentioned here and in Matthew 14:34. It is a fertile crescent-shaped plain, on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee, (see Figure 5). It is more than 500 feet below the level of the ocean with an almost tropical climate. Josephus describes it as "an earthly paradise, in which every kind of useful plant grew and flourished."

Mark records that when Jesus and His disciples moored their boat at Gennesaret the people there immediately recognized Jesus (Mark 6:54), most likely having heard of the healing of the woman with the flow of blood and Jairus' daughter.

Unlike the people of Decapolis who, after seeing Jesus destroy their swine flock and begged Him to leave the people here seemed to welcome Jesus. Use of the participle form of the verb *περιτρέχω* (meaning to run around) in verse 6:55 indicates that they also knew that Jesus would stay but a little while at a place, and therefore were concerned to take advantage of this opportunity and began to bring to Jesus all those who were sick, whether by themselves or carrying them on their beds. Their desire was only to be allowed to touch Jesus' garment like the style of the woman who was healed earlier in verse 6:34.

Also note that when speaking about their desire to touch Jesus' garments Mark uses the term *μᾶτιον* and not *χιτῶν* (as he did in verse 6:9). The word *χιτῶν* refers to the garment nearest the body, without seam, woven from the top throughout. Over this is worn the *μᾶτιον* which is a tunic or cloak that flows loosely usually with a border or fringe at the base.

It is also interesting to note that we do not find that the people desired to be taught by him, only to be healed, indicating that their concern seemed to be more for the physical than the spiritual.



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Mark Chapter 7

This chapter speaks to the danger of overemphasis on traditions and vain worship by the religious leaders from Jerusalem and what cause took moral defilement. Afterwards Jesus and His disciples travel to the region of Tyre and Sidon where He heals a Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter and then on through the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee where He heals a deaf-mute.

Verses 7:1-13 Jesus confronts the Pharisees concerning traditions and commandments

While not a formal commandment, the tradition or ritual of Jews washing their hands prior to eating a meal originated with the Talmud and addressed the idea of dealing with ritual impurity. The washing of the hands is done while reciting a blessing and is known as *netilat yadayim*;

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands.



Figure 6

Certain passages in the Talmud indicate that failing to wash hands before a meal is a significant transgression. (Figure 6 shows a typical hand-washing station) This ritual derives from various practices of the priests of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. The priests who performed the temple rituals were given gifts of oil, wine and wheat that could be eaten only after ritual washing. The ancient rabbis extended this practice to all Jews, men and women, before eating meals. It is suggested that the practice was instituted so the Temple's washing ritual would not be forgotten and was thus became part of the medieval codes of Jewish law. Recall the "six water pots" at the wedding of Cana of Galilee;

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons (John 2:6)

This idea of "remembrance" is carried on today in many of the rituals of the Orthodox Liturgy such as the Great entrance which was retained to remind us of the original procession of the Eucharistic elements prior to the start of the Divine Liturgy.

Note that Mark takes the time to explain this specific ritual (verses 3-4) again indicative of his Roman audience who was probably not familiar with the specifics of this ritual act. **Also note Mark's use of the term βαπτισμοῦς to describe the action washing of cups, pitchers and kettles (verse 7:4) referring to the original meaning of the term "baptize."**

Through this pericope Mark also brings clear the point that some Jews, and especially the Pharisees, wished to be seen as more righteous than others and placed undue attention on these external ceremonies. While Jesus did not take issue with the Law (ref Matt 5:18-19) He did take issue with the strict and unyielding observance of traditions by the Pharisees and other Jews who occupied their time with external purifications drawing away their attention from the greatest commandments; love of God and His people.

The Pharisees did not attacked Jesus personally, but through His disciples (verse 5), just as they attacked His disciples for picking corn on the sabbath (verse 2:24), and their criticism of His disciples not fasting (verse 2:18). They attacked the disciples again on a point of ritual, not of faith.

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees directly stating "they have put aside the commandments of God in favor of παραδοσῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων (the traditions of Man) using Hebrew Scripture to expose their errors. Jesus gives an example of how the Pharisees substituted God's commandments for their own purposes when He speaks of the 6th of the 10 Commandments and the concept of *korban*.

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קָרְבָּן (Κορβαν, Korban) This word is found only one time in the New Testament here in Mark 7:11, and is a word of Hebrew origin which Mark preserved by transliterating this word in Greek. The word means “*something brought near the altar as a sacrificial offering or devotion (ωφέληθης)*”.

As a child, living in the home of the parents, a child is commanded to obey and honor them according to the 6th Commandment. As an adult, this commandment still stands in that an adult is still to honor and care for the parents. Here Mark is telling us of a “tradition” of the day which had corrupted the commandment so that adult children could avoid taking care of their parents. The tradition held that if the child set money aside for the care of your parents and instead gave it to the temple as an offering, this would free the child from the obligation of giving or using the money for the purposes of caring for parents. In fact, the “korban” did not necessarily be given to the Temple but only offered. And the offering was not off limits to that person but only to the person to whom the korban was pronounced. In this way the intent of the 6th Commandment was now nullified by a legalistic interpretation (tradition) of Mosaic Law.

Verses 7:14-23 Jesus speaks on clean versus unclean

Jesus now returns again to the idea of ritual purity by pointing out the difference between clean and unclean. Now no longer speaking to just the Pharisees, Jesus publicly announces that food does not pollute the soul; only actions and desires can do that. This accusal addressed with marked emphasis to the masses, whom the Pharisees despised as ignorant of the law, and cursed, sought to further incense the Pharisees against Jesus. Against His disciples Jesus is even harsher calling them ἀσύνετος – unable to understand or comprehend, unintelligent. In mentioning the heart and the stomach in the same sentence, Jesus distinguishes between the physical and the spiritual.

The heart is central in Orthodox Spirituality. *If your heart is pure, your actions are pure. If your heart is impure, so will your actions be.* In our Orthodox tradition, the combination of heart and the mind is referred to as the nous and while the heart is obviously not identified with the physical heart, is understood to be the center of our spiritual existence; God takes up residence in the heart (Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:17).

To this point Jesus is emphasizing that the He, as Lord and God, calls us to be mindful of the mental portion of our nous, that is our attitudes, thoughts, and desires. This is a higher calling than the Mosaic Laws, which like all laws, can only judge and convict outward acts and not the thoughts or inclinations which ultimately find expression in physical acts. The fruit of the Tree in the Garden of Eden was not evil in of itself, it was the inclination of Eve and Adam to disobey the command of God that caused the Fall.

Finally, the struggles that would be recorded in Acts and the Epistles of St Paul regarding the controversy over what is ok and not ok to eat gain support through the Gospel writers recording of Jesus’ own words on the subject.

Gospel of Mark Study Guide

Verses 7:24-37 Jesus Heals in Tyre and Sidon

Syro-Phoenician's Daughter Jesus and His disciples then set out for the territory of Tyre located on the Mediterranean coast south of Lebanon and was a major Phoenician seaport from about 2000 BCE through the Roman period. (see Figure 7)

Mark gives us a sense of the frantic pace that Jesus and His disciples were keeping when he states; "He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it..." showing that He desired a degree of rest for Himself and His disciples. However, that was not to be as Mark states that His presence was soon discovered by a woman from a region of Phoenicia under Syrian rule, hence Syro-Phoenician and also indicates that she was Gentile and not Jewish. This area was in the possession of the Canaanites, and the Phoenicians were descended from the Canaanites. This is why in Matthew's account she is referred to as a Canaanite woman.

These regions of Tyre and Sidon hearken the reader to the time of the prophet Elijah who performed miracles in these regions. Luke, in his recounting of Jesus' rejection in Nazareth (Luke 4:24-26) afterwards states; "I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon."

In Matthew's version of the incident (absent from Mark) the woman addressed Jesus with the words: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This suggests that the woman may have been a proselyte, or at least that she believed in the truth of the Jewish religion (Matt. 15:22).

Jesus' answer to her; "αφες **πρωτον** χορτασθηναι τα **τεκνα**...ου γαρ καλον εστιν λαβειν τον αρτον των τεκνων και βαλειν τοις **कुनारीस**" at first seems harsh and rude as it appears that Jesus refuses to perform the miracle, of which this is the first and only instance, however, it was not an absolute and permanent refusal. So, let's break down His response.

- **FIRST** (First, let the children be filled...) The word "first" could be taken to mean that Jesus did not intend to exclude the Gentiles indefinitely from receiving the Gospel message, but they were first in line to hear it.
- **CHILDREN** This term refers to the Jews as they were the nation God had elected for His purpose of the salvation of all of God's creation. Jesus is stating here that His first mission was to bring Israel back to its calling as a kingdom of priests.
- **DOGS** The term "कुनारीस" is the diminutive of κύων and refers to a little dog or a house dog. Jesus is not referring to wild dogs or street dogs with no home but one who is part of the family but does not yet have the same privileges as the family members.

Her answer to Jesus indicates a humility and faith AND an intelligent understanding of Jesus' response to her request and indicates that she recognizes Israel's right to eat first. Although Mark only records Jesus saying to the woman, "go home to your daughter" who was cured," Matthew records a more emphatic reply; "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." In either case Mark is making clear that Jesus puts the emphasis on the faith of the person receiving the miracle. In this case the miracle is performed without interaction between Jesus and the person who is ill and indicates that Jesus' power is not magical or follows some formula and ritual.

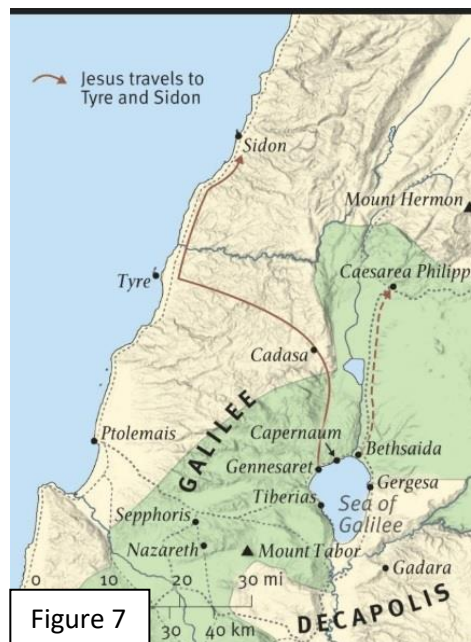


Figure 7

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The Deaf and Dumb Man (7:31-37)

Deaf and Dumb Just as in the case of the paralytic (2:1-12) and the Cures at Gennesaret (6:53-56) this man is brought to Jesus. The man is described as κωφόν and μογιλαλον. Κωφόν is from the root κοπτω meaning to strike or to be blunted with the thought being the person was smitten in his ear and thus deprived of that sense. The term μογιλαλον means “speaking with difficulty,” not “speechless” (αλαλος). So, in both cases this individual did at one time possess these powers but through some event lost them. Also, note that the people who brought the man beseeched Jesus to physically lay hands upon him (επιθη αυτω την χειρα). (ref Jairus’ request to Jesus to lay hands on his daughter, 5:23).

He took him aside... Jesus, possibly seeing in the man some reason why this particular cure should not be done in public, judged it best that the cure should be private. This withdrawal from the crowd would offer a sense of solemnity and perhaps Jesus saw in him a sense of pride that would render anything like a public act of healing hurtful to the man.

And looking up to heaven He sighed... The man’s condition most likely affected his ability to understand what power he was submitting himself to so Jesus’ heavenward look may have been intended *silently* to lift the man’s heart and faith to God and show him that he was receiving a gift from above?

The Greek verb used *εστεναξεν* (sighed) means to *groan* because of pressure of being *exerted forward* or (figuratively) to feel pressure from what is *coming on* – which can be intensely pleasant or anguishing (depending on the context). Scholars offer several insights into Jesus’ action here.

1. An act of genuine sorrow in sympathy with human suffering, expressed His pity for the miseries of suffering in this life, and His compassion with the afflicted in their afflictions, as one who would be touched with the feeling of their infirmities.
2. Not that He resented to do him this kindness, but because of the many temptations which he would be exposed to, and the sins he would be in danger of after the restoring his speech and hearing to him, sins of which before he was free from.

While Mark records the physical acts of Jesus’ touch, Mark is clear to point out that the complete healing occurred at the moment (*ευθεως*) of Jesus’ uttering of the Aramaic *Ephphatha*.

Once again Jesus sternly commands them to observe the Messianic Secret but to no avail at the people spread the word of His healing power.

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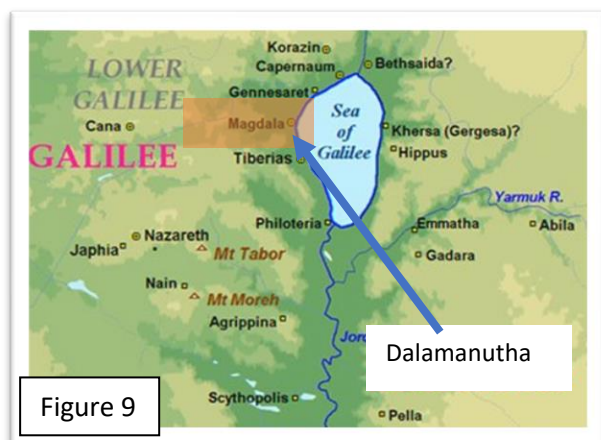
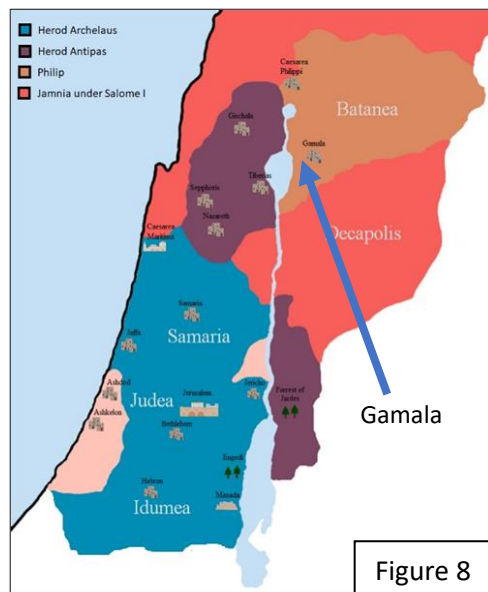
Mark Chapter 8

In this chapter we have the second miracle of the loaves, continued dealing with the Pharisees and the restoration of a blind man. Also, this chapter is the beginning of Jesus preparing His disciples for His upcoming passion and for what lies ahead for His disciples.

Verses 8:1-10 Second Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes

Both Mark and Matthew record both miracles of the loaves in each of their Gospels. Some scholars believe that this story is another version of the feeding of the five thousand, recorded earlier, (6:30-44). A closer look shows several differences in detail, not to mention that it would make no sense for Mark or Matthew to tell the same story twice in his own manuscript. The crowd that followed Jesus was hungry for the Word of God to the point where they forgot about their physical needs and followed Him into the desert to hear every word that came out of the Lord's mouth.

The feeding of the 5,000 took place near Bethsaida, close to the Sea of Galilee. In contrast, evidence points to the fact that most likely the feeding of the 4,000 took place in the **Tetrarchy of Phillip** just north of the Decapolis border, perhaps not far from the mountain town of Gamala, which became famous as "the Masada of the north" during the war Israel had against Rome later in the 1st Century. This would align with Mark's comments that it was far enough away from the shore of the Sea of Galilee to be considered a desert area, but close enough so that, with some provisions, the people could return to their homes and Jesus and His disciples to the shore and take the boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee at



Dalamanutha (verse 8:10). According to Mark once again a great crowd gathered (παλλιν πολλου οχλου). From His cures of the sick at Gennesaret to the healing of the deaf and dumb man Jesus and His disciples have had very little rest, if any. At the end of a three day journey into the desert with nothing to eat (ουκ εχουσιν τι φαγωσιν) both the Man Jesus and his disciples must have been exhausted, although they must have had some provisions since Mark records that the disciples had seven loaves and a few small fishes. Keep in mind that the loaves of this time period were about the size of a Belgian waffle. Traveling with so little food is a testimony to the people's desire to be with Jesus and hear His message.

It is interesting and a bit comical to note that even after the disciples had recently witnessed Jesus feed 5000, they again asked Him "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" And once again as He did with the Feeding of the 5000, Jesus asks the disciples; "How many loaves do you have?" Mark adds this question not because Jesus did not know, but as before, Mark included the question so there would be no mistake about the miraculous nature of the feeding. The additional two loaves and a somewhat smaller multitude (4000 people rather than the previous 5000) this does not, in the smallest degree, affect the character of the miracle.

With regards to making comparisons with the numbers of loaves, 5 versus 7, there have been attempts to symbolically associate these with the Torah (5 Books of Moses) and 7 as the number of perfection or the days of Creation. We must be careful to not excessively ponder as to the exact quantities but to focus on what is important which is that the quantities were clearly too small to have feed so many people and still have leftovers.

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Verses 8:1-10 The Pharisees Test Jesus Again

After crossing over to Dalamanutha near the region of Magdala a delegation of Pharisees, probably sent from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus' activities, approaches Him and asks Him to perform a sign or miracle which Mark tells us that they did this "to test Him." This demand by the Pharisees for a sign is significant enough to be recorded in all four gospels.

Once again Mark uses the word *αναστεναξας*, (verse 8:12) the same as He did with the deaf and dumb man He healed (verse 7:34), however in this case Mark records that Jesus groaned (or sighed in His spirit) indicating a deep and intense anguish. This reaction of Jesus could also be impatience which He always showed towards those lacking in faith or in those who believe they can possess faith. The unbelief of the Pharisee's was deep even after having witnessed or at least known of Jesus' ongoing miracles and healings. John in his Gospel speaks to this when he writes that the difficulty lies in the will, not the intellect, as far as acceptance of the 'signs' of Jesus is concerned (Jn. 7:17).

Mark makes it clear that the Pharisees had no intention to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and that they only asked for a sign with the intent to accuse Him. At a previous occasion they had suggested that Jesus' power to perform miracles was satanic in origin (verse 3:22). Jesus' sighing could also be His sadness that while to those He had healed He simply said "Get out!" But what could be said to those who have become spiritually hardened and self-imprisoned. Jesus Himself was the true Sign from heaven, the living Witness to the living and ever-present God.

If the Pharisees could not see that He was in the Father and the Father in him, then their blindness would remain. Ans so the only answer to be given was one of frustration; *"Why does this generation ask for a sign? And an emphatic rejection of their request which would have no effect on them; Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it."*

Verses 8:14-21 The Disciples Lack of Understanding and the Yeast of the Pharisees

Jesus' frustration and impatience are then carried over to His disciples when they mistake Jesus' comment about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod for their lack of bread. He even accuses them of being *"hardened of heart"* (*πεπρωμενην εχετε την καρδιαν υμων*) which recall He called the disciples after the first miracle of the loaves (verse 6:52). Jesus' use of the term *"yeast"* was as a metaphor for something that spreads, just as today we would use the negative image of cancer, in this case cynicism, hypocrisy and disbelief being the yeast or cancer that is spreading. Jesus desires that His disciples, who will soon take over His earthly ministry, will awaken to the threat of this Pharisaic leaven that is closer to them than they realize.

In helping the disciples to understand Jesus specifically points out the two distinct terms for the baskets used to collect the leftovers from each miracle. In the first Miracle of the Loaves the term is *κοφινους* which is a small wicker-basket used for carrying food, whereas in the second miracle the term used is *σπιριδας* which is a larger plaited basket such as a hamper, similar to what St Paul was lowered in in Acts 9:25 indicating a much larger quantity of leftovers.

Finally, Mark ends this story very abruptly with Jesus saying to the disciples, *"Do you still not understand!"* Matthew on the other hand softens this and presents the disciples in a better light adding the additional sentence, *"Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

Verses 8:22-26 The Healing of the Blind Man in Bethsaida

One scholar comments on the placement of this next miracle, which is recorded only in Mark, saying;

"The disciples had been blinded to spiritual truths by their constant preoccupation with their own immediate bodily needs. It was only fitting therefore that the next miracle should be the opening of the eyes of the physically blind man of Bethsaida, as a picture of what God would yet do for them. It is also fitting that the story which follows (8:27-30), should contain the account of the opening of the eyes of Peter to the Messiahship of Jesus, and that

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chapter 9 should contain the story of the transfiguration... and that this particular miracle, naturally enough, occurred in Bethsaida, the home town of Peter (Jn. 1:44)."

Like the earlier healing of the deaf and dumb man (verse 7:32-33) the people of the town bring the afflicted man to Jesus and Jesus takes him away from the crowds. This healing is another case where Jesus makes use of spittle to effect the cure.

Healing properties, especially in eye-diseases, were ascribed to saliva by the Jews and the early Christians as well as by the Greeks and Romans. The power of curing eye-diseases with saliva was stated in certain part of the Talmud and was even ascribed to the emperor Vespasian. In Chapter 7 of his book Natural History (circa 77AD), Pliny the Elder writes on the properties of human spittle.

But it is the fasting spittle of a human being, that is, as already stated by us, the sovereign preservative against the poison of serpents; while, at the same time, our daily experience may recognize its efficacy and utility, in many other respects. We are in the habit of spitting, for instance, as a preservative from epilepsy, or in other words, we repel contagion thereby in a similar manner... On the same principle, it is the practice in all cases where medicine is employed, to spit three times on the ground, and to conjure the malady as often; the object being, to aid the operation of the remedy employed.

In recent times a report by scientists from the Netherlands identifies the compound histatin, a small protein in human saliva, greatly speeds wound healing.

Details in this healing indicate that the man's blindness was not from birth; "...men look like trees" and that his sight was "restored" (αποκατεσταθη). Unlike other healing Jesus performed, this healing occurred in stages. Mark records that Jesus literally spit (πτυσας) into the man's face and then applied His touch to the man's eyes. Jesus asks the man to relate what he sees, and he reports partial healing saying he sees "the" men but as trees. Jesus, a second time, applies His touch to the man's eyes and a total cure (τηλαυγως απαντας) is effected. Some scholars suggest that the various stages in which this miracle occurred were meant as a means to build up the man's faith.

With Jesus' command to "not even enter into the village" on his way home Jesus returns to the "Messianic Secret."

Verses 8:27-30 Peter's Profession of Faith

Jesus and His disciples now set out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi (Figure 10) located in the northwest section of the tetrarchy of Philip (figure 11) which was designated Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. Jesus' question to the

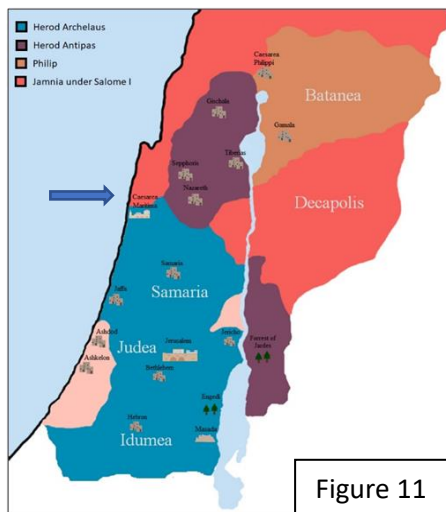


Figure 11

disciples, "Who do people say I am?", was purposeful so as to hear how the disciples were affected by the predominant thoughts about who Jesus was.

Note that Jesus was not interested in the opinions of the Jewish clergy (Pharisees, Scribes and Rabbis), but the opinions of the people to which Mark lists some of the prevailing views of the time.

These included the Jewish belief that the soul of one of the ancient prophets had entered into Christ, according to the Greek idea of the transmigration of souls. Or perhaps they thought that one of the



Figure 10

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prophets had risen again in the person of Jesus as Herod himself had intimated this very idea. Others thought that Jesus was Elijah because it was known that Elijah had not died (2 Kings 2:11) and that there was an expectation that he would return (Malachi 4:5). This first question then led directly into Christ's second and more important question; "υμεις δε τινα με λεγετε ειναι?" (Who do YOU say I am?) The pronoun "you" at the beginning of this question indicates Jesus' emphasis on His desire to know what His disciples believed.

Peter, typical of his impulsive nature, is the first to speak proclaiming, "συ ει ο χριστος!" (You are the Messiah (Christ)) to which Matthew completes with "ο υιος του θεου του ζωντος." (The Son of the living God). The confession of Peter is the first fundamental Christian confession of faith, and the germ of the Apostles' Creed.

Although Mark stops at this point, Matthew's gospel adds what will become the focal point for the claim of the Catholic Church as the universal Church, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*"

Jesus' prohibition to the disciples to maintain the Messianic Secret would almost certainly be related to the political expectations the people had about what the Messiah would do when He came. Mainly that, as Moses did for the Israelites of that time, the Messiah would deliver Israel from Roman imperialism and restore the Davidic kingdom. Apparently even the disciples had similar thoughts, as is evident from their question after Jesus' resurrection: "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6)

Verses 8:31-38 First Prophecy of the Passion

With this confession and understanding, Jesus now begin to teach His disciples what the Son of Man would suffer and what would be expected of them. Jesus' bold and open speaking (παρησια), especially concerning His death, must have been alarming to hear as evidenced by Peter taking Jesus aside with a strong and aggressive personal interest (προσλαβανω).

St. Paul would later write to the Corinthians about this lack of understanding saying: "*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*"

The subsequent force of Jesus' rebuke to Peter is harsher than anything Jesus had said or would say to the Jewish leadership. For this reason, it is believed that Peter's action of challenging Christ was not the mind of Peter enlightened by the Holy Spirit, but the mind of the enemy. In this way Peter could be addressed by Jesus directly as Satan. Christ saw this as the same temptation that fell from the lips of Satan in the wilderness when he offered to surrender the kingdoms of this world to Jesus.

Jesus then speaks about the condition and severity of following Him; deny himself, pick up his cross and follow me.

- The **denial** in Greek is rendered as απαρνησασθω. This word is a combination of the preposition από (away from) and αρνέομαι (to deny). The combination greatly emphasizes the denial to the point of utter refusal to recognize the original source involved. This original source is man's selfish nature, natural motives, and impulses (Rom. 6:6) which he should reject and become dead to so far as they come into conflict with Christ-like behavior.
- The **cross** is the pain of our self-denial. The cross is the symbol of our suffering sacrifice, to the point of laying down our lives. Ever since, Christ's crucifixion on the cross, the cross has stood as the emblem, not of suffering and humiliation, but of suffering for the sake of Christ and his Gospel.
- **Following Him** is to be obedient to His Gospel and to imitate Christ in our actions for whosoever does these things for the love of Christ, for the sake of preaching and advancing the gospel shall save his soul.

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Mark Chapter 9 The Transfiguration, Healing, and Continuing the Disciples Education

Verse 9:1 *“Some will not taste death...”*

Jesus closes His discussion with the disciples with a very cryptic statement; “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

The meaning of this statement, at the time, was clear as the Apostles and even Paul believed that this referred to Jesus’ Second Coming which was imminent. However, with the Second Coming not yet occurring speculation extended to this referring to His resurrection, His ascension, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the spread of Christianity, or the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

However, it seems probable that the placement of the Transfiguration event immediately after Jesus’ teaching to His disciples about His upcoming Passion are a foretaste of His second- coming glory. Further support of this is the fact that all 3 synoptic gospels use the same sequence of Transfiguration immediately after the Passion prophesy.

St Cyril supports this when he writes about Jesus’ statement saying;

“But by the kingdom of God He means the sight of the glory in which He will appear at His manifestation to the inhabitants of earth: for He will come in the glory of God the Father, and not in low estate like unto us.”

Verse 9:2-8 **Transfiguration Event**

Orthodox Theology emphasizes the uncreated light that came out of the Lord Jesus Christ on the mountain. This light was only his divine nature. Christ gathers in his person the divine nature and the human one, and both are perfect in him.

Commentary on *why Jesus transfigures before the Apostles* (Excerpt from a Sermon by St. Ephraim the Syrian)

He led them up to the mountain to show them the glory of the Godhead and make known to them that He is the redeemer of Israel, as He has shown through the prophets, and that they should not be scandalized in Him when they see His voluntary suffering, which as man he was about to suffer for us. For they knew Him as a man, but did not know that He was God. They knew Him as Son of Mary, going about with them in the world and He made known to them on the mountain that He was the Son of God and God. He led them up to the mountain and showed them His kingship before His passion, and His power before His death, and His glory before His disgrace and His honor before His dishonor so that when He was arrested and crucified by the Jews, they might know that He was not crucified through weakness, but willingly by His good pleasure for the salvation of the world.

Commentary on the *presence of Moses and Elijah* (Pulpit Commentary⁴)

Moses and Elijah were there because Moses was the lawgiver of the old covenant, and Elijah was conspicuous among the prophets; so that they were the representatives of the other of the goodly fellowship of the prophets. They appear together to bear witness to Christ as the true Messiah, the Savior of the world, prefigured in the Law, and foretold by the prophets. They appear to bear witness to him, and then to resign their offices to the great Lawgiver and Prophet whom they foreshadowed. Then, further, Moses died, but Elijah was translated. Moses, therefore, represents the dead saints who shall rise from their graves and come forth at his coming, while Elijah represents those who shall be found alive at his advent.

Commentary on the *Voice from Heaven* (Excerpt from Homily by St. Cyril of Alexandria)

But besides the wonderful and ineffable sight of Christ’s glory, something else was done, useful and necessary for the confirmation of their faith in Him: and not for the disciples only, but even for us too. For a voice was given forth from the cloud above, as from God the Father, saying: “This is My beloved Son, hear Him. And when there was the voice,” it says, “Jesus was found alone.” What then will he whose heart is incurable, say to these things? Lo! Moses

⁴ The **Pulpit Commentary** is a homiletic commentary on the Bible created during the 19th century under the direction of Rev. Joseph S. Exell and Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones. It consists of 23 volumes written over a 30-year period with 100 contributors.

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is there, and does the Father command the holy apostles to hear him? If it had been His will that they should follow the commandments of Moses, He would have said, I suppose, Obey Moses; keep the law. But this was not what God the Father here said, but in the presence of Moses and the prophets, He commands them rather to hear Him. And that the truth might not be subverted by any, affirming that the Father rather bade them hear Moses, and not Christ the Savior of us all, the Evangelist has clearly marked it, saying, "When there was the voice, Jesus was found alone." When therefore God the Father, from the cloud overhead, commanded the holy apostles, saying, "Hear Him," Moses was far away, and Elijah too was no longer nigh; but Christ was there alone. Him therefore He commanded them to obey. For He [Christ] also is the end of the law and the prophets...

Verses 9:9-13 The Question of Elijah

The appearance of Elijah upon the mountain had raised a question in the minds of the disciples who witnessed the transfiguration. According to Jewish tradition Elijah still to appear, not merely in a vision, but in bodily form, to usher in the messianic age? Elijah the Prophet is one of the most beloved prophets in the Old Testament and his life is chronicled in Kings I and King II which tells of the miracles he performed and his dramatic ascent to heaven. According to Jewish tradition, Elijah frequently comes down to earth to help Jews in distress or reveal secrets of the Torah to Jewish scholars and he is present at the Passover Seder. At the end of his book, the prophet Malachi states that God "will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes," announcing the arrival of **Moshiach** (the Messiah).

Jesus' answer to His disciples was another question with the purpose of linking both the 'Son of Man' and 'Elijah Return' with the 'suffering Servant' of Isaiah 53:3. Jesus agreed with the prophesy of Malachi 4:5 pronouncing its fulfillment in John the Baptist, but also showed the parallelism between John and Himself. In rejecting John, the Pharisees and scribes had rejected God's counsel making it all the more sure that they would reject the Messiah when He came.

Verses 9:14-29 Healing of the demon possessed (epileptic) boy

The Crowds Meet Jesus Once again Mark relates that the crowds (οχλον πολύν) were waiting for Jesus and His disciples as they came down from the mountain after the Transfiguration event, in fact Mark states they ran to them. As for Mark comment that the people were amazed to many scholars it seems most probable that they saw in Jesus' countenance heavenly and majestic traces of the glory of His transfiguration, even as the face of Moses shone when he came down from the mountain (Exodus 34:29-30). John Schultz, in his commentary on Mark points out the great contrast of the brilliantly white glory which was manifested on the mount of transfiguration with the darkness found at the foot of the mountain, in the valley.

The Boy's Symptoms Described As for the symptoms the man describes with reference to his son (verse 18) they are those of violent convulsions, and indicative of epilepsy, which in this case seems to be complicated with insanity. Luke uses the word *σπαράσσει* (to convulse) Mark (verse 20) uses the stronger compound word *συνεσπαράξεν*. Matthew adds that the child was "lunatic," or epileptic, but adds that the lunacy was the work of a demon. These symptoms of epilepsy, were well known among the ancient Greeks and Romans and was considered a sacred disease brought on by supernatural power or of evil omen and these people were described as lunatics (as in Matthew) or "moonstruck."

Inability of the Disciples to Cast Out Demons There must have been something particular about this possession since the man stated that "*I asked your disciples to cast it out and they were unable.*" Recall that in verse 6:13 when Jesus sent out His disciples, they were able to cast out demons on their own. Mark's comment about the arguing between the scribes and disciples could indicate that the scribes were questioning the abilities of Jesus' disciples. Just as it was when Jesus became frustrated with His disciples after the second miracle of the loaves ([verse 8:17](#)) Jesus' answer here is again clearly one of frustration. However, it does offer some insight into why the disciples could not succeed when He states "*You unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?*"

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Jesus' Question The father, after describing his boy's condition says to Jesus; "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." While some might judge the father for his doubts, it could be that the unsuccessful experience with the disciples, who probably assured the man that they could heal the sick and cast out demons, could have dramatically affected the father's faith. This could be supported by his later statement; "I do believe."

Jesus' Answer Jesus' answer [το ει δυνη – verse 9:23] has in some translations come across as an indignant exclamation, "If I can!" As the original text does not provide punctuation the reading could also be offered as; "You have inquired about ability and whether any help is possible, (But if you can do anything...help us) but you have stated the question incorrectly. The question of ability is in you, not in me." (Everything is possible for one who believes). This understanding would also more closely match previous responses of Jesus to similar situations (John 5:6, Matt 8:3, Luke 18:41). Jesus, through this verse and the other related verses is saying to us; "The power is sufficient on my part; is it on yours? I can give, but can you receive?"

The Father's Answer "I believe, help me in my unbelief." In this response the father, in answer to Jesus' response indicates that he has belief, however he acknowledges that this faith is unable to singly bring about a cure for his son. A rendering might be "Even though my faith is a weak faith, do not wait for something better, but grant my prayer. Do not sternly judge my faith, but help me as I am."

Jesus Commands the Demon The significance of the casting out of this particular demon is evidenced by two (2) critical differences that are not seen in other exorcisms by Jesus.

1. "I command you, come out of him..." While not evident in the translation, the Greek here is unique in the use of the specific pronoun "I" as Jesus states "...εγω σοι επιτασσω εξελθε εξ αυτου..." In other commands such as verses 1:25 and 5:42 the specific pronoun "I" is not used.
2. "...and never enter him again." This phrase is only used here and may have been necessary to ward off future demonic influences which a young boy who would not have the maturity to defend himself against. The support for this is given in Luke 11:24-26 which indicates a possibility of a return of the demons.

The Question from the Disciples Why were we unable to drive it out? This question had already been answered by Jesus' previous exclamation; "You unbelieving generation!" Mark shows us here again the many evidences of the disciple's slowness, with which Jesus had to be patient. Some have commented that perhaps unbelief never fully understands its own failures but supposes there must be some reason for them to be sought.

A final note on this pericope. The final verse, most protestant Bibles read; "This kind can come out only by prayer."

The Orthodox and Catholic Bibles have the addition of "...and fasting." Below is the actual text from the Codex Sinaiticus which is one of the oldest extent manuscripts. The red box in figure shows the addition of "...and fasting" that appears to be written in text not matching the original.

So which version is correct?

In Chapter 2 recall the discussion on fasting where the Pharisees were questioning Jesus on why His disciples did not fast. Jesus' answer was "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast

while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them." It could be that the disciples were not fasting for that reason. Also, for this particular situation they would not have had the opportunity to fast in advance.

Verses 9:30-32 The Second Prophecy of the Passion and Jesus Continuing to Teach the Disciples

Back in verses 8:31-33 Mark related Jesus' first prophecy of His upcoming Passion. In this we see that the disciples, and especially Peter, did not understand what Jesus was prophesizing. Here in this second prophecy we have a very similar situation where the disciples are still not understanding His purpose in coming into the world. The

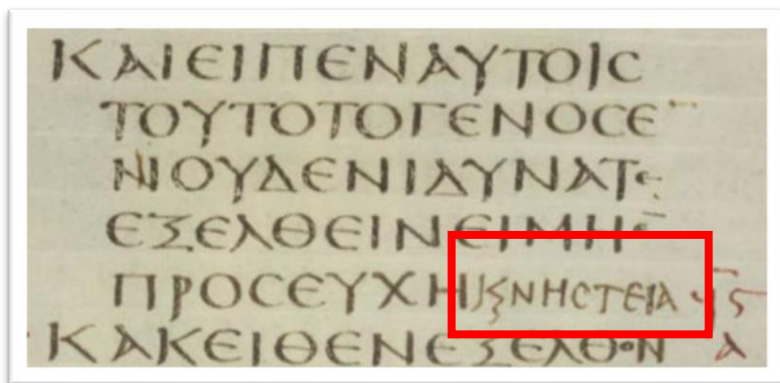


Figure 12

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word Mark uses here for “*did not understand*” is “*ἠγνοοῦν*” which is imperfect active tense indicating that this lack of understanding has been continuous in the past and is continuing. The addition of “*and they were afraid to ask Him*” would indicate that the disciples were aware of their continuing lack of understanding.

Verses 9:33-34 illustrate the disciples arguing amongst one another, however a better translation of the Greek word *διαλογίζομαι* would be *to deliberate by reflection and/or discussion* and is the source of our word “dialogue.” This would better fit the source of their discussion and lack of understanding of Jesus’ mission. As the disciples were still being affected by worldly ambitions (ref: [Verses 8:14-21](#)) they were expecting, as was typical of the time, a rapid establishment of a royal Messianic throne on the earth that would grant to them some form of worldly royalty, so that the discussion among them concerned which of them should be the great ministers of the Messianic King.

Jesus’ response to this, “*Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all*” (verse 35) speaks directly to the disciples misunderstanding and pride, and to all of us that the desire to be first is self-seeking and exactly opposite to the spirit which is the law of Christ’s kingdom. The Kingdom that Jesus was speaking of is one of perfect love, self-denial, and humility. He who has as his master ambition, greed, vainglory, and self-pride has less of Christ’s kingdom. This verse speaks to this danger of wanting to be first since the Greek verb used for “be” in this verse is *ἔσται* is *future tense* so that a better translation would be; “*Anyone who wants to be first will be made last, and the servant of all.*”

In verses 9:37 and 42, Jesus speaks about children and metaphorically wants to compare the innocence of children with the “*hardening of the heart*” that often times occurs as we become adults. Fr. Alexander Goussetis gives a wonderful interpretation of this when he tells us:

We must make a distinction between the terms childlike and childish. Those of you who have children or grandchildren know that childish behavior includes conduct that is self-centered and disobedient. Those with childlike qualities, on the other hand, reveal basic Christian characteristics. For example:

- *Children recognize their dependence on others and look for help from others.*
- *Children unimpressed with rank or title. They tend to be less prejudiced than adults can be.*
- *Children are honest with their feelings. They hold nothing back in expressing themselves.*
- *Children are inquisitive. They are constantly learning and growing and excited about new experiences.*
- *Children find it easier to trust others more than adults do. (although this is becoming more difficult)*
- *Children are naturally joyful and playful. They behave as if they are seeing things for the first time.*

Although we can never be children again, Jesus is calling us to cultivate childlike qualities in our relationship with God. Think for a moment about how you relate with God. As you reflect on your connection with God, in what ways are you still trusting, honest with your feelings, inquisitive, joyful, and pure of heart? Sometimes as adults, we intellectualize our faith. Children, on the other hand, have the ability to perceive without understanding, to feel without analyzing.

Verse 9:38-41 Anyone Not Against Us is For Us When the disciples told Jesus that they attempted to stop the man working in the name of Jesus they received an unexpected answer, “*Do not restrain him.*” There are many examples in Church history where men and women have been wrongfully punished by Church authorities for taking a different path of evangelizing Christ. We have seen in previous chapters how Jesus Himself was persecuted by the Jewish authorities for how He handled certain situations.

Note that Jesus do not say the antagonistic version of this, that is; “*Anyone who is not with us is against us.*” This phrase is seen today in the form of various Christian denominations, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox, arguing about which one will lead to salvation. Often times rather than working together and understanding that there are many paths for someone to come to Christ, we condemn each other. This is why Orthodox Theology never states that we HAVE the truth, only that we have the FULLNESS of the Truth. The lesson to be learned, however, is that there is no such thing as neutrality in reference to Christ.

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Verse 9:48 Where the worms that eat them do not die and the fire is not quenched.

This is a recollection of a vision taken from the prophesy of Isaiah 66:22-24 where God speaks about judgement and hope for Israel;

“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure. ²³From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord. ²⁴“And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who



Figure 13b



Figure 13a

rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

Gehenna, or the Valley of Hinnom (figure 12a), lay to the south of Jerusalem. Originally a pleasant suburb of the city, it became in later times the scene of the worship of Canaanite god Molech which demanded child sacrifice. King Josiah then destroyed the temples and altars of Molech (2 Kings 23:10)

and it then became the receptacle of waste for everything that was vile and filthy, even unto today (figure 12b). These accumulations were from time to time consumed by fire; and the things which were not consumed by fire were the prey of worms. Hence ‘Gehenna’ became the image of the place of eternal punishment, where *‘the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’* These terrible images became one vision of the eternity of future punishment and are the symbols of certain dreadful realities; too dreadful for human language of Jesus’ time for human thought to conceive.”

Verse 9:49-50 The Seasoning of Salt

In this verse Mark provides continuity of thought between verse 48 (*...and the fire is not quenched*) and verse 49 (*for everyone will be seasoned with fire...*) which is very strong. Mark ties salt and fire together through their purifying effect. Salt is used to preserve certain foods to avoid decay and loss of flavor while other things are cleaned by heat. Historically salt was connected with the making of a covenant relation between God and Israel (Lev. 2:13 and Num. 18:19). Additionally, while both salt and fire are painful, correctly used they can be healing and purifying. Sodium salts provide a moist environment for the healing process and salt pulls the water out of some bacteria thus dehydrating and killing them and fire or heat is used to cauterize wounds to promote faster healing.

This idea of salt as a purifying agent is a metaphor that Jesus is using to let His disciples understand how they must undergo a discipline of suffering as they will be put through the “fire” of ridicule, torture, and for many of them ultimately death as they continue His work. Jesus is saying that this purification must happen if they are to avoid the [hardening of their hearts](#) and that they will see their Master endure the same suffering as they will.

While salt is good, it can lose its virtue, and become useless and once spoiled can never have its saltiness restored. If the disciples “lose their saltiness” through hardened hearts or worldly things then this can destroy, or spoil, their discipleship which makes them “useless” for saving others from the corruption of the world. Human striving cannot restore ‘saltiness’ only the Creator can renew that. Finally, Jesus tells His disciples to “be at peace with one other” and maintain brotherly relations with one another, thus avoiding selfish and vain discussions such as those the disciples engaged in previously (verse 9:34).

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Mark Chapter 10

Marriage, Riches, and a Third Passion Prophecy

Verse 10:1-12

Marriage and Divorce

While Mark records the Pharisee's question to Jesus as "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?", Matthew records the question quite differently, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife *for any and every reason?*" According to The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, in Jesus' time there were two schools with different opinions on the matter in Jesus' day.

- The Pharisees and scribes who followed Hillel⁵ held that a man could divorce his wife for almost any cause.
- The followers of Shammai⁶, on the other hand, insisted that divorce was lawful only in case of adultery."

The law of Moses reads (Deut 24:1-4): *"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."*

A commentary on the term "indecent" is given by Rabbinical Professor Zev Falk who described Biblical (Mosaic) divorce as the *"arbitrary, unilateral, private act of the husband."* The husband initiated and executed the divorce at his will and in accordance with his subjective evaluation of the nature and quality of his marriage.

This arbitrary definition of "indecent" left opportunity for situations which some men took advantage of. Jesus, by saying *"it was because you were so hardhearted..."* brought out that the law that permitted divorce did not reflect God's original intent about marriage as defined in Genesis, but was an accommodation to a Fallen world and human sinful inclination thus pointing out an imperfection in the Mosaic Law to accommodate the fallen state of mankind.

The Disciples Question Jesus Further Only in Mark do we read of the later inquiry to Jesus by the disciples (verses 10:10-12) and Jesus' response is very blunt and is God's absolute standard and intention. Matthew, in his tradition of softening the Gospel, adds the qualifier "μη επι πορνεια – except in the case of immoral activity" (verse 19:9)

By the time of the 1st century divorce among both Jew and Pagan was becoming increasingly common as was immoral behavior. The many admonitions from St. Paul in his letters to the Graeco-Roman Gentile church clearly reflect this. Jesus seems to anticipate that a divorced person will remarry (verse 11) and while we should not water down the words of Jesus, the Orthodox Church sees this in the light of a willful divorce or more correctly stated; "situations where the couple's marriage has experienced a spiritual death."

In his writing entitled *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*, John Meyendorff offers the position of the Orthodox Church regarding divorce;

But, of course, she [Church] never encourages any remarriage—we have seen that even in the case of widowers—because of the eternal character of the marriage bond; but only tolerates it when, in concrete cases, it appears as the best solution for a given individual. The indissolubility of marriage does not imply the total suppression of human freedom. Freedom implies the possibility of sin, as well as its consequences. Ultimately, sin can destroy marriage. The Church, therefore, neither "recognized" divorce, nor "gave" it. Divorce was considered as a grave sin; but the Church never failed in giving to sinners a "new chance," and was ready to readmit them if they

⁵ Hillel the Elder is one of the best-known sages of the Talmud and lived during the 1st century. He served as head of the Sanhedrin, the ancient rabbinic tribunal, and was the founder of the House of Hillel, a school of Jewish law famous for its disputes with the rival House of Shammai.

⁶ Shammai was a Jewish scholar of the 1st century, and an important figure in Judaism's core work of rabbinic literature, the Mishnah. Shammai was the most eminent contemporary of Hillel.

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repented. Of course, in each particular case pastoral counseling and investigation should make sure that reconciliation is impossible; and the “*permission to remarry*” should entail at least some forms of penance (in conformity with each individual case) and give the right to a Church blessing according to the rite of “second marriage.”

In accordance with Orthodox Church Canon Law and the November 1973 encyclical of His Eminence, Archbishop Iakovos, Ecclesiastical Permission to Remarry is granted when;

1. a marriage is entered into by force, blackmail or false reasons.
2. one or both parties is guilty of adultery.
3. one party is proven to be mad, insane or suffers from a social disease which was not disclosed to the spouse prior to the marriage.
4. one party has conspired against the life of the spouse.
5. one party is imprisoned for more than seven years.
6. one party abandons the other for more than three years without approval.
7. one partner should be absent from home without the other's approval, except in instances when the latter is assured that such absence is due to psycho-neurotic illness.
8. one partner forces the other to engage in illicit affairs with others.
9. one partner does not fulfill the responsibilities of marriage, or when it is medically proven that one party is physically impotent or as the result of a social venereal disease.
10. one partner is an addict, thereby creating undue economic hardship.

Verses 10:13-16 Jesus and the Children

Mark uses the Greek word ἐπιτιμησαν when describing the action of the disciples when the people brought the children to Jesus the disciples. Many texts translate this harshly as “scolded” or “rebuked” but this is not always the correct translation. At its root, the word means to *warn so as to prevent something from going wrong*.

The disciples seem to have had a problem accepting children as genuine members of the kingdom and in fact had already been cautioned about their treatment of children (Matt. 18:10-14). In the previous chapter Jesus took a child and used it as an object lesson of humility. Here the child becomes an example of citizenship with that citizenship being of the Kingdom of Heaven. As Jesus taught in that previous encounter with the child, the attitude of the child is one of dependence and as members of the kingdom, we must realize our dependence on Christ. This will be made clear by Jesus in verse 10:27.

Francis Nathan Peloubet, a 19th century US pastor was enthusiastic about the importance of Sunday school to educate a new generation of Christians. Around 1872, he began to write quarterly Sunday school lessons published as an annual series entitled *Select Notes on the International Sabbath School Lessons*. Peloubet offers five (5) reasons for the Jesus’ indignation towards the disciples.

1. Jesus loved little children and rejoiced in their love.
2. They (disciples) were keeping away from him those who wanted to come to him, and for whom he died.
3. They were taking away those who were the hope of the church which they were appointed to build up.
4. The character of children is of that which is necessary to enter his kingdom.
5. They were hindering the best workers in his kingdom, the mothers.

Verses 10:17-27 The Use and Danger of Riches

Possibly inspired by Jesus’ comment about the children, Mark records that a man ran up to Jesus, kneeling before Him asking “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus’ reaction to the man calling Him “good” is

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remarkable since elsewhere Jesus says to His accusers: “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? Mark records Jesus response as “**Why do you call me good?**” so that the emphasis is on the person of Jesus, whereas Matthew records Jesus saying “**Why do you ask me about what is good?**” so that the emphasis is on the action. In addressing Jesus as “good teacher” the man is comparing Jesus to other (human) teachers. Jesus response forces the man to see goodness in relation to God, not to humans. Ultimately, it is the goodness of God that is the measure against which all human acts are will be judged. Also note that in accordance with the Messianic secret Jesus does not reveal to the man His divinity stating only that “No one is good—except God alone.”

Jesus then begins with the Law (Commandments) all of which are directed at Man’s relationship to his fellow Man. Note that “You shall not defraud” is an addition not mentioned in the 10 Commandments (or at the very least a form of the 10th Commandment). It is thought to be specifically directed at the man speaking with Jesus, especially since both Mark and Matthew record that “*he was a man of great wealth.*” Through Jesus’ mention of the commandments, He desires for the man to realize his lack of understanding of his own shortcomings. The man measures his own character against others and not against the character of God. Jesus wants the man to understand that **sin is more than a failure to obey the Law but is to fall short of the glory of God.** As St Paul points out in most of his letter, salvation cannot be attained merely by being good and that is what the man had strove to do all his life.

Out of love for the man (verse 10:21) Jesus gives the man a difficult command, that is “*Go and sell what you have and give the money to the poor.*” Scholars differ on the central message of Jesus’ instruction to the man. “**Give to the poor**” is directed at the man’s renunciation of his wealth in favor of the poor, while “**Go and sell what you have**” commands the man to renounce what has become for him a spiritual impediment.

While Jesus always showed concern for the poor the New Testament does not say that ‘God is on the side of the poor and the Bible does not associate righteousness with poverty. Additionally, wealth is not seen as necessarily sinful in the New Testament but as we will soon see, it can be a great responsibility. President John F. Kennedy commented on this in 1961, some weeks before being inaugurated the 35th President of the United States when he quoted Luke 12:48 before the Massachusetts State Legislature, “*For of those to whom much is given, much is required.*”

As Jesus does not accuse the man of acquiring his wealth at the expense of the poor, as many tax collectors did, the command of “**Give to the poor**” seems not to be the man’s impediment, however, verse 22 seems to indicate that “**Go and sell what you have**” was the more difficult prospect, especially with Mark’s comment regarding the enormity of his wealth. The man’s disappointment and departure prompts Jesus to make a general statement regarding the danger of riches as a stumbling block to the kingdom (verse 10:23). Sometimes wealth is not proof of God’s blessing but a test of stewardship. The Scottish writer George MacDonald suggested that sometimes God punishes people by making them rich.

The disciples’ amazement at this proclamation (verse 10:24) was most likely due to their Jewish concept of wealth being proof of God’s blessing. A key teaching of the Torah is that all wealth originates with God. This is seen in the words of warning from Moses to the Israelites when he tells them,

“When you have eaten your fill on the edge of the Promised Land, and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied . . . beware lest your heart grow haughty and . . . you say to yourselves, ‘My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.’ . . . Remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to get wealth . . .” (Deut 8:12-18).

Although it has become popular folklore to believe that Jesus’ comment regarding the camel passing through the eye of a needle (verse 10:25) which makes reference to a supposed small gate in Jerusalem though which camels would pass is dismissed by most Biblical scholars including Jerome and is only a metaphor meant to reflect the impossibility of the task.

Once again Mark uses the term ἐξεπλησσοῦντο (10:26) which he used several times previous to describe the reaction of the people to Jesus’ actions and now once again uses it to describe the disciples utter astonishment of

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Jesus' words. Jesus' reaction to this is very personal as Mark records "*εμβλεψας δε αυτοις ο Ιησους*" the verb here translated as "to look at in a *sustained, concentrated* way, with special "interest, love, or concern. A locked-in gaze." The magnitude of this look is better understood when compared to the exact same verb used in Luke 22:61 to describe how Jesus looked at Peter when he was being questioned regarding his personal knowledge of Jesus;

"Peter replied, "I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight (ενεβλεψεν) at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him..."

This very personal insight into Jesus' reaction lends more credence to the fact that Mark was indeed a scribe of Peter who would be able to dictate such an event in a very personal way. Additionally, in the successive verse it is Peter who speaks.

Seemingly Peter speaks for all the disciples (verse 10:28), in effect saying, "We have done what this man would not: we left our homes and our livelihoods behind to follow you Lord at great personal sacrifice." Here Peter is arguing the same thing that was being discussed back in verses 9:33-34. A self-seeking hope that their self-denial would bestow special honors in God's kingdom as Jesus' chosen disciples. While Mark implies this, it is brought forth directly in Matthew (verse 19:27) where he adds Peter also saying, "*What shall we have, therefore?*"

Jesus' answer is not a rebuke but an acknowledgement of what Peter is asking however Jesus wants to be clear that anyone who wishes to deny himself must do that for both Jesus *and* His gospel. Jesus, as the Word of God cannot be regarded apart from the gospel, nor can the gospel be regarded as a true object of sacrifice apart from Jesus. This is why, as Orthodox, we are not Sola Scriptura for the Gospel is not a book but a living Word. Jesus also points out that the hundredfold reward will also "come with persecutions."

Verses 10:32-34 The Third Prophecy of the Passion

This particular Passion Prophecy begins differently as Mark indicates that Jesus "was walking ahead of them" with a singular purpose. In fact Luke uses the phrase *προσωπον αυτου εστηριξεν* which translates to "He [Jesus] set His face resolutely, with conviction. This conviction indicates Jesus understood His destiny and was most likely the reason the disciples were amazed and fearful as they knew that Jerusalem was not a safe place for them to be recalling Jesus' words from the first (8:31) and second (9:31) passion prophecies. Of the three prophecies this is the clearest and the most complete explanation of the events to come (except for the method of death – crucifixion), preparing them, most of all, for His resurrection and the suffering that would befall the disciples. Jesus here also reveals that this persecution will come at the hands of the Gentiles as well as from the Jewish Councils (10:33).

Verses 10:35-45 The Request from the Sons of Zebedee

The theme of the disciple's desire regarding their positions in the coming kingdom of God (9:34) is once again clearly expressed through the bold request from the first-called disciples James and John. Matthew once again softens the selfishness of the request by stating that it was Salome, the mother of James and John, who requested the favor from Jesus (Matt 20:20-23). Either way, in light of Jesus' impending Passion we once again see, through this request, the lack of understanding from this inner circle of disciples who should have understood the immense gravity of what is to come, especially having been witnesses to the Transfiguration and are told by Jesus that "*you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Matt 19:28). Jesus' does not rebuke them but gives three answers⁷,

1. A place in the kingdom demands suffering
2. It is not Jesus' prerogative to determine status in the coming kingdom
3. Leadership in the kingdom means service

⁷ See Jerome Biblical Commentary, pg. 618

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Number 2 in particular, verse 40, *but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant*, was exploited by the Arians to imply the subordination of Jesus to God the Father thus supporting their claim of Jesus as a great prophet but not divine. However it was argued at the Ecumenical Councils that this was voluntary acceptance of this position by the Jesus in the person of the Son of God and that after His resurrection the divine attributes He had laid aside in His incarnation would be returned to Him.

The disciples answer to Jesus of “δυναμεθα – we are able” (10:39) when asked if they can endure the same “baptism” as that of their Lord is ironic in the face of their rejection of Christ during the trial and execution.

Verses 10:41-45 Christian Leadership

Having responded to James and John Jesus now addresses all the disciples with a reminder of what constitutes Christian service which begins with humility and love. Jesus makes the distinction between greatness and leadership of the world and greatness and leadership of the kingdom.

Greatness and leadership is presented in two degrees,

- a) “ος εαν θελη γενεσθαι μεγας εν υμιν εσται διακονος υμων” whosoever desires to become great among you must be your servant
- b) και ος αν θελη υμων γενεσθαι πρωτος εσται παντων δουλος whosoever of you desires to become first must be a servant to all

In these statements Jesus does not forbid or discourage such desires, but he proceeds to tell how a Christian should act on such desires. Jesus is not faulting power or authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical, which is exercised by rulers or bishops, or government but only condemns the arbitrary and corrupt exercise of such power, which the Jewish and Gentiles authorities were accustomed to. Even today the Orthodox Church is arranged not in a hierarchy but in a synodal manner so that no one bishop has more authority than another. Jesus offers Himself as the standard of Christian leadership when He says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (10:45)

Verse 10:46-52 Blind Man of Jericho

Jesus and His disciples now reach Jericho, the “City of Palm Trees,” situated fifteen to twenty miles northeast of Jerusalem, in the valley of Jordan, about seven miles north of the Dead Sea. Jericho was built by the Canaanites and is remembered in the Book of Joshua regarding its destruction by the Israelites in the Battle of Jericho. Excavations have revealed that Jericho is one of the earliest settlements dating back to 9000 BCE giving it the title of “oldest city in the world.” Jesus passed through Jericho twice, once when in this part of Mark and also in Luke when he converted Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10).

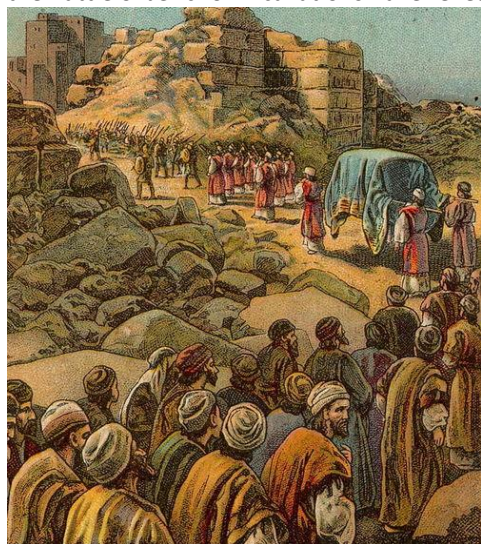


Figure 15 – Capture of Jericho

After the arrival of the Arabs in 638, the Jerusalem-Jericho road became one of the main routes used by the Arab travelers in their pilgrimages to Mecca. The Jerusalem-Jericho road was and still is one of the main paths across the Judean Desert and is where monks and hermits came to meditate and pray in the silence of the desert since the dawn of the Byzantine era.



Figure 14 – Map of Jericho

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The fact that Mark records that a “great crowd” was with Jesus and His disciples indicates that pilgrims were coming to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. The beggar Bartimaeus and his father Timaeus are named which is rare in the Gospels so that they both must have been well known at that time, (Bar meaning son of). Matthew in his account names two beggars but again this could be reconciled by the fact of Mark wishing to focus in on the healing of one of the beggars. Bartimaeus’ fervent desire to see Jesus shows he had heard enough about Jesus’ healings to give him hope. His use of the term Son of David (10:48) indicates that he had also heard enough to conclude that this Jesus was the promised Messiah.” Also notice the simplicity of the prayer similar to our own Jesus Prayer. Often times today we forgot the simplicity of prayer and like the Pharisees we make our prayers unnecessarily long (Matt 6:7)

The man’s voice must have been loud since we read that “Jesus hearing him stopped and told the crowd to bring the man to Him. Even after the crowd commands him to be quiet the blind man, in similar fashion to the Syrian Phoenician women in Mark 7:26-29 and the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8, cries out even louder to get the attention of Jesus. And so the same people who had told Bartimaeus to be quiet, now tell him “θάρσει - Have courage!”

Upon Jesus’ acknowledging the blind man, Bartimaeus did something that a blind person would not do, he throws his cloak aside.

Note regarding the Cloak.

A cloak was a wide vest that reached to the ankles and was worn as the outer garment, also called a robe or mantle and were worn by everyone including priests (Exodus 28:31), kings (1 Samuel 23:4–6), and women (2 Samuel 13:18).

The Mosaic law (Exodus 22:26–27) states that if a borrower gives a lender his cloak as surety against the loan, the lender must not keep it overnight, as it may be the only shelter the borrower has. When Paul, imprisoned in Rome he asks Timothy to bring him his cloak (2 Tim 4:13).

Thus, a blind person would be very particular about where he put certain things so that he would be able to retrieve them later by touch. It could be that because of his faith in the Son of David, the Messiah he knew that he would be able to return and find his cloak since he would be able to see where it had fallen.

Some has posited that the act of Bartimaeus throwing off his “garments” is a metaphor for a sinner throwing away everything that hinders their following of Christ. The cloak representing earthly treasures that are a stumbling block to he who wishes to be saved (ref the rich young man in verses 10:17-27). No man will be saved while sitting still and burdened with heavy loads.

The Healing of Bartimaeus

Again here, as we have seen Jesus do numerous times, He asks the obvious question, “What do you want me to do for you?” (verse 10:51). Jesus, as has been the case in most of His past miracles, wants to see an expression of faith on the part of the one seeking to be healed, as the healing is always one of body *and soul*. Notice also that the blind man’s request changes from his original and generic “*Have mercy on me!*” to a very specific “*I want to see!*”

While Matthew states that Jesus healed through touch (Matt 9:29), Mark gives no such indication only recording that Jesus said to the blind man “*Go your faith has healed you*” and immediately his sight was restored.

In his article *The Christian Event as an Encounter*, Fr. Luigi Giussani makes an interesting observation on this passage.

Faith is recognizing an exceptional Presence and adhering to what that Presence tells you about himself. Faith is a judgment — not an emotion — that affirms a reality, a Mystery, and your own limitation before it. To be saved is to be granted an escape from our own inability.

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Mark Chapter 11 The Entry into Jerusalem and Temple Encounters

Verses 11:1-10

The biblical story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is recorded in all four of the Gospels (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-38; and John 12:12-18) and is celebrated in all Christian expressions as Palm Sunday. Five days before the Passover, Jesus traveled to Bethany from Jericho and through the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem to complete His divine mission. Mark's writing in verses 11:1-11 clearly wants us to connect Jesus' actions with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

Entrance into Jerusalem

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you, righteous
and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Zechariah 9:9

The Greetings of the People

Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

Psalms 118:19-21

Jesus comes from the Mount of Olives

Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley...You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

Zechariah 14:3-5

Sending the disciples to fetch the colt and Samuel's prophecy to Saul

*When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"'
Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine. They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them.*

1 Samuel 10:2-4

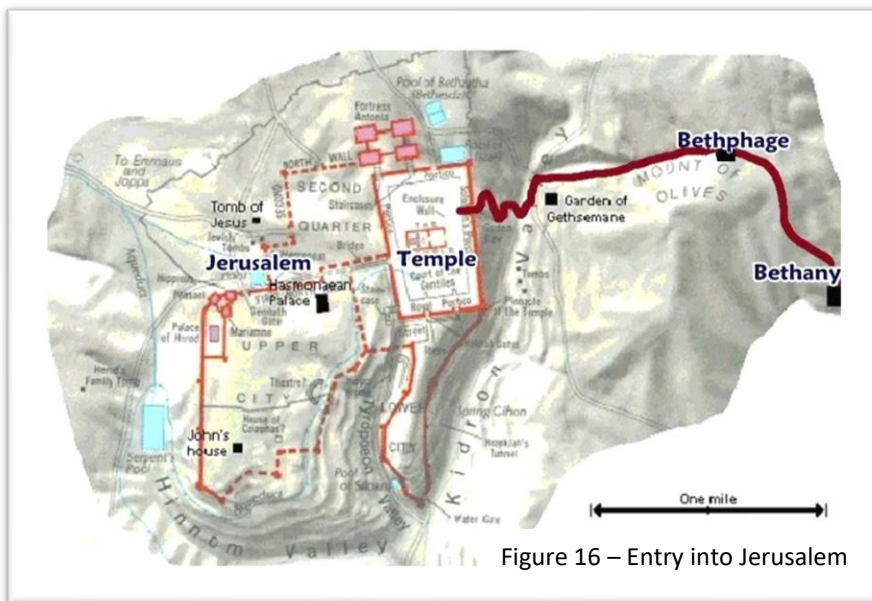


Figure 16 – Entry into Jerusalem

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While these prophecies would not have been recognized by a Gentile reader, certainly the Jews of this time would have seen Jesus enacting these events and thus envision the Lord as a divine warrior coming to begin the great eschatological battle and restore the nation of Israel.

The Mount of Olives rises 2,724 feet above the sea level and there were three paths, one on the north between two peaks of the hill, a second over the summit of the southern peak, and a third on the south around the slope, between the Mount of Olives and the Hill of Offence. This third path was the best and most frequented road and was the one taken by Jesus and His disciples.

Go and Find a colt...

Mark refers only to a single colt to be recovered by the disciples while Matthew states “...*you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her.*”

According to the teachings of Rabbi Lubavitcher, in Jewish tradition “*the donkey represents the essence of the messianic process: a process that began with the beginning of time and which constitutes the very soul of history. In the beginning, the Torah tells us, when G-d created the heavens and the earth, when the universe was still empty, unformed, and shrouded in darkness, the spirit of G-d hovered above the emerging existence. Says the Midrash: "The spirit of G-d hovered" — this is the spirit of Moshiach.*” For Moshiach represents the divine spirit of creation — the vision of the perfected world that is G-d's purpose in creating it and populating it with willful, thinking and achieving beings.”

The Messianic donkey first appears as Abraham heads for the Binding of Isaac, “Abraham rose early in the morning and readied his donkey,” (Genesis 22:3).

Seven generations later Moses, following God’s calling to take the Jewish people out of Egypt and bring them to Mount Sinai, *took his wife and children, set them upon the donkey, and set out for Egypt.*”

Abraham, Moses and the Messiah used the donkey in their fulfillment of God's will. But the extent to which the donkey is involved in their mission differs. With Abraham, it carries his supplies; with Moses, his wife and children; while the Messiah is described as himself riding the donkey.

upon which no man sat.

This requirement is only mentioned in Mark (11:2) and Luke (19:30). Scholars believe this was significant to show that He who used the colt did so in his own right, and not as filling a place which others had filled before him. In this way it is thought that this indicates not humility, but sacredness. Jesus was laid in a sepulcher that was hewn in stone, wherein never man was laid before, and was born of a pure virgin.

St John Chrysostom also notes; “*But mark how docile the colt, how being unbroken, and having never known the rein, he was not tense or uneasy, but went on orderly; which thing itself was a prophecy of the future, signifying the submissiveness of the Gentiles, and their sudden conversion to good order.*”

אָנָּא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה Lord, please save us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (Psalm 118:25-26)

The Hebrew word *הוֹשִׁיעָה* is transliterated in Greek as *ωσαννα* and in English as “hosanna.” In Hebrew the original intent is “Save” and is viewed as a plea for help. These verses indicate the recognition of Christ as Lord (Psalm verse 26) and Christ as Messiah (Psalm verse 25). With these verses Mark recognizes clearly that Christ’s kingdom is the continuation of the of God’s people, whose future is prophesied in the Old Testament.

Orthodox Celebration of Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem as Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday summons us to accept both the rule and the kingdom of God as the goal and content of our Christian life. We draw our identity from Christ and His kingdom. The kingdom is Christ - His indescribable power, boundless mercy and incomprehensible abundance given freely to man. The kingdom does not lie at some point or place in the distant future. In the words of the Scripture, the kingdom of God is not only at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), it is within us (Luke 17:21). The kingdom is a present reality as well as a future realization (Matthew 6:10).

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Palm Sunday summons us to behold our king: the Word of God made flesh, the vanquisher of death and the giver of life. We are called to behold Him not simply as the One who came to us once riding on a colt, but as the One who is always present in His Church, coming ceaselessly to us in power and glory at every Eucharist, in every prayer and sacrament, and in every act of love, kindness and mercy. He comes to free us from all our fears and insecurities, to take solemn possession of our soul, and to be enthroned in our heart. He is the King, who liberates us from the darkness of sin and the bondage of death.

Verse 11:11 Jesus in the Temple

It is only in Mark where we read about Jesus immediate entry into the temple even though it was late in the evening and they were tired from their travels and the excitement of their entry into Jerusalem. Here is another case of small details of Jesus' life that have been lost in the other parallel Gospels and indicates a first-person insight into who Jesus was and what He did.

"And he entered Jerusalem, and went into the temple; and when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve."

Other small details include that Jesus did not sleep in Jerusalem itself, but returned to Bethany outside the city possibly due to lodgings not being available due to the great number of people there for the Passover or His desire to avoid the Jewish authorities who were ready to engage Him. A passage from John indicates Bethany was safer; *Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.* (John 11:1). It might also have been possible that Jesus came to the temple and saw the money-changers packing up their wares and tables as Jesus' expulsion of the money-changers will come the next day.

Verses 11:12-14 and 20-25 The Fig Tree Cursed and Withered and Prayer

These verses are one of the themes of Great and Holy Monday with one of the hymns stating;

"O brethren, let us fear the punishment of the fig tree, withered because it was unfruitful; / and let us bring worthy fruits of repentance unto Christ, who grants us His great mercy."

This act of Jesus (cursing an innocent fig tree) is difficult and many have stated that it would have been much more acceptable if Jesus' seemingly unreasonable anger at an innocent tree could be explained away, especially since Mark states that "it was not the season for figs." (Note that this statement is missing in Matthew)

Symbolically however the fig tree and the vine are two time-honored symbols of the health of Israel both spiritually and physically throughout the Old and New Testament to whom the Son of God had now come, looking for fruit only to find "a barren tree" as we will soon see in verses 11:15.



- *The fig tree was the only plant named in the Garden of Eden.* Gen 3:7
- *"When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree."* Hosea 9:10
- *"Judah and Israel lived in safety, every man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon."* 1 Kings 4:25
- *It was under the fig tree that Nathanael proclaimed Jesus as Lord saying; "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."* John 1:48-50
- *If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.* Roman 11:17-21

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Mark, symbolically refers to the leaves of the fig tree as the leaves of a formal religion, but barren of all fruits of the Spirit, that Israel and certainly her priests and council was also withering away.

It is interesting to note the establishment of the Levitical priesthood was confirmed by the miracle of *the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, which had sprouted and put forth buds, produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.*

Numbers 17:23

And now, by a contrary miracle, there is the return to the “dry rod” signifying the drying up of that same priesthood by those priests who had abused it.

The lesson in the fig tree is relevant for us today a warning against an empty profession of Christianity. The withered fig tree calls out as a voice against hypocritical and false-hearted Christianity. This sentiment is echoed in the words of St. Theophylact urging us to bear fruit or be lost.



"He withers the tree, then, in order to chasten men. The disciples marvel, and with good reason. For the fig tree contains a great amount of sap, and so the fact that it withered immediately serves all the more to indicate the miracle. The fig tree means the synagogue of the Jews, which has only leaves, that is, the visible letter of the law, but not the fruit of the Spirit. But also every man who gives himself over to the sweetness of the present life is likened to a fig tree, who has no spiritual fruit to give to Jesus who is hungry for such fruit, but only leaves, that is, temporal appearances which fall away and are gone. This man, then, hears himself cursed. For Christ says, Go, ye accursed, into the fire. But he is also dried up; for as he roasts in the flame, his tongue is parched and withered like that of the rich man of the parable, who in his life had ignored Lazarus."

Blessed Theophylact, Commentary on Matthew

Once again, we have a small discrepancy between Mark and Matthew's account of the disciple's commentary on the fig tree. In Mathew's account the disciples amazed as they saw the fig tree withered immediately while Mark's account has Peter recognizing the fig tree the next morning commenting "*the fig tree you cursed has withered away.*"

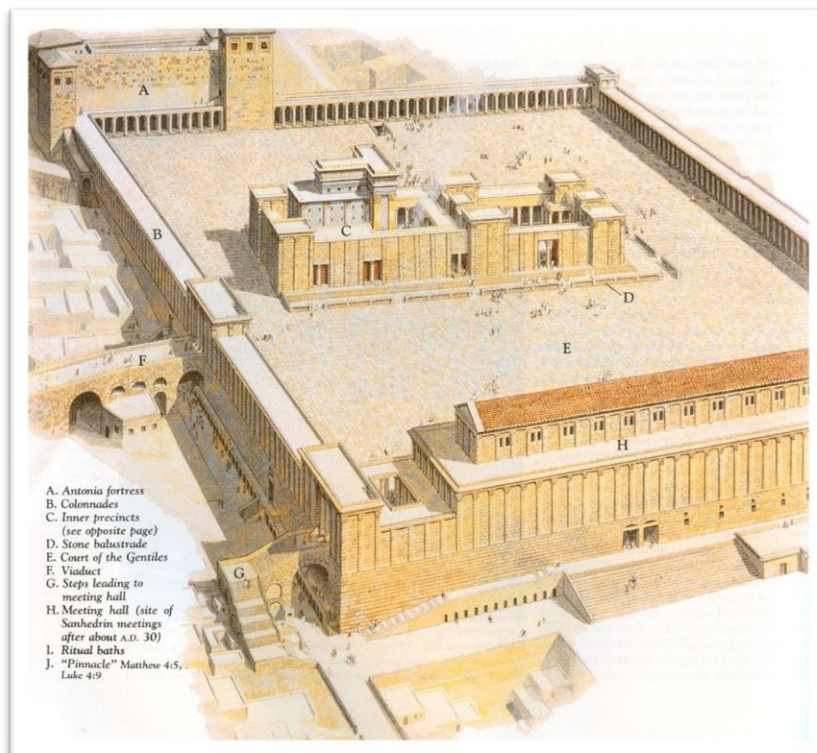
Jesus Clears the Temple Court (11:15-19)

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there.

Money changing was very common and necessary in Jerusalem and other areas of the Mid-East as there was a proliferation of currency system, a standard retained from Hellenistic period.

In Jesus' time vast numbers of Jews streamed to Jerusalem "out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5), taking with them large sums of money in foreign currencies.

Money exchange was carried out by the *shulhani* or exchange bankers. The *shulhani* would set up their "tables" in



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the outer court of the Temple for the convenience of the numerous worshipers, especially those from foreign countries (Matt. 21:12–13). The shulhani fulfilled three major functions:

- a) exchange of foreign currency - *κερματιστας* meaning to cut small, thus the one who gives small change (John 2:14),
- b) changing of large denominations into small ones and vice versa *κολλυβιστων* (Matt. 21:12)
- c) banking *τραπεζιταις* from *τραπεζα* or *table* (Matt 25:27)

For each of these transactions the *shulhani* charged a small fee (Greek *κόλλυβος* meaning small coin). The *shulhani* would also receive money on deposit for investment and pay out an interest at a fixed rate⁸, although this was contrary to Jewish law and they were charging higher than normal fees.

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.

During the important Jewish holidays, such as Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, the money changers would set up in the long meeting hall (Item H in figure 17). It is thought that due to the large number of people in Jerusalem for Passover some of the stalls spilled over into the Court of the Gentiles (Item E in figure 17).

Note that Mark indicates Jesus specifically focused on two groups; the moneychangers and those who sold doves. As we have seen the *shulhani* were unlawfully extracting interest, contrary to Jewish Law. But what about the dove sellers?

Lambs were the usual sacrifice offered, but Jewish Law allowed those who couldn't afford one to bring two doves or pigeons to the temple⁹. Thus, those who sold doves often exploited the poor. Hence, He described this scenario with these people who exploited the poor, as a "den of robbers" or "den of thieves."

¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts

Not only was there the exchange of foreign coins into local currency but also deposits were often handed over to the Temple authorities for safe deposit in the Temple treasury. The Ancient historian Josephus commented on the gross exploitation by the priests when he referred to the high priest Annas saying;

But as for the high priest, Ananias he increased in glory every day, and this to a great degree, and had obtained the favor and esteem of the citizens in a signal manner; for he was a great hoarder up of money: he therefore cultivated the friendship of Albinus, and of the high priest [Jesus], by making them presents; he also had servants who were very wicked, who joined themselves to the boldest sort of the people, and went to the thrashing-floors, and took away the tithes that belonged to the priests by violence, and did not refrain from beating such as would not give these tithes to them.

Book 20, Chapter 9

The sons of Annas had bazaars set up in the Court of the Gentiles for the purpose of money changing and the purchase of sacrificial animals. It was the combination of their greed and that they carried out these activities in a sacred area that aroused the zeal of Jesus.

Finally (verse 17) Jesus says "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations*" (Isaiah 56:7)", the point being that the temple is a place of worship, praise, prayer and ritual sacrifice and "*not a den of robbers*" to unlawfully exploit the people coming to worship.

⁸ Matthew 25:27 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest."

⁹ Leviticus 5:7 "Anyone who cannot afford a lamb is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the Lord as a penalty for their sin, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering."

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Commentary on verses 11:24-26

According to Jerome's commentary, Mark adds these addendum verses with regards to the fig tree as a catechism on prayer and forgiveness;

Verse 24 Prayers will be answered – *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

Verse 25 Forgiveness - *“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

Commentary on the missing verse 11:26

Some manuscripts have added the similar verse from Matt. 6:15. It is thought that this verse may have been added to prevent misunderstanding of His act upon the fig tree and taking away any false inferences from it.

While the power of prayer is recognized by Christians as powerful, it cannot be used for “the gratification of personal resentments”. An unforgiving prayer against an enemy would be fruitless by its own nature and the unforgiving spirit would violate the true purpose of prayer, as it is not to be used as a weapon of vengeance.

An unforgiving spirit is not the penitent and humble spirit to which forgiveness is linked but rather is the hard-heartedness to which the remission of sins cannot be granted. This is also evident in the closing lines of the Prayer given to us by Jesus Himself; *“...and forgive us our trespasses, as we also have forgiven those who trespass against us”*. (Matt 6;12)

Verses 11:27-33 The Authority of Jesus Questioned

These verses introduce specifically those who will play a central role in the persecution, trial, and condemnation of Jesus; the chief priests, scribes and elders. Recall they were each mentioned in Jesus' first prophesy (verse 8:31)

The question asked of Jesus; *“By what authority are you doing these things?”* could be extended to include not only His cleansing of the temple, but also His entry into Jerusalem in the manner He did, and His teaching and miracles. The Gospels do not inform us of Jesus' education, formal or otherwise and in fact the question is raised in John 7:15 *“The Jews there were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?”*

The suggestion regarding education is clear; that someone without a formal education cannot possibly speak on theological matters or change liturgical or Mosaic practices. In the following verses we have the answer from Jesus Himself who says *“My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸ Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.”*

Rather than answer their question, Jesus puts the three (chief priests, scribes and elders) on the defensive by asking them a counter-question; *“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”* Note that the discussion amongst the three was not the answer of ‘true or false’ but which answer is “safe” and which is “unsafe.”

The question which arises is that since they were the religious rulers and leaders of the Jewish nation how is it that only now they are inquiring into His claims? While John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan they inquired then as to who he was. Also they had allowed Jesus to teach, preach and perform miracles openly, all over the Holy Land for three years, and did not, as the God-appointed leaders of Israel, require publicly and personally of Him to give account of Himself? In fact, the resurrection of Lazarus had already occurred, and the Jewish leadership had met to discuss what to do.

“But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man

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performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

John 11:46-48

If now the three admit that John's baptism was from heaven then they acknowledge his divine authority and would be at a loss to explain why they did not welcome him and equally why they did not welcome Jesus who was baptized by John. On the other hand, a denial of John's divine authority "from heaven" risked an uprising due to the popularity of John the Baptist whom they held up as a prophet from God, even though he is already dead. Their final confession, "We do not know" was to seal their own condemnation as the leaders of the people of God.

This also points out an important lesson for us today that one cannot allow one's convictions to be dictated by public opinion.

Mark Chapter 12 Ministry in Jerusalem and Encounters

The debate between the Jewish leadership and Jesus will continue throughout this chapter as several confrontations will take place during this last week of Jesus' life on earth with one commentary summing up the events thus;

The debates recorded in this section all took place on one busy day-Tuesday of the passion week. They concerned the following subjects: the source of our Lord's authority (Mark 11:27-33); the parable of the vineyard and the husbandmen (12:1-12); a question about taxation (12:13-17); the resurrection (12:18-27); the Great Commandment (12:28-34); the Messiah's relationship to David (12:35-40). The section closes with an account of the widow's gift of two mites (12:41-44).

Verse 12:1-11 Parable of the Wicked Tenants

Isaiah 5:1-7

I will sing for the one I love, a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ² He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ³ "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵ Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. ⁶ I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." ⁷ The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed.

Mark 12:1-9

A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.

² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.

³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

⁶ "He had one left to send, a son, his beloved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

⁷ "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

⁹ "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

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This parable would have been evident to the readers of Mark, as well as to the scribes and Pharisees as a 'back-cloth' to Isaiah 5:1-7 with the following analogies.

- the vineyard is the nation of Israel
- the owner is God
- the tenant farmers are the Jewish leadership
- the beloved Son is Jesus
- the servants *could* refer to prophets but most likely include God's messengers to Israel (Moses, David, etc).
- the theme is judgment.

Many of the details of the landowner's care and preparation of the vineyard are borrowed from Isaiah, though the concept of the tenant farmer is new. The reference to an absent owner was a common feature of the Greco-Roman economic system. The term υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν (beloved Son) hearkens back to the voice from heaven at the baptism of Jesus. The final line: "He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others" could refer to Christian claim that the identity of God's people are transferred from Israel to the Church.

One difference between Isaiah's parable and Jesus' is that in Isaiah the vineyard was the subject; in Jesus' parable the laborers are. Isaiah says that God looked for good grapes in His vineyard, but the vineyard only produced bad fruit. Jesus says nothing about the fruit and instead the point in His parable is that the tenants refuse to pay their rent, acting as if they were the owners instead of the leaseholders.

In Jesus' parable, the servants who were sent to collect the rent in the form of fruit were harshly treated so that Jesus is equating the harsh treatment given to Him with the harsh treatment given to the prior messengers of God¹⁰. In verse 7 "Come let us kill him" has OT references such as the stoning of Jeremiah by the exiles in Egypt and Isaiah killed by Manasseh.

Verse 11 indicates that these words of Jesus were directed personally to the Jewish leadership and not as a general statement, especially the reference to "beloved Son".

Jesus' quotation about the rejection of the stone (verse 12:10) is from Ps. 118:22, 23;

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

The rejection of the corner-stone aligns with the murdering of the heir (verse 7). Becoming the head of the corner to join the two walls (verse 10) is a reference to the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ as His new spiritual kingdom. (Eph. 2:19-22)

The reference is clearly about Jesus' death at the hand of the leaders of Israel, followed by His resurrection by the hand of the Father. Jesus is the capstone in building of the New Testament Church. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on this: "The others unto whom the vineyard was to be given are further described in Matt 21:43; where Jesus is quoted as saying, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. This is an obvious reference to the Gentiles and the Church."

Verse 12:12-13 The Plan to Trap Jesus Continues

¹² Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away. ¹³ Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.

Note that Mark makes clear that the Jewish leadership was becoming more concerned with not only Jesus' popularity but also His knowledge and authority and their repeated failure to discredit Him. (Recall the earlier Jewish leadership plot to kill Jesus when He healed the man with the withered hand, [verse 3:6](#) and their question of

¹⁰ Reference 1 Thessalonians 2:15

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His authority, verse 11:28) Their attempts continue with the Pharisees and Herodians setting aside their differences and coming together in an effort to entrap Jesus with His words.

The Pharisees, were opposed to all foreign domination, while the Herodians, saw Jesus as an instrument of the Romans. This diametrically opposed alliance between these two parties was deemed necessary by their common hostility to Christ, whose growing influence was viewed by both sides as dangerous. The plan therefore is to combine forces to trap Jesus into giving an answer which while satisfying the one side is in opposition to the other. This is brought out in their statement; ἵνα αὐτὸν ἀγρεύσωσιν λόγῳ (verse 12:13) The verb here is ἀγρεύω which has the meaning of entrapping someone through a convicting remark elicited from them in conversation.

Their greeting to Jesus, although on the surface seem complimentary, is clearly ironic when they declare Him a "Teacher" even when they accuse Jesus of teaching without authority. Couple that with their equally ironic adulation; οὐ μελεῖ σοι περὶ οὐδενός (you do not give thought or concern to anyone) when compared to verse 11:32 where the Jewish elders were concerned how the people would react to their answer to Jesus about John the Baptist.

Verse 12: 14-15 The Question of Taxes

Their question to Jesus; *"Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? ¹⁵Should we pay or shouldn't we?"* is an attempt to accomplish two goals¹¹

(1) force Jesus to answer the question; if Jesus refuses, He will lose credibility as a Rabbi with the very people who just proclaimed Him a King; and

(2) they force Jesus to base this answer in Scripture, thus testing His scriptural knowledge

During this time the Jews were in conflict with Roman authorities as many wanted to maintain the ideal Jewish state, (theocracy) *recognizing God, alone, as king and ruler of Israel*¹². Therefore, paying taxes to such any such ruler denied God's sovereignty over the nation. Resentment by the Jews against this poll tax paid to the Roman treasury led to one revolt in 6 CE under the leadership of Judas the Galilean. This, in turn, led to the creation of radical Jewish groups, such as the Essenes, which launched another rebellion from 66 through 70 CE, which ended with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem leading to a scattering of the Jews out of their ancestral lands. If Jesus says that it is lawful to pay the tribute, He would have been a collaborator with the Roman occupiers, branded a political criminal, thus alienating the people who had just proclaimed Him a king.

On the other hand, the Roman leaders were very touchy about anything that looked like resistance to their rule. They could be tolerant of various religions and cultures, but only so long as they accepted Roman authority. If Jesus denied the validity of paying taxes, then he could be turned over to the Romans as someone encouraging rebellion. Pilate as the emperor's chief soldier, chief magistrate, head of the judicial system, was above all, the chief tax collector and was, as Philo¹³ described as "a cruel man of most ferocious passions, who had a habit of murdering [people] "untried and uncondemned" The Herodians, as servants of Rome would have gladly turned Jesus over to Pilate if He spoke against paying the tax.

Thus either answer would have allowed the Jewish or Roman authorities to sentence Him to death.

Instead of immediately entering into a discussion, Jesus asks to see the coin of the tribute suggesting that there is something meaningful about the coin itself. The circulation of the denarius in Judaea was typically only to Roman soldiers, officials, and Jewish leaders in collaboration with Rome. Thus, it is noteworthy that Jesus, Himself, does not possess the coin. The ability of the questioners to produce the coin at Jesus' request implies that they routinely used it revealing their religious hypocrisy, bringing a potentially profane item, the coin of a pagan, into the sacred space of the Temple. (recall that Jesus was "walking in the temple courts" verse 11:27)

¹¹ Excerpt from *Rabbinic Rhetoric and the Tribute Passage* by David Owen-Ball

¹² Excerpt from the report of the Roman Tacitus as recorded in Book II.42 of the Annals, 17 A.D

¹³ Philo Judaeus, (Philo of Alexandria, 15BC–50 CE) was a Jewish philosopher whose writings provided a clear account of Hellenistic Judaism.

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Verse 12:16 The Answer to the Question of Taxes

As he has done in previous discussions with the Pharisees and Scribes, Jesus then poses a counter-question, "Whose image and inscription is this?" (τινος η εικων αυτη και η επιγραφη)

Again, quoting from Owen-Ball who argues that the counter-question is significant as it follows a pattern of formal rhetoric common in first century rabbinic literature where,

- (1) an outsider poses a hostile question to a rabbi
- (2) the rabbi responds with a counter-question
- (3) by answering the counter-question, the outsider's position becomes vulnerable to attack
- (4) the rabbi then uses the answer to the counter-question to refute the hostile question.

Owen cites that Jesus' use of this rhetorical form was one way Jesus established His authority as a rabbi. Since the hostile question was a direct challenge to Jesus' authority as a rabbi on a point of law, His interrogators would have expected a counter-question grounded in scripture, i.e. the Torah. Two words, "image" and "inscription," in the counter-question harkens to two central ideas in the Torah, the First Commandment and the Shema.

The First Commandment prohibits worship of anyone or anything but God, and it also forbids crafting any image of a false god for adoration. God demands the exclusive allegiance of His people. Jesus' use of the word, "image," in the counter-question reminds His questioners of the First Commandment's requirement to venerate God first and the prohibition against creating images of false gods.

The Shema also demands the worship of God alone. Jesus' use of the word "inscription" alludes to the Shema. The Shema is a Jewish prayer based upon Deuteronomy 6:4–9 , 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41 and is the most important prayer a pious Jew can say; "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God — the Lord alone." This opening line stresses Israel's worship of God to the exclusion of all other gods. The Shema then commands a person to love God with his whole heart, whole soul, and whole strength. Both Mark and Matthew recount Jesus quoting the Shema in the same chapter just a few verses after the Tribute Episode. The Shema thus requires worshipers to "inscribe" the words of the Shema in their hearts, to instruct their children in them, to bind them on their hands and foreheads, and to inscribe them conspicuously on their doorposts and on the gates to their cities. Jesus means to call attention to the Shema and its requirements by using the word "inscription" in the counter-question as His appeal to scriptural authority.



Verse 12:16 The Counter-Answer to Jesus' Question

The answer to Jesus' counter-question of whose image and inscription the coin bears is "It is Caesar's." This answer is clearly accusatory against the Jewish leaders questioning Jesus. Looking at the actual image and inscription on the denarius you see that the front of the coin shows a profile bust of Tiberius crowned with the laurels of victory and divinity, recognizable as a Roman emperor. The inscription circumscribed around Tiberius is an abbreviation, of "Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Fili Augustus," which translates to, "Tiberius Caesar, Worshipful Son of the God, Augustus."

On the obverse sits the Roman goddess of peace, Pax, and circumscribed around her is the abbreviation, "Pontif Maxim," which stands for "Pontifex Maximus," which, in turn, means, "High Priest." The coin of the Tribute Episode reflects Roman propaganda as it imposes the cult of emperor worship and asserts Caesar's sovereignty upon all who transact with it.

In a richly ironic passage, Mark as well as Matthew and Luke, depict the Son of God and the High Priest of Peace, newly-proclaimed by His people to be a King, holding a coin, *given to him by the Jewish religious and authorities*

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and leadership, whose image and inscription is of a king who claims to be the son of a god and the high priest of Roman peace.

Lastly, note that this answer to Jesus' counter-question about the coin's image and inscription bears little relevance to their original question as to whether it is licit to pay the tribute. While Jesus could certainly answer their original question the rhetorical function of the answer to the counter-question is to demonstrate the vulnerability of the opponent's position and use that answer to refute the opponent's original, hostile question.

Verse 12:17 Jesus' Final Answer to the Question

Now Jesus' responds to the original question, "*Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?*" Jesus tells His interrogators, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's.*" This response begs the question of what belongs to God and what belongs to Caesar.

As we heard in the Shema and in the Hebrew tradition, everything rightfully belonged to God. By using the words, "image and inscription," Jesus has already reminded His interrogators that exclusive allegiance, love, and worship belong to God alone. Similarly, everything economically belonged to God as well. For example, the physical land of Israel was God's (Leviticus 25:23). In addition, Jews were to dedicate the firstfruits, that first portion of any [harvest](#) and the first-born of any animal, to God thus acknowledging that all good things came from God and that all things, in turn, belonged to God.

The emperor, on the other hand, also claimed that all people and things in the empire rightfully belonged to Rome. The denarius notified everyone who used it that the emperor demanded exclusive allegiance and worship. Roman occupiers served as a constant reminder that the land of Israel belonged to Rome. Roman tribute, paid with Roman currency, impressed upon the populace that the economic life depended on the emperor.

With this straightforward counter-question, Jesus points out that the claims of God and Caesar are mutually exclusive. If one's faith is in God, then God is owed everything; Caesar's claims are necessarily illegitimate, and he is therefore owed nothing. If, on the other hand, one's faith is in Caesar, God's claims are illegitimate, and Caesar is owed, at the very least, the coin which bears his image.

Jesus' counter-question simply invites His listeners to choose allegiances. Remarkably, He has escaped the trap through a clever rhetorical gambit; He has authoritatively refuted His opponents' hostile question by basing His answer in scripture, and yet, He never overtly answers the question originally posed to Him.

Often times this Gospel episode is used to indicate the separation of Church and State, meaning "give to God worship and to the Government civil obedience." It is interesting to note that the Catechism of the Catholic Church does not use this Episode to support the proposition that it is morally obligatory to pay taxes, but instead, refers only to justify acts of civil disobedience. Christians are to refuse political authority when that political authority makes a demand contrary to the demands of the moral order, the fundamental rights of persons, or the teachings of the Gospel. A person's absolute freedom is only submitted to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Joseph Addison Alexander, a 19th century American biblical scholar sums this idea up nicely when he says;

'Yes, if you are actually under [Government] domination, yet allowed to serve God in the way of his appointment, and indeed protected in that service, you are bound to pay back what you thus receive, but no such obligations can destroy those which you owe to God himself, or suspend them when they come in competition. In a word, repay to Cesar what he gives you, and to God the infinitely greater gifts which you receive from him'.

Verses 12:18-27 Marriage at the Resurrection

The Pharisees and Herodians having had their turn, it was the Sadducees who came to question Jesus. It might be good here to discuss both the Pharisees and Sadducees and their differences. According the Jewish Virtual Library;

The **Sadducees** were elitists who wanted to maintain the priestly caste, but they were also liberal in their willingness to incorporate Hellenism into their lives, something the Pharisees opposed. The Sadducees rejected the idea of the Oral Law and insisted on a literal interpretation of the Written Law; consequently, they did not believe in

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the resurrection of the body, or an afterlife, since it is not mentioned in the Torah. The main focus of Sadducee life was rituals associated with the Temple. The Sadducees disappeared around 70 A.D., after the destruction of the Second Temple. None of the writings of the Sadducees has survived, so the little we know about them comes from their Pharisaic opponents.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees were considered the spiritual fathers of modern Judaism. Their main distinguishing characteristic was a belief in an Oral Law that God gave to Moses at Sinai along with the Torah. The Torah, or Written Law set down a series of laws that were open to interpretation. The Pharisees believed that God also gave Moses the knowledge of what these laws meant and how they should be applied. This oral tradition was codified and written down roughly three centuries later in what is known as the Talmud.

The Pharisees maintained that an after-life existed and that God punished the wicked and rewarded the righteous in the world to come and also believed in a messiah who would herald an era of world peace. Pharisees adhered to the tenets developed after the destruction of the Temple; that is, such things as individual prayer and assembly in synagogues.

These two "parties" served in the Great Sanhedrin, a kind of Jewish Supreme Court made up of 71 members whose responsibility was to interpret civil and religious laws.

The question posed by the Sadducees refers to the so-called Levirate marriage, from Latin levir, "a brother-in-law. This provision corresponded to the desire of the Nation of Israel to perpetuate the family name, and this desire allowed for the provision in case of death of the father without having son(s). The Torah Law (Deut 25:5-10) decreed that a man's name must be preserved in the male offspring he produced and that if he died without leaving a son who would carry his name, one of his brothers ought to marry his widow and provide a son in his brother's name. While the Sadducees' question was valid it was a point taken to the absurd – there were seven brothers as was the inclusion of the resurrection in the question (verse 12:23).

The Sadducees' story including seven brothers when their point would have been clear after the first and second childless marriages was to ensure that they stayed within the Mosaic Law which said that one man was able to have several wives. This was because at that time many men died in war, but the women remained, and this allowed for the surest propagation of the Israeli Nation.

Jesus' answer was again in the form of a question, "*Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?*" He did not indicate that the resurrection was mentioned plainly in the Scriptures, but that it was implied in its teaching, but unfamiliarity or ignorance of the true meaning of the Scriptures kept the Sadducees from believing in the resurrection. Birth and marriage are connected with this world, however in the world to come people will neither marry nor be given in marriage but will be as the angels (verse 12:25). The Orthodox interpretation of this is that *a husband will know his wife, and a wife her husband, and of course, children their parents, but a husband will not know his wife according to earthly appetites, but according to love, which united them in this world*¹⁴. The full image of God will be made visible in the resurrected person.

In the second part of His answer "...or the power of God?" Jesus redefines the concept of death and resurrection. The Sadducees believed that death meant the total cessation of life; the body and the soul. From Jesus' reply (verse 12:26-27) we may conclude that the human soul does not die. This is given in verse 26-27, when Jesus comments about the "dead rising" reminding them of when God called Moses, He said of Himself "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" proving that those patriarchs were alive. According to the Wycliffe Bible Commentary:

"The truth demonstrated here is the fact of immortality. To be the God of Abraham is to be in fellowship with Abraham. It is therefore not possible to be the God of the dead, but only of the living. Thus when God spoke out of

¹⁴ Walk to Eternity: Selected Sermons and Interviews by *Serbian Patriarch Pavle*

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the burning bush, though the patriarchs had been dead for years, he was still in fellowship with them. The argument of Christ then assumes that since there is life after death, this is sufficient to prove that resurrection will follow. Perfect human existence demands the union of soul with body."

Verses 12:28-34 The Greatest Commandment

After two very grueling debates with the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, Jesus is now engaged again by one of what is described as a teacher or expert in Jewish law. While Mark only mentions that this expert asked Jesus for an answer, Matthew records that the expert "πειραζων" tested Jesus.

First in consideration is the question asked, "*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*" A dividing point among the Jewish teachers in the rival schools, was the "strivings about the law" against which Paul warns Titus (Tit. 3:9). Jews divided the Torah into greater and lesser; but they were not agreed in the particulars so that the Jewish Talmud reckons the Law in positive laws at 248, and negative laws at 365, the sum being 613. It is said that to keep so many laws is an angel's work, and so they debated which was the great commandment.

Jesus answer to this question is a combination of two sections of the Pentateuch. The first part of Jesus' answer is "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God — the Lord alone." The Shema which He referred to in the previous debate about the Roman coin. The Shema is the most important prayer a pious Jew can say stressing Israel's worship of One God to the exclusion of all other gods and inscribed on the phylacteries¹⁵ worn by pious Jews.

The second part; "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" is taken from Deut. 6:5 with the addition, "*and all your διάνοια.*" This word διάνοια is a compound word with the prefix δια meaning thoroughly or from side-to-side," which intensifies the root word νοος or mind and means the movement from one side of an issue to the other to reach a *balanced*-conclusions, i.e. critical thinking.

This same word is used by St Paul in Ephesians to indicate the incomplete reasoning of the Gentiles saying: εσκοτισμενοι τη διανοια οντες απηλλοτριωμενοι της ζωης του θεου... They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God...

The words *heart, soul, strength and mind* are a four-fold formula defining the components of divine love. Heart denotes the love of and desire for doing God's will resolve, soul refers to the individual existence, personhood, strength, the full and complete exercise of heart by the soul, and mind is the reason which aligns with faith in God and not in empty worldly philosophies.

The third part "Love your neighbor as yourself." is the last part of Leviticus 19:18 which in its entirety reads "*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.*"

In combining these two commandments, Jesus connects love of God with love of His creation, humanity. St. John makes this, love, a central principle in his first epistle, stating: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This connection of love is demonstrated when God sent his only beloved Son into the world that humanity might live through him.

John in his Gospel reiterates this command here in Mark and Matthew, **love your neighbor as yourself**, when he records Jesus as saying "A **new** command I give you: Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34).

Only in Mark do we have a record of the effect Jesus' answer has upon the scribe and Jesus' response, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Mark's use of the term *νοουνεχως* (has understanding) seems to indicate Jesus'

¹⁵ Phylacteries, sometimes called tefillin, are small, square leather boxes containing portions of Scripture (Ex. 8:1-10, 11-16; Deut. 6:4-9, 13-21) and worn by Conservative and Orthodox Jews during prayer services. The source for wearing phylacteries are from Deut. 11:18 "*Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*" Phylacteries are worn in pairs—one strapped on the left arm, and one strapped to the forehead. The word *phylactery* comes from a Greek word meaning "safeguard or protection."

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approval and recognition that the expert did indeed understand the fullness of the spiritual truths of these commands.

Jesus' approval also stemmed from the expert's admittance of the superiority of Love to God and Man over all ritual or ceremonial observances. The expert's reply indicates that he had probably read the Prophets with much greater discernment than most of his fellow scribes, and that his understanding had been enlightened by the teachings of Jesus. This admittance, *more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices* was a daring utterance directly opposed to the rigid ceremonial ideas of the Jewish leaders.

Verses 12:35-37 The Question of Son of David

While previously the demons declared Him to be the Son of God (verse 5:7), these verses (12:35-37) are the first time Jesus comes close to revealing His divinity to the public at large.

"...take your seat at my right hand", (ref. Ps. 109, 31) refers to a posture is appropriate to kings, who are frequently described as sitting on their thrones (Ps. 29, 10). In the Scriptures to be seated at the right hand of a king signifies a place of honor and implies a participation in his power.

"...until I have made your enemies your footstool." alludes to the ancient practice spoken of in Josh. 10, 24. This figure itself, however, presupposes the act of sitting on a throne.

Verses 12:38-40 Jesus Condemns the Scribes

Now after a series of answering the questions from the Jewish leadership, Jesus turns the tables and begins to ask the questions. It is noteworthy that His criticism and indictments of the Jewish leadership is much more pronounced in Matthew – see Matt 23.

Jesus' indictments specifically address several items:

- a) "desire" (θελοντων) to be noticed προς το θεαθηναι τοις ανθρωποις
- b) "walk about in fully decorated dress" (στολαις) refers to the garments or clothing and implies the wearing of the garments of their particular office (ref Matt 23:5)
- c) "desire to be greeted with respect in public" (ασπασμους)

Each of these was forbidden by Jesus to his disciples when they were evangelizing and working (Luke 10:4).

Their love of money caused them to prey on the most vulnerable, the widow and orphan who should above all other have been the objects of their compassion and prayer because they are the objects of God's special concern. The robbing of their money is compounded by their offering of false prayer. Jesus warns of the severity of their punishment due to their misuse of their spiritual privileges, betrayal of the trust of the simple, and brought reproach upon the name of God as described in Ex.22:22-24.

"Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword."

"Greater knowledge and greater opportunities [positions of power] only bring greater responsibility, which can, if rejected, bring greater condemnation."

Verses 12:41-44 The Widow's Offering

The opening verse of this section indicates that the treasury was set up so that people's donations were public and visible so that people who entered the temple could make their donation into a display of generosity that gave them a reputation of piety. This is in stark contrast to the advice Jesus gave in The Sermon on the Mount: *"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret..."*

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The **lepton** (λεπτόν), plural **lepta**, means "small" or "thin" and is one of the various fractional units of currency used in the Hellenistic world and was minted in Greece until the late 19th century. The lepton was typically the smallest available denomination of currency and today would be worth about 1/8 of cent. The value of a mite was about the cost of a public bath.



Mark makes two significant comments on the widow's condition to emphasize the magnitude of her donation; πτωχή (poor) and όλον τον βιον αυτής (she put in all she had to live on). In this case there is a possible indictment by Jesus on both the **Jewish leadership that preys upon the poor** who can least afford the temple taxes and the **system that is in place** that forces widows and orphans into their dire situations. This second part is evident in the very next verse (13:2) when Jesus responds to the disciple's comment on the size of the building stones saying;

"Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

The words *"Not one stone here will be left on another"* was literally fulfilled as when in the destruction of the Temple in 70AD the building were set ablaze and the gold of the temple roof melted and ran between the huge blocks of stone. To recover all the gold, the Romans made sure that not one stone was left on another.

Finally note that Jesus does not disparage the other people's offerings, He only made a comparison of the weight of the widow's donation. Jesus (verse 13:43) indicates that a small gift from those who are financially limited is weighed as great as much a donation as a large gift from a vast income. This principle extends to all aspects of our life; citizens pay national taxes according to their ability, parents provide for their children as their resources allow, and people contribute to charities as they are able. Should not then Christians provide for the glory of Christ in their tithing to the Church?

"If Christ is Lord of your mind, and heart and life, let Him be also of your silver and gold." John Ross¹⁶

Chapter 13 The Eschatological Discourses

Mark 13 chronicles Jesus' discussion with Peter, James, John and Andrew, the first-called of Jesus' disciples as they leave the Temple.

Deception (verses 5-12)

Jesus first warns the disciples about false figures that will come to them claiming to be him. He warns them to be wary of such charlatans. He also warns them that great wars will come when kingdoms rise to fight other kingdoms. Jesus mentions there will be natural disasters and great famines that will reflect the birth pains of a new order that will emerge.

Coming Dangers (verses 14-23)

Jesus warns his disciples that those in power will seek to silence them, punish them and kill them. However, Jesus tells them to be faithful and to continue to preach the Good News. Also, they should not be afraid as it is not they who speak, but the Holy Spirit who speaks through them.

Jesus speaks of wars that will become more and more common with widespread devastation. Brothers will turn against brothers. In these darkest hours Jesus warns that there will be more and more false prophets and self-proclaimed messiahs professing that all should follow them but to beware and avoid these false prophets because they only lead to deceit.

¹⁶ John Ross (1842-1915) was a Scottish born minister who, under the United Presbyterian Church in 1872 took up ministry work in China (Manchuria) and Korea. Known for his generous spirit toward Chinese ancestral rites, he supported the idea of a Chinese church that would not be a Western replica. In 1887, he completed the first Korean translation of the New Testament.

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The Coming of the Son of Man and Warnings to Remain Vigilant

Reminding them of the fig tree parable to illustrate His point, Jesus says that when the earth has been nearly destroyed, He will come again to save His people. He cautions them to be on the alert and remain vigilant as no one knows the time of the coming of the Son of Man, but the Father alone.

While the disciples would certainly experience this persecution in their lifetimes, Jesus' warnings clearly speak to generations beyond the lives of the disciples. Certainly, in the near-term Mark's Roman and Gentile audience would have experienced some of this as the first centuries following Christ's ascension was filled with great persecutions. The disciple's question of "*When shall these things be?*" is answered by Jesus in three specific points and a dire warning.

- a) the destruction of the temple – verse 13:2
- b) the end of the world – verses 13:5-23
- c) the sign of his coming – verses 13:24-31

While the destruction of the Temple did occur, history has certainly seen these predictions come true, through seemingly endless wars and specifically World Wars 1 and 2 where many thought those to be clear signs of the end times, however in verse 13:7-8 Jesus tells us that "*such things must happen, but the end is still to come.*"

But Jesus also reminded His disciples of the purpose of their mission and the assurances of His presence.

- a) the need to proclaim the Gospel to all nations – verse 13:10
- b) the need to be alert – verses 13:32-37 – verse 13:9
- c) the Holy Spirit will provide the words – verse 13:11
- d) standing firm leads to salvation – verse 13:13

The suffering predicted by Jesus that would be endured by the apostles is recorded in the Book of Acts as well as St. Paul in his epistles telling of his suffering for Christ. However, through all these sufferings the Book of Acts records that the apostles did persevere and follows Jesus' command to proclaim the Gospel (verse 13:10)

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. (Acts 5:42)

Commentary on verse 13:14

The expression, το βδελυγμα της ερημωσης, which is also present in Matt 24:15-16, is translated as "*the abomination of desolation or appalling desolation*" and is taken from Daniel and describes the abomination of idolatry.

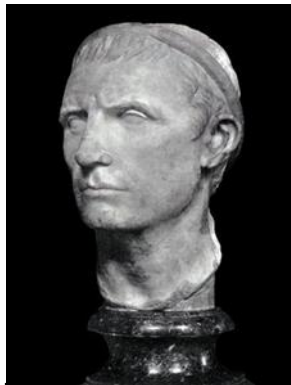
"...And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation..." Daniel 9:27

And from Ezekiel describing sacrilege.

"And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing—the utterly detestable things the Israelites are doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary? Go in and see the wicked and detestable things they are doing here." So I went in and looked, and I saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and unclean animals and all the idols of Israel. Ezekiel 8:6-10

The description of the idolatrous rites mentioned in Ezekiel 8:10 indicate an Egyptian origin as their worship had both animals and insects that were held up as sacred and the painting of idolatrous objects upon walls was a Chaldeans practice.

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Antiochus

Scholars generally agree that the desolation referenced in the Markian passage refer to the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who ruled Palestine from 175-64 B.C.

Antiochus treated Israel with such violence and contempt that they rebelled against him. When he came to suppress the rebellion, his forces entered the temple, stopped the regular sacrifices, set up an idol or altar for Zeus, and apparently offered swine there as a sacrifice. Matthew makes the abomination clearer when he render it as “*standing in the holy place*” i.e. the temple which the reader would understand as an act that defiles the holy place which is at the heart of Israel. The words “*let the reader understand*” in both Mark and Matthew Jesus is speaking to future Christians saying that *they must be ready to flee* when they see Roman armies attacking Jerusalem.

Although still in question, several sources of antiquity record this as actually happening. One of those sources, Eusebius, in his work *Ecclesiastical History* records,

“The people of the Church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ traveled from Jerusalem, so that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea...”

The sign of His coming – verses 13:24-31

These verses can clearly be seen as a foretelling of the coming of the Son of Man in a passage taken from the apocalyptic books of the Old Testament, especially from the book of Isaiah (13:10) and Daniel (7:13).

The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

The Time of this Coming – verses 13:28-32

The fig tree (verse 13:28) while native to the area where Jesus was preaching was also a symbol used very often in the Old Testament and therefore a common reference for the audience.

In verse 30, the term γενεα can be translated as both “generation” in the sense of the persons then living but can also be translated with the meaning of race or nation. In this later case the race or nation can refer to the continuing preservation of the Jewish race, despite a long history of persecutions and attempts at annihilation. The Jewish Diaspora has persevered for thousands of years, scattered among all nations and persecuted as no other race, whether still residing in that nation or diaspora.

The Dangers of Millennialism

In verse 13:29 Jesus says, “*Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.*” This led to an entire theology devoted to trying to calculate, through the observance of events and numerology when this coming of the Son of Man would occur. One of these theologies is Millennialism which relies heavily on verses from the Book of Revelation.

Millennialism, also known as Chiliasm (from the Greek for 1000) is a Christian theology that attempts to according to decipher Scriptural prophecies to interpret the past, align present events, and predict the future. Millennialism originated out of the Zoroastrian concept that each 1000 years, the earth ends and is reborn and is found in other religions, such as Judaism (Kabbala), Islam, and American Indian (Sioux *Ghost Dance* religion).



Ruins of the Church at Pella

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The fundamental problem for early Christianity, as for all apocalyptic movements, was the passage of time, which brought with it profound disappointment (2 Peter 11). This led to the focus shifting from preparing for the imminent coming of Christ to the completion of the task assigned by Jesus; spreading of the Gospels to all nations, that is The Great Commission.

Seeing the dangers of obsessing about predicting the coming of Christ, Origen, an early 3rd-century theologian, argued that the millennium should be interpreted allegorically. In fact, the Orthodox Church removed the Book of Revelation from the Church canon so that although it is accepted as one of the books of the Bible it is never read from the pulpit in church. By the time Christianity became the official state religion, millenarianism was pushed to the margins of acceptable Christian thought.

Millennialism continues to be active in American fundamentalist Protestantism and is a major factor which have impacted and shaped American foreign policy. This is evident in attempting to associate the behavior of nations like the former Soviet Union, Iran, and of course Israel into the framework of the Book of Revelation instead of understanding these events as a natural course of history (verse 13:7)

As a final commentary to verses 13:22 and 37 (...for false Christs and prophets will arise...I say to you all stay awake!), it is interesting to note that there have been over 40 people, just in the 19th and 20th century who have claimed to be the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Some of the more notable include:

- Ernest Norman – American Electrical Engineer claiming to be Jesus in a part life
- Sun Myung Moon – leader of the Unification Church and claimed also to be the restored Adam and his wife the restored Eve
- Jim Jones – Leader of People’s Temple and founder of Jonestown in Guyana
- David Koresh – leader of the Branch Davidians in Waco Texas
- Oscar Ramiro Hernandez – believes he was Christ who was sent to kill Barack Obama, the Antichrist.

The Orthodox answer to all of this is best expressed in the closing words of chapter 13.

Be alert! (αγρυπνεῖτε)¹⁷ You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. “Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back...³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ (γρηγορεῖτε)”

Chapter 14 PASSION NARRATIVES - Anointing, Passover, Betrayal, Arrest and the Trial

Verses 1 and 2 Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

The 8-day festival of Passover is celebrated in the early spring, from the 15th through the 22nd of the Hebrew month of Nissan¹⁸. Passover (Πῶσχα - Pesach) commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. In Hebrew it is known as Pesach (which means “to pass over”), because God passed over the Jewish homes when killing the Egyptian firstborn on the very first Passover eve. At midnight on the 15th of Nissan in the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), God visited the last of the ten plagues on the Egyptians, killing all their firstborn. While doing so, God spared the children of Israel, “passing over” their homes—hence the name of the holiday.

¹⁷ Αγρυπνία is the Greek word for a Vigil service where the main point is to stay awake and be alert.

¹⁸ According to the canon 1 of the 1st Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, Pascha must be held on the first Sunday after the first full moon (known as the 14th of Nissan) after the vernal equinox. This canon ensures that Christian Pascha is not celebrated concurrently with the Jewish feast of Passover. “But if anyone of those who preside in the Church, whether he be bishop, presbyter or deacon, ... is observing Pascha at the same time with the Jews, the holy Synod decrees that he shall be an alien from the Church.”

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Pesach is observed by avoiding leaven and highlighted by the Seder meals that include wine, matzah, bitter herbs, and retelling the story of the Exodus. The unleavened bread is symbolic of the bread that the Israelites ate when they left Egypt and is commanded by Scripture.

You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.

Deut 16:3

To the Jews leavened bread represents ego and self-aggrandizement; the person who is pumped full of self, whose being is swelled by pride, leaving no room for a higher truth to enter their life. Leaven has a similar symbolism for Christians although the symbolism is different between Orthodox and Protestant. In the Protestant theology the leaven represents sin. This is taken from St Paul's words to the Corinthians:

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinth 5:6-8

In Orthodoxy the leaven represents Christ and the kingdom of heaven which comes from Matthew 13:33¹⁹.

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into [the] flour until it worked all through the dough."

The Orthodox see the words of St Paul when he refers to the "old leaven" as referring to the "...yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod," of which Jesus warned the disciples. (recall Mark 8:15)

Verses 14:1 and 2 The Plot to Kill Jesus

In these verses we find the most definite statement thus far by the Jewish leadership regarding their intentions for Jesus; "...και εξητουν οι αρχιερεις και οι γραμματεις πως αυτον ... αποκτεινωσιν." The verb is a compound word (από and κτείνω) which means *to kill by whatever means so as to put out of the way*. Matthew provides details of the location of this meeting stating that it took place at the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest (Matt. 26:3). We also know from other Gospels that there was some opposed to the putting of Jesus to death such as Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:51), and Nicodemus (John 7:50, 51), who were members of the Sanhedrim.

In this verse both Mark and Matthew both speak of the chief priests and scribes seeking how to εν δολω κρατησαντες. The use of the term δολος means to snare someone in a deceptive way implying treachery. This, combined with their comments in verse 14:2 clearly indicates that this decision to kill Jesus is not motivated by moral objections due to Jesus' seeming disregard of Jewish Law and ritual but motivated by self-interest.

It is very probable that with the large number of people that came to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast²⁰ that many whom Jesus had healed over the last few years would be there, so an outright and public attack on Jesus would have indeed caused a disturbance.

Verses 14:3-9 The Anointing at Bethany

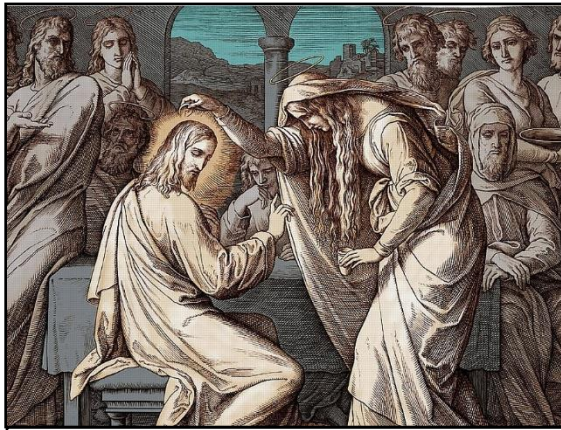
This section opens with Jesus at [Bethany](#) and we seemingly have a contradiction between the Gospels of Mark and John about the timing and the location. Mark states 2 days before Passover and John states 6 days. This could be reconciled by the fact that Mark timing is with Jesus at the home of Simon while John states when He arrived in Bethany. As for the location John states *only* that Jesus was in Bethany where Lazarus²¹ was. Matthew and Mark both place the dinner and the anointing at the home of Simon the Leper and from John we know that Mary and

¹⁹ This is why leavened bread is used in the Orthodox Liturgy.

²⁰ Josephus the Historian records that at the Passover Feast the priests would perform close to 300,000 sacrifices.

²¹ The same Lazarus Jesus had earlier raised from the dead.

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Mary Anoints Jesus

Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. While Mark does not identify the woman who anointed Jesus, we read in John that she was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Mark describes the alabaster container as containing “*very expensive perfume, made of pure nard*”²². While most alabaster jars of that time were sealed with wax to allow the contents to be poured out and then resealed, Mark describes the woman’s action as “...συντριψασα το αλαβάστρον” - she shattered the neck of the bottle²³ and poured it on Jesus’ head.

This extravagant anointing of Jesus by Mary could be explained by her having been the most receptive to Jesus’ teaching and as an expression of honor and gratitude to Jesus for the resurrection of her brother Lazarus. However, a

deeper symbolism is found in the custom of anointing with oil for the ritual of consecration of **kings** (1 Kings 1:38-39)

“So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet,... and went down and had Solomon mount King David’s mule, and they escorted him to Gihon. Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon.”

and priests (Ex 29:7). *“This is what you are to do to consecrate them, so they may serve me as priests [then] take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head.”*

The anointing of the head was also a distinction which was conferred upon the guest of honor (Luke 7:46) among the Jews and other ancient cultures, but in this case Mark intended this action to symbolize Christ’s Royal Priesthood.

Verse 14:4-6

The disciple’s indignation of Mary’s action is explained well by St John Chrysostom; (Homily 80 on Matthew)

They [disciples] used to hearing their Master say, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, and blaming the Jews, because they omitted the weightier matters, judgment, and mercy, and faith, and discoursing much on the mount concerning almsgiving, and from these things they inferred with themselves, and reasoned, that if He accepts not whole burnt offerings, neither the ancient worship, much more will He not accept the anointing of oil.

Jesus’ reaction to the disciples indignation and Mary’s action is the same as from His comments regarding the widow’s gift (12:43). Jesus saw both actions, the use of all the costly anointing oil and the widow’s “putting in all she had to live on” as fundamentally the same. He regarded both gifts as true offerings of faith and love and accepted such giving, whether to God the Father or to Him, as right and natural.

Verse 14:7

Jesus’ reference to the continual presence of the poor refers to Deuteronomy 15:11.

If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need... Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all

²² Nard comes from India and the Far East and is made from the spikenard plant that grows in the Himalayas. The cost of the ointment used by Mary was worth about 300 denarii (about \$55,00 US) and was about a years’ worth of wages.

²³ This is the same verb used in Romans (16:20) by St. Paul when he speaks of the God of peace συντριψει τον σαταναν υπο τους ποδας υμων – will crush Satan under your feet.



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your work and in everything you put your hand to. *There will always be poor people in the land.* Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

This is not to say that poverty should be accepted without any effort to try and abolish it. It is simply a practical recognition that in this fallen world there will always be those in need, whom we should make every effort to help.

Verses 14:3-9 The Betrayal

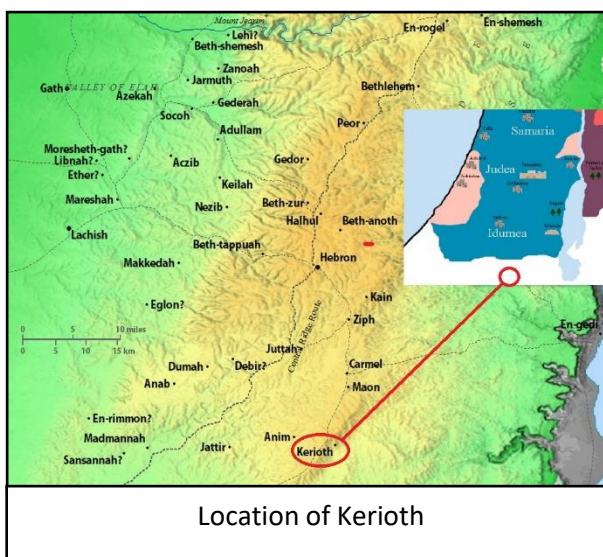
Who was Judas Iscariot?

Judas's name is the Greek version of the Hebrew "Judah" which roughly means "Praise" or "Let God Be Praised." However, the origin of "Iscariot" is believed to be from the Greek *iskariotes* comes from Hebrew קריה איש meaning "man of Kerieth," a city in Judea within the inheritance of the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:25).

There are two persons named Iscariot in Scripture with the most famous being Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus.

The other Iscariot is Simon Iscariot, the father of Judas (John 6:71). He was also called Judas Iscariot so as to distinguish him from "Judas the brother of James" (Luke 6:16).

Judas lived near the beginning of the first century A.D. and he is the only disciples of the 12 disciples not from Galilee.



Location of Kerieth



Landscape of Kerieth

Judas, like the other disciples grew up in an Israel which was occupied by a foreign ruler (Rome) with fighting between Samaritans, Jews, and other local groups, making it a hotbed of political unrest, rebellion, and oppression, making it a dangerous place to live, especially for anyone following someone like Jesus who attracted so much attention and controversy.

It is thought that Judas was a member of the Zealots who were motivated by these political factors within a prophetic idealism. They believed that if they turned Israel back to God and incited war against the Romans, the Messiah would arise to lead them and establish His Kingdom. In this light, the message Christ was preaching, along with His strong criticisms

against the Jewish leadership initially aroused great excitement among the Zealots and their sympathizers. Jesus seemed to fit their expectations of a Messiah who would turn the people back to God and lead them to victory over the Romans and usher in God's Kingdom. It is interesting to note that that Peter was also considered part of this group since he was known as Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15), and while Peter was equally as passionate as Judas the contrast of their paths is noteworthy.

When Jesus had chosen Judas to be one among His disciples and had appointed him treasurer too most likely Judas felt he was part of the leadership that would usher in the expected New World Order.

However when Jesus' message focused on the fulfillment of prophesy that He would die a humiliating crucifixion for the salvation of the world and that this world included gentiles, Judas began to understand that Jesus' references to

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the Kingdom contradicted the vision of the Zealots. Daniel had prophesied of the Messiah's coming at this time to set up the Kingdom that "shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44; 7:13-14, 27; 9:24-25) so slowly Judas began to see Jesus as a false Messiah.

Why did he do it?

Mark accuses Judas of being motivated by **greed**. (14:10-11)

"...and promised to give him money."

Matthew agrees with Mark (26:15)

"Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?"

Luke claims that Judas was **led astray by Satan**. (22:3)

"Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve."

John attributes the motivation to **both Satan and thievery**. (12:6 and 13:27)

"He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it."

"As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him."

What Did Judas Do?

The betrayal seems to follow closely after the anointing by Mary. Jesus' harsh rebuke, «**ΑΦΕΤΕ ΑΥΤΗΝ! ...ΚΑΛΟΝ ΕΡΓΟΝ ΕΙΡΓΑΣΑΤΟ ΕΙΣ ΕΜΕ.**» to the disciples after hearing them murmuring about this waste of costly ointment, was especially impactful to Judas as the realization sunk in that Jesus was not the expected Messiah.

Judas' betrayal and the price paid was prophesied in the Old Testament in Zechariah, (Zechariah 11:12-14).

- *I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.*

This was the price of a slave as given in Exodus 21:32.

"If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave..."

- *And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord.*
- *Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the family bond between Judah and Israel.*

Even Jesus' knowledge of the betrayal was prophesied, (Psalm 41:9)

"All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying, "A vile disease has afflicted him; he will never get up from the place where he lies." Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me."

From one perspective, it is important that we do not vilify Judas completely for his actions and not recognize that Scripture does make clear that Judas had made a commitment to Jesus, and that prior to Jesus' rebuke at the Anointing, that he was anything but sincere in his faith. Like the rest of the disciples, he left everything to follow our Lord was actively involved in ministry, he was given remarkable spiritual gifts, and witnessed Jesus' great miracles.

From another perspective, these prophecies should not be taken to mean that Judas was a hapless pawn in the fulfillment of Jesus' salvific work. Mark, Matthew and Luke all state that Judas sought out the Jewish elders indicating this was done at his own initiative and gave the Jewish leadership the opportunity they were looking for

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to put Jesus out of the way (verse 14:2). If Judas was truly unable to affect his destiny then Jesus' words at the Last supper and His admonition would be hypocritical. (14:18 and 21)

Judas teaches us that even the best environment of teaching, the most compelling evidence, and being among others deeply faithful we cannot become complacent as we are constantly under the influence of those forces opposing our faith in God. We each have free will to decide whether to walk in the light or in the dark.

Jesus tells us this, that even when we are in the faith we are subject to the influence of those who wish us to join them in darkness; *"The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows."* (Luke 12:47)

We must carefully guard our soul and our heart against these assaults, the most deadly of which is complacency and overconcern with worldly cares. Recall the dire warning in the parable of the Rich Man when God tells him,

You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own all the things you have prepared?

The story of Judas also reminds us of our requirement to observe part 2 of the Great Commandment.

"...and the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matt 22:39)

Here Jesus commands us that we must reach out to those who are walking away from the faith or have for whatever reason, have abandoned the faith. Jesus calls us to *"be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire"* (Jude 22–23).

Verses 14:12-26 The Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper

Verses 14:13-15 Jesus' answer to His disciples regarding the preparations for the Passover feast seem to indicate that Jesus had made prior preparations with someone in Jerusalem regarding the Passover celebration. From verse 14:15 we get the impression that οικοδεσπότη, "the master of the house" (different from the man carrying the pitcher of water) would not be someone who was uninformed as God could have prepared him in a dream or a vision that he would entertain Jesus and His disciples for the feast.

Recall the vision given to Ananias regarding St. Paul;

"In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias! The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

Jesus tells His disciples to ask the master of the house, *"Where is my guest room..."* indicating a previous preparation. This guestroom "κατάλυμα" is similar to the lodging where God met Moses (Ex 4:24). During the Passover week, hospitality was recognized as a universal duty in Jerusalem; pilgrims and strangers alike being received. However, it would not be likely that a room would have been available to entire company without previous arrangement.

Find a man carrying a pitcher... It is important that we also pay close attention to small details in Scripture and here in verse 14:13 we find another of these small details. *"Christ instructed two of his disciples: "Go into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him."* What is the significance of this man. How were the disciples to distinguish this particular man performing a seemingly common tasks in a city full of people? Pastor Greg Boyd²⁴ makes an interesting commentary on this point,

The custom of carrying water in the Holy Land is ancient. However, it was and is the woman's job to go to the well or spring with a pitcher and carry water to [her] home. When the Gibeonites deceived Joshua (9:3-27), he judged them and made them servants to chop wood and carry water. This punishment may seem mild to us, but how humiliating it was to a man—carrying water in public—a woman's job! This helps us to better understand how easy it was for

²⁴ Gregory A. Boyd (born June 2, 1957) is an American theologian, pastor, and author and senior Pastor of Woodland Hills Church.

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the disciples to identify the man carrying the water pot when Jesus sought an upper room [in which] to eat the Passover. It was not a question of seeking one man out of many carrying a water pot—this man would stick out above all others, in that he alone would be carrying one . . . A man may carry a water skin, but seldom does one carry a water pot.

Verse 14:16 “So they prepared the Passover.”

Once the disciples secured the room in Jerusalem for Passover, they had to handle preparations for the Seder²⁵ meal itself which was held by sunset, about 6pm. This preparation is outlined in Ex 12 and included;

1. Purchase of the lamb by the tenth day of the first month, four days before Passover
2. The lamb had to be unblemished and not more than one year old.
3. Under the supervision of the priests the lamb would be properly slaughtered. The family representative would slaughter the lamb and catch the blood in a basin.
4. The priest then tossed the blood at the base of the altar.
5. The family representative would skin the lamb and remove the fat and kidneys so they could be placed on the altar and burned.
6. Removal of all the leaven from the house, a task to be completed on the night before the meal itself. The father or other head of the family would lead in the search and removal of leaven.
7. Early in the morning of the day of Passover, the leaven had to be taken away and roasted.
8. The lamb would be roasted outside over an open fire until it was ready to eat.
9. Preparation of other dishes associated with the meal, such as jars of water, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, a fruit-and-nut paste, raw vegetable dipped in tart dressing, and the wine.
10. Arranging the room with floor cushions so everyone could recline at the table.



Traditional Seder Plate
Item 6 is the karpas (parsley)

Verse 14:18 “One of you will betray me...”

All the gospels indicate Jesus’ foreknowledge that one of His disciples would betray Him. Throughout His ministry Jesus quoted Old Testament prophecies about Himself so that the Psalm verse makes the agony which Jesus must have felt, both for Judas and His upcoming Passion painfully clear, “*Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.*” This agony is made clear by John’s Gospel when he writes that Jesus was *εταραχθη τω πνευματι* (John 13:21). This verb means to render anxious, agitate or stir up and is the same verb is used to describe the “troubling of the waters by the angel at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:4)

The words of Jesus “*One of you will betray me...*” and His dire warning, “*But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.*” would serve as a final opportunity to rouse Judas to repentance but sadly it did not have this effect.

Verse 19 gives the disciples response to Jesus’ statement, *λυπεισθαι*, that is deep sorrow that Jesus would imply treasonous behavior on behalf of His disciples who had given up all to follow the Master, thus leading to their perplexed and questioning glances between one another. Even Judas asked, “*Surely you don’t mean me?*” as Mark records that “one by one they said to him...” (verse 14:19)

Verse 14: The Dipping of the Bread, The Ritual of Karpas

Mark records Jesus’ action of dipping²⁶ the bread but only John’s Gospel gives us the full characterization of the action of the bread and Judas’s role in the betrayal. (John 13:26-27)

²⁵ Item 1. (shankbone) 2. (hard-boiled egg), 3. (horseradish), 4. (onion) 5. Charoset (paste of fruits and nuts, 6. Karpas (parsley)

²⁶ Notice the use of the word *εμβαπτομενος* “baptism” to describe the dipping action.

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“Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.”

The Jewish tradition is for the host to give the dipped bread to an honored guest as a sign of affection which in this case with Judas highlights even further the act of Judas’ betrayal.

The dipping of the karpas²⁷ is the first ritual (after the ceremonial hand-washing) of the seder and refers to as the inciting incident of the Passover story. After Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery, they tell their father he was murdered and devoured by a wild beast. They dip his coat in blood and show it to their father to convince him of their lie. Karpas also connects this Seder ritual to Joseph’s coat in that it has the dual meaning of both the green vegetable used during the Seder and “wool” as is given in Ester 1:6.

To further emphasize the connection between the coat and the karpas, some medieval rabbis ruled that the karpas should be dipped in red vinegar to remind us of the blood in which the coat of many colors was dipped. However, over time saltwater prevailed as a symbol of the tears of slavery.



Verses 14:22-24 Institution of the Last Supper

The narration of the Last Supper event is given in each of the Synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke which again indicates the importance of the event. The Holy Eucharist (Θεία Ευχαριστία) is the oldest experience of Christian Worship and represents the principle sacrament of the Orthodox Church. Ευχαριστία (Eucharist) is a Greek word meaning thanksgiving and the origin of the Eucharist is traced to the Last Supper event between Christ and His disciples. The Eucharist is the most distinctive event of Orthodox worship because in it the Church gathers corporately to remember and celebrate the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.



*Participation in the Eucharist is the very purpose of the Church, which is the Worship of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, the Eucharist is truly the center of the life of the Church and the principal means of spiritual development, both for the individual Christian and the Church as a whole and is an **experience** of communion with the Living God in which prayer, music, gestures, the material creation, art and architecture come into full orchestration. The Eucharist is a celebration of faith which touches not only the mind but also the emotions and the senses. Not only does the Eucharist embody and express the Christian faith in a unique way, but it also enhances and deepens our faith in the Trinity. This sacrament-mystery is the experience toward which all the other activities of the Church are directed and from which they receive their direction²⁸*

Augustine of Hippo makes a remarkably interesting comparison in relating the Bread and the Wine of the Last Supper as it relates to us as Christians.²⁹

“The very sacrifices of the Lord declare that Christians are united among themselves by a firm and inseparable love for one another. For when the Lord calls bread, which is compacted together by the union of many grains, His body, He is signifying one people, whom He bore, compacted into one body; and when He calls wine, which is pressed out from a multitude of branches and clusters and brought together into one, His blood, He also signifies one flock joined together by the mingling of a multitude united into one.”

²⁷ Karpas is the Hebrew term for a green vegetable, most likely parsley.

²⁸ Taken from GOARCH.ORG in an article by Rev. George Mastrantonis

²⁹ Chapter 50 of Augustine’s *Writings in Connection with the Donatist Controversy*

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Now while Mark only includes the event of the Last Supper, it is in the Gospel of John (chapters 13-16) that we hear the entire conversation of the evening where Christ clearly and openly explained to the disciples His purpose, His Passion, and what is to be expected in the future for His disciples.

Historical Understanding of the Eucharist

Throughout the centuries, Christianity has seen many evolutions of the Eucharist. Today in most non-denominational churches the original depth and richness of the Eucharistic meaning has been reduced to a simple memorial of the words of Christ at the Last Supper and even then, is only occasionally observed. This has never been the practice of the Church from Her very beginning and in fact, from the earliest times a form or rite was prescribed by the Early Church.



Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (τη κοινωνια και τη κλασει του αρτου)...All the believers were together and had everything in common. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

Acts 20:7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.

Later in the Post-Apostolic period the sacramental identity and tradition of the celebration of the Eucharist among believers was cemented into the psyche of the Church.

Didache of the Apostles³⁰

Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks thus. **First, concerning the cup:** *We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David Your servant, which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory forever.* **And concerning the broken bread:** *We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory forever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.*

But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, but they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs. Chapter 9

But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. Chapter 14

In his **First Apology**, St Justin the Martyr (2nd Century) speaks of the sacramental nature of this *κλασει του αρτου* (breaking of the bread)

For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and the change by which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and the blood of the incarnated Jesus.

in his **Catechetical Lectures**, St Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Century) spoke of the divine mystery of the *κλασει του αρτου* and warns us to not consider the Eucharist as simply an evening meal.

For just as the bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the Body of Christ and the wine the Blood of Christ...This one teaching of the blessed Paul is enough to give you complete certainty about the Divine

³⁰ The *Didache* is a 1st century document and is considered the first example of the Early Church's catechetical document that provided the order of early sacraments and guidance on Christian life.

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Mysteries... *Do not, therefore, regard the Bread and the Wine as simply that; for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but -- be fully assured by the faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ.*

In his treatise **On the Lord's Prayer**, St. Cyprian of Carthage (3rd Century) speak of the daily partaking of the salvific power of the Eucharist.

Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body and we ask that this Bread be given us daily, so that we who are in Christ and daily receive the Eucharist as the food of salvation and [by] abstaining from communicating, be withheld from the heavenly Bread, and be separated from Christ's Body...

The Anaphora (Αναφορά)

Today, the Anaphora is the portion of the Divine Liturgy that captures this most ancient of Christian traditions, the *Κλασει του Αρτου* and is given in four (4) parts. The Greek word αναφορά is a two-part word; ανα – lead up and φερω – offer. The word however has a specific connotation *to offer something upon an altar as a sacrifice to God through a sequence to reach its needed consummation.*

The Anaphora begins after the Symbol of Faith (Creed) with the announcement by the deacon.

Let us stand aright! Let us stand in awe! Let us be attentive, that we may present the Holy Offering in peace with the people's response describing this Offering as a mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.

Part 1 Words of Thanksgiving

In the first part of the anaphora, the priest, recalling the words of the Holy Fathers, restates the reasons for offering the Anaphora to God:

It is proper and just to sing to you, to bless you, to praise you, to thank you, to worship you in every place of your dominion. For you are God...For all this we thank you, and your only-begotten Son, and your Holy Spirit, for all that we know and that we do not know, for the manifest and hidden benefits bestowed on us.

The faithful respond with the triumphal hymn of the angels (from Isaiah in his vision)

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. Heaven and earth are filled with your glory; glory to God in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.

Part 2 The anamnesis: the recalling God's works

The term **anamnesis**³¹ is a Greek word for “*bringing to remembrance*” and is a *deliberate recollection*, done to appreciate the effects or intended results of what happened. In the words of Hippolytus of Rome this is a “recalling” of the last and the first mystical supper of our Lord. This is much deeper than a simple remembrance of a past event but a bringing to mind of God who is now present in our midst. This 2nd part begins with the reason for the Anamnesis.

You so loved your world that you gave your only-begotten Son so that everyone who believes in him should not perish, but have life everlasting. He came and fulfilled the whole divine plan in our behalf. On the night he was betrayed, or rather, when he surrendered himself for the life of the world, he took bread into his holy and all-pure and immaculate hands, gave thanks and blessed, sanctified, broke, and gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying...

The continuation of this segment of the *anamnesis* is a reciting of the words given in Mark verses 14:22-24

“Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it... This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

³¹ The root word μνήμησ – to remember

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The priest close with; *remembering, therefore, this saving commandment and all that has been done for our sake: the Cross, the tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming.*

Part 3 The Epiclesis: Asking for the descent of the Holy Spirit

After this remembrance and thanking of Christ for what He has done for His creation, the priest performs the **epiclesis** which in Greek is the “calling upon.” Here the priest offers to God “this spiritual and unbloody sacrifice” and entreats God to,

*“...send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts lying before us, **And make this bread the precious body of your Christ, and that which is in this cup the precious blood of your Christ, changing them by your Holy Spirit, that for those who partake of them they may bring about a spirit of vigilance, the remission of sins, the communion of your Holy Spirit, the fullness of the heavenly kingdom, and confidence in you, not judgment or condemnation.**”*

Notice that the prayer asks that God send down His Holy Spirit upon not just the gifts, but also upon **us**.

Part 4 The final prayers for the living and the dead

PRAYERS for the DEPARTED *For Saint John the prophet, forerunner, and Baptist; for the holy, glorious, and most praiseworthy apostles; for Saint(s) (Name), whose memory we celebrate; and for all Your saints, through whose supplications, visit us, O God. And remember all who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection to life eternal (Names). Grant them rest, O our God, where the light of Your countenance keeps watch.*

PRAYERS for the LIVING *We beseech You, Lord, remember all Orthodox bishops who rightly teach the word of Your truth, the priests, the deacons in Christ, and every priestly and monastic order. Again, we offer You this spiritual worship for the whole world, for the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and for those living pure and reverent lives. For civil authorities and our armed forces, grant that they may govern in peace, Lord, so that in their tranquility we, too, may live calm and serene lives, in all piety and virtue.*

And in case someone has not been remembered, the Deacon says to the people,

And remember those whom each one of us has in mind, and all the people.

Verses 14:25 I will not drink again ...

At Passover, it is Jewish teaching and custom that during the Seder, four (4) cups of wine be drunk. Each of these cups recalls the events of the Exodus from Egypt and the birth of the Jewish nation and thus represent expressions of redemption. Specifically, each cup of wine represents God’s promise to the Israelites that He:

1. "will take you out..."
2. "will save you..."
3. "will redeem you..."
4. "will take you as a nation..."

Some scholars say Jesus made this statement of not drinking between the third and fourth cups. Jesus has accomplished, through His ministry, the first three (3) of God’s promises, up to His voluntary crucifixion on the cross. However, the celebration of the fourth cup will not occur until His Second Coming when it will be a time and place suitable for celebration, possibly at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7–9). Recall, that even on the cross, when offered wine mixed with *σμύρνα*³², Jesus refuses it (Mark 15:23).

Verses 14:26 And they went out singing a hymn...

³² *Σμύρνα* (Smyrna) is a bitter herb, like myrrh that was mixed with wine and given to help deaden the pain of criminals sentenced to crucifixion.

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At the conclusion of the supper and as was customary at the close of the Passover, Jesus and His disciples closed the evening by singing praises to God in the form of a hymn which probably was one of the Psalms. Then they set out for the mount of Olives, outside the city of Jerusalem choosing to retire there so as to prevent a possible riot in Jerusalem, and to not bring trouble upon the master of the house where they celebrated the Passover.

This singing and praising is remembered in the Divine Liturgy at the close of the Anaphora when the priest exclaims, *“And grant that with one voice and one heart we may glorify and praise Your most honorable and majestic name, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.”*



Verses 14:27-31 Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

Verse 14:27 After the Last Supper dialogue, Jesus continues to explain what His disciples can expect in their future as they follow Him. Now Jesus’ tells them something even more disturbing, “οτι παντες **σκανδαλισθησεσθε** εν εμοι εν τη νυκτι ταυτη” – (This night you will all be scandalized by me...)”)

The Greek word σκανδαλόν is literally the trigger mechanism of a trap that closes on the unsuspecting victim). Figuratively it is a means of “*causing to stumble*” with a stress on the *means of entrapment*, i.e. how someone is caught by their own desires.

This second *figurative* expression was used by Jesus back in chapter 8 when Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus prophesized about His death. Jesus accused Peter of being a stumbling block, a means of entrapment which is why Jesus said to Peter, *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a σκανδαλον (stumbling block) to me for you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”*

Jesus tells His disciples that when they witness His humiliations and sufferings, it will be a *stumbling block* to their faith, causing them to question whether He truly was the Messiah, especially when they see Him being overpowered by His enemies. This disappointment is evident Luke 24:21; when Jesus meets two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus and they say, “... and we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

The disciples become even more dismayed when Jesus paraphrases an ominous quote from the prophecy of Zechariah (13:7) saying, *‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.’* This is taken from the prophet who speaks the words of the Lord concerning Israel and her priests.

Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the Lord Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”

Here Jesus refers to Himself as the shepherd, the “strike” refers to His death of the Son, the disciples are the sheep of His flock and the scattering is the disciples who will scatter at the arrest of Jesus (verse 14:50).

Verse 14:28 However, not to leave His disciples in this state of distress Jesus comforts them by speaking of His resurrection and promising to see them again, *“I will go before you in Galilee.”* Recall that the angel present at the empty tomb used these very words to remind the disciples of Jesus’ promise.

“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here...He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

Mark 16:6

Verse 14:29-31 In verse 14:29 we once again encounter the self-confident Peter displaying the kind of prideful response that creates the condition in which Satan could entrap him, just as he had back in [verse 8:33](#). In his reply there is a genuine belief that such desertion is not possible, ει παντες σκανδαλισθησονται αλλα ουκ εγω. (Even if all the others “become entrapped” I will not!) So, in Peter’s response we notice three things³³:

³³ The Gospel of Mark, A Modern Study Guide by John Shultz, 1965

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1. Peter rejects the very idea as an impossibility, and bluntly contradicts our Lord. He evidently regarded our Lord's words as a mark of distrust of the disciples rather than as a prediction and solemn warning.
2. Peter asserts his strength of character to be greater than that of the other disciples.
3. He trusts to his own strength, though the remembrance of how his faith failed when he was sinking in the Lake of Galilee, should have presented this presumption.

Peter will later learn to be wary of reliance on just his limited human strength and his bold and prideful nature would drastically change with the events of Jesus' arrest, trial, and suffering of His Passion. These same "entrapments" that snared Peter, he would later warn other Christians about during his ministry.

"And a stone that causes people to stumble (λιθος προσκομματος) and a rock that becomes for them a trap (πετρα σκανδαλου). They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for."

1 Peter 2:8

Verse 14:30

Jesus' response to Peter is prophetic, "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will deny me three times."

In the first century, roosters commonly crowed at least twice during the night. The first crowing usually occurred between twelve and one o'clock. The second crowing took place not long before daybreak, most likely around three o'clock. It was this latter crowing that is referred to as the "the cockcrow." This crow was also when roosters crowed the loudest, and this loud call was the alarm clock in ancient times for summoning laborers to work.³⁴

Herein there is a bit of controversy since the other three Gospel writers record Jesus saying to Peter,

"Truly I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.

In Marks account Jesus says *"before the rooster crows twice..."* However, this is not necessarily a controversy as the other Gospel writers are simply using the term "cockcrow" in a general sense whereas Mark uses the very specific sense of the term. This is evident by Mark in Chapter 13:35 when Jesus was warning about the return of the Son of Man saying *"Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come"*, and speaks of the cockcrow as a distinct event.

"...μεσονυκτιου η αλεκτοροφωνιας η πρωι." (...whether at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn)

Depictions of roosters have been found in Roman catacombs and on the tombs of Christians. During the Middle Ages, the rooster became a popular Christian image on weathervanes, also known as weathercocks and thus are commonly found on old churches in Germany, Scotland, Norway, the Netherlands, France, and other countries. The rooster's habit of crowing at the dawn of each new morning also made it a symbol of the Christian's victory of light over darkness. Roosters in Catholic art are associated with Peter and represents his denial of Christ but more importantly stands for his remorse and repentance upon hearing the rooster's crow. For this reason, the rooster has symbolically come to represent a call to repentance and conversion. Comparisons have also been made of the rooster's crowing in the morning as a reminder that Christ who ended spiritual darkness.



Rooster on Church Steeple in Prague, Czech

³⁴ McClintock and Strong, 1968

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Verse 14:31

Peter counters Jesus' warning saying, "ου μη σε απαρνησομαι..." Here we have a unique feature of the Greek language not present in English; the double negative. Greek uses the two words to express negation, ου and μη.

An example to show the difference in these two Greek words can be found by examining Matthew 5:17 where Jesus says,

μη νομισητε οτι ηλθον καταλυσαι τον νομον η τους προφητας **ουκ** ηλθον καταλυσαι αλλα πληρωσαι

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

In the first part of the sentence Jesus uses μη to refer to a willingness or desire and implies a choice of action on the part of the listener, μη νομισητε, *do not be willing or desire to think that I have come to...*

In the second part of the sentence Jesus uses ουκ to express that something is not a fact. Ουκ ηλθον (*I did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.*

In Peter's reply to Jesus' claim that Peter will deny Him, Peter is indicating two important things,

1. The fact that he will not deny Jesus - **ου μη σε απαρνησομαι**
2. That Jesus should not think that Peter would deny Him - **ου μη σε απαρνησομαι**

These two negatives, understood in their proper content help us understand the firm belief and conviction that Peter had in his loyalty to Jesus even to the point of dying with Him. To be fair Peter, through Mark, admits that the other disciples express the same loyalty, ωσαυτως δε και παντες ελεγον (as said all the other [disciples]).

Verses 14:32-42 In the Garden of Gethsemane

Garden of Gethsemane is mentioned only twice in the Bible, and in one context. The word is Hebrew and is a combination of two words Γα (gat), press, and שמן (shaman), fat. The combined meaning is **oil press** and as the garden was at the foot of the Mount of Olives it is believed the garden contained an oil press.

Both Mark and Matthew record that Jesus and the disciples went to the Mount of Olives, and then proceeded to a field (χωριον) called Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed three agonizing prayers after which He was arrested.

While Luke only mentions Jesus and the disciples going to the Mount of Olives he does indicate the Jesus went to that location *κατα το εθος* (as was His custom or habit – Luke 22:39). This is how Judas was able to inform the Jewish and Roman authorities where they could arrest Jesus. This is made clear by John who writes in his gospel (18:2)

Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

John also leaves out the details of Jesus' praying in the Garden and moves immediately to Jesus arrest.

Verse 14:33-34 Before Jesus leaves to pray, He tells His disciples that His "soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death..." (...περιλυπος εστιν η ψυχη μου ...) The Greek word, περιλυπος, can be rendered as "going round and round in sadness" but Jesus adds to this that His depression was "to the point of death" (εως θανατου). Some scholars see this intense emotion of despair as a possibility that Jesus was facing actual death in the Garden of Gethsemane and it is also here where we can see the fully human nature of the Lord which desired a release from this terrible Passion. Luke describes Jesus' anguish in greater detail when he writes, (Luke 22:44)

And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.



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Verse 14:36 *Take this cup from me*

Professor Alan Cole³⁵ offers the importance of this claim by noting that if Satan would have been able to make Jesus succumb physically at this point, without allowing Him to give His life as a ransom for the sins of mankind, he would have prevented the salvation of mankind. This can be supported if we interpret Jesus' words to the Father in His first prayer, "*παρενεγκε το ποτηριον απ εμου τουτο*" (take away this cup from me) to mean His death on the cross, then St Paul's comment in Hebrews (5:7) could not apply to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, because the Father did not save Him from that death. The theology of the Church teaches, while Christ has two natures, He has only *one* will and thus Jesus could not ask for anything contrary to the will of his Father.

Johnson and DeWelt present another interesting interpretation of "*take this cup from Me*". They posit that Jesus did not desire to

"back out of it, infinitely far from that." The cup, from which He was to drink, had in it ingredients which were never mingled by the hand of His Father, such as the treachery of Judas, the desertion of His disciples, denial on the part of Peter, the trial in the Sanhedrin, the trial before Pilate, the scourging, the mockery by the soldiery, the crucifixion, etc. All these incidental and unessential ingredients were put into the cup by men, willfully and wantonly. Hence the petition, Remove this cup as it is. Without these superadded ingredients the potion would have been unquestionably bitter enough; and it need not be doubted that, in consideration of that bitterness, the exquisite sensibility of our Lord would be conscious of a feeling of shrinking and instinctive recoil. But still He had come for the very purpose of 'tasting death for every man,' and was no doubt willing and wishful to die."

Verse 14:36 *Abba, Father*

Αββα Abba" is the Aramaic term for God the Father and is only found referenced in the Bible three times; once by Mark and twice by Paul in Romans and Galatians and is an intimate appellation spoken by Jesus and Paul to characterize their personal relationships with God. It is also a term of reverence for bishops and patriarchs within the Coptic, Syriac, and Ethiopian churches.

The second term used by Jesus ο Πατηρ (Father) implies a dual designation suggests that what Jesus does and will do is not for the Jews only, but includes Gentiles.

Verse 14:36 *Yet not what I will, but what you will*

Just as Jesus' humanity is evident in His words, "*if it be possible, take this cup from Me,*" With the words *αλλ ου τι εγω θελω αλλα τι ου* (but not what I will but what is Your will) Jesus reveals His divine nature with the closing since as He is one in essence with the Father, His will and the Father's will must be the same.

Verses 14:37

Mark tells us that Jesus repeated His prayer to the Father (verse 14:39). Each time Jesus returns to find the disciples sleeping and He singles out Peter, reproaching him for falling asleep. Peter could have been singled out since it was only eight verses earlier that Peter said he was ready to die for Jesus. It seems that now Jesus is saying to him: "*You were ready to die for Me, but you are not ready to say awake for Me.*"

Verses 14:32, 39, and 41 *Jesus prays alone*

Mark, Matthew, and Luke make a point to record that Jesus withdrew to pray in solitude. Throughout the New Testament when Jesus went off to pray in solitude it was for a specific reason, and many times it was to prepare for a major task.

- a) At His baptism (Luke 3:21)

³⁵ R. Alan Cole (1923-2003) was a biblical scholar, professor at Oakhill Theological College London, Moore College Sydney, and Trinity College, Singapore. He is the author of the Tyndale Biblical Commentary Series

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- b) Left to spend 40 days in the wilderness before being tempted by Satan.
- c) To prepare for all the healing and teaching He would perform (Luke 5:16)
- d) Before He selected His 12 disciples (Luke 6:12-13)
- e) Here in the Garden before His faced His arrest and Passion

The lesson for us is that, as imitators of Jesus, we need to practice the art of solitude as a vital discipline in our spiritual growth. All of us from time to time suffer from the stresses of life, especially during this pandemic period. When faced with the combination of work stresses, politics, family care issues we are vulnerable to losing heart and sometimes faith.

This is why the Orthodox monastic life is such an important example for us who live in the world, for here we have a living example of the spiritual power and comfort that solitude provides. Spending time at one of our Orthodox monasteries demonstrates firsthand what Elijah found out when he was under great stress. That God is not in the noise and thunder but in the silence.

And Elijah said to the Lord, "They have torn down your altars and killed all your prophets, except me. And now they are even trying to kill me!" And God said "Go out and stand on the mountain, I want you to see me when I pass by."

All at once, a strong wind shook the mountain and shattered the rocks. But the LORD was not in the wind. Next, there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² Then there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. Finally, there was a gentle breeze..."

We not only find God in our solitude, but we also receive a clarity that comes from time spent with God from which we emerge spiritually, physically, and emotionally renewed.

Verse 14:41 **απεχει ηλθεν η ωρα**

These words in this verse have been debated as to have several interpretations depending on the way "απεχει" is translated. Strong's Concordance translates this word in several ways; *it is enough, to be finished, or to be away or distant.*

- a) **"It is enough"** This translation indicates that Jesus is saying to His disciples, *"Enough! - the time when you could have been of service to me is gone by. I asked you to stay awake and keep watch from my betrayers."* Had they been awake they might warned Him, but now the time is past, and He is now in the hands of his enemies.
- b) **"It is finished"** - This translation demonstrates Jesus offering consolation to His disciples, (καθευδετε και αναπαυεσθε) *take your rest, my agony is over take some rest during the brief interval that remains.*
- c) **"[he] is at a distance"** - Here the translation is rendered as Jesus saying to His disciples, *"There is yet time for you to take some rest. The betrayer is some distance off."*

Verse 14:43-52 **The Betrayal and the Arrest**

Verse 14:43 Mark and Matthew refer to the group that came to arrest Jesus as (οχλος πολυς) a large crowd, however John's Gospel provides significantly more details (John 18:3). He refers to the group by the specific term την σπειραν³⁶ which refers to a body of soldiers, a cohort which is a tenth of a legion representing about 500-600 soldiers. It is doubtful that the Jewish Council or Pilate would release that many soldiers however John is making the point that the group was large enough to ensure that they were prepared for any resistance that might be offered. This is supported by the additional comment *"They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons."* and indicates a readiness to do an extensive search. Also, John is being clear that this group sent to arrest Jesus was composed of Roman soldiers and Jewish servants meaning that both Jew and Gentile are partners in the death of the Son of God.

³⁶ Note: Do not confuse this word σπειραν with a similar Greek word σπείρω which is "seed"

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Verse 14:44 Even though Judas is about to betray Jesus, Mark specifically identifies Judas' as "one of the 12" reminding readers of his former intimate relationship with Jesus as a warning to all of us that we can be led away if we are not vigilant and on guard. While the "kiss" was prearranged, the act of betrayal with a kiss contains a two-fold meaning. A kiss is not only a sign of love and affection but was also given as a sign of deep respect, honor and token of fidelity especially to a teacher. Judas uses the kiss of peace, both as an inverted symbol of love and affection and as a cruel irony as one who had previously respected Jesus as his Teacher.

To describe the kiss, Mark uses the term κατεφίλησεν. The prefix κατα always accentuates the verb multiplying the impact of the verb. In this case the verb indicates a fervent kiss of deep affection, much more than is required to identify the person of Jesus. This combined with Judas' address of "Rabbi" shows that this was a planned and deliberate act of betrayal with the intent that Jesus realize the intensity of the betrayal.

Mark does not record Jesus' comment on the kiss, however Matthew and Luke provide us with Jesus' response to Judas' action.

Matthew 26:50 *"Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend."*

Luke 22:48 *"but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'"*

From John's Gospel we have the details on Jesus' response to Judas and of the reaction of those who came to arrest Him.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again, he asked them, "Who is it you want?" Jesus of Nazareth, they said.

Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

John 18:4-8

Verse 14:47 Once again we have evidence of Peter's temper and quickness to act, although only John mentions Peter by name as the one who acted. In fact, Peter acts even after Jesus gives those arresting Him the command to "αφετε τουτους υπαγειν" (Let these men go!)

John also provides us with the name of who Peter attacked, Malchus, and identifies him as a servant of the priest and not a soldier which is interesting that he, and not an armed soldier, would be Peter's target. Peter's quick temper and possibly pride filled action also belies his continuing misunderstanding about Jesus' ultimate purpose and all that He taught them during His ministry. This is not Peter's first misunderstanding and Jesus, attempting to remind Peter of this says, *Put your sword away. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* (verse 14:11). Jesus is reminding Peter and the other disciples that He is willing to accept that which the Father gives Him and that the answer to violence is never violence. This is the reason why the Orthodox Church has never adopted the policy of **Just War**, as the Church cannot rationalize the committing of violence. The famous picture of Bishop Germanos of Patra blessing the soldiers before battle was not to bless a glorious war or the violence but to ask God for their safe return.



While we cannot know if Peter's intended to kill Malchus, and the fact that Peter only got the man's right ear suggests several possibilities:

1. The man moved

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2. Peter had bad aim
3. Jesus intervened and guided Peter's sword to only strike Malchus' ear

Most likely the third option would fit best for the Gospel narrative. Luke, the physician, is the one who tells us that Jesus heals Malchus' ear (Luke 22:51). Thus Jesus not only rebukes Peter for his use of violence but also once again demonstrates that mercy must extend even to those "who hate us" (Luke 6:27)

Verse 14:51-52 A Young Man Runs Away

The incident of this young man seems to occur with no direct purpose. Commentary from Johnson and DeWalt suggests,

The only solution, certainly the best, is the supposition that it was no other than Mark himself. Mark was at this time a young man, living probably in Jerusalem with his mother, and was more or less a follower of Jesus, and very likely to be present, from his interest in our Lord, during these awful transactions, That he should not name himself is very naturally explained, on the same principle of personal delicacy as induced the evangelist John to allude to himself in the third person.

Verses 14:53-72 Jesus on Trial

Once again, we have here the Marcian Sandwich. The incident of Peter's denial sandwiched between the trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin.

Mark does not provide any details regarding the chronology of what happens after Jesus was arrested. It is John's Gospel that we read about Jesus' first taken to Annas.

Annas (also Ananus or Ananias) was appointed by the Roman legate Quirinius as the first High Priest of the newly formed Roman province of Judaea in AD 6 and served as High Priest for ten years (AD 6–15). Josephus records that Annas was removed during the reign of Roman emperor Tiberius who "sent Valerius Gratus to be procurator of Judea, and had Ananus removed from high priesthood."

While Annas was officially not a high priest due to the political maneuvering of Roman authorities he remained a skillful behind-the-scenes political influence and managed to have five of his own sons become high priests. While Annas was officially no longer a high priest due to the political maneuvering of Roman authorities he retained political influence through his five sons who became high priests.

As Caiaphas was son-in-law to Annas, the thought is that Jesus was first brought to Annas for an informal preliminary investigation and counsel on how to proceed due to his experience and recognition of his status.

Caiaphas was the high priest of the temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' ministry and ruled from AD 18 to 37. The high priest served as the Jewish people's representative to God and after the Roman governor was the most powerful leader in Judea. Caiaphas oversaw the temple treasury, controlled the temple police and lower-ranking priests and attendants, and ruled over the Sanhedrin.



As Caiaphas was in charge of the temple, he was aware of the money changers and animal sellers who were driven out by Jesus. As a member of the Sadducees, Caiaphas did not believe in the resurrection so it was most likely a shock to him when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Caiaphas was also the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.

The Trial – Was it Legal?

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Before we discuss the trial, it is helpful to understand what constituted “the chief priests and the whole council...” The Sanhedrim, which convened to convict criminals consisted of

1. chief priests, which are the heads of the twenty-four priestly classes
2. scribes, which were rabbis schooled in the literature of the Temple
3. elders, who were chosen from amongst the most influential of the laity. Jewish tradition puts the number of members at seventy-one.

The high priest usually presided, and the other councilors were arranged in front of these two in the form of a semicircle. Two scribes or clerks attended, who on criminal trials registered the votes, one for acquittal, the other for condemnation.

While the Sanhedrin did have the ability to try and convict criminals, the manner in which this trial was conducted can be shown to not be in accordance with Jewish laws of the time. Criminal procedure in the Torah rests upon three principles: (1) publicity of the trial, (2) the liberty of defense allowed to the accused, and (3) a guaranty against the dangers of single testimony. In each of these cases there was a clear violation.

- a) **Jesus was arrested secretly at night and was not formally charged of any offense.** Judas simply pointed out Jesus, and a crowd arrested Him. In his book *Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews*, Samuel Mendelsohn states, “The testimony of an accomplice [in this case, Judas] is not permissible by Rabbinic law...and no man’s life, nor his liberty, nor his reputation can be endangered by the malice of the one who has confessed himself a criminal.” Since Judas accepted a bribe (Mark 14:10) from a judge, certainly Judas would be considered a criminal. And since Jesus’ judges bribed Judas, they would be criminals as well.
- b) **Jesus was examined in a secret night proceeding.** According to the Talmud, the Sanhedrin is forbidden from convening between the time of the evening and morning sacrifice. In the book *Jesus Before the Sanhedrin*, M.M. Lemann states that “no session [including a preliminary examination] of the court could take place before the offering of the morning sacrifice.” The Jewish Mishna states, “Let a capital offense be tried during the day, but suspend at night.” The famous Rabbinical teacher Maimonides explains the “The reason why the trial of a capital offense could not be held at night is because...the examination of such a charge is like the diagnosing of a wound—in either case a more thorough and searching examination can be made by daylight.”
- c) **The Sanhedrin could not bring forth verifiable charges.** (verse 14:55 and 59). Equally the witnesses they brought forth could not agree and Jewish Law requires that “One witness shall not arise against a man for any sin or guilt that he may commit; according to two witnesses or according to three witnesses a matter shall stand.” Thus, two witnesses provide conclusive proof of reality, but one witness does not. (Deuteronomy 19:15)
- d) **The Sanhedrin illegally convened to try a capital offense on the day before Sabbath.** Jesus, however, was arrested on Passover evening which is the day before the First Day of Unleavened Bread and the Jewish Mishna states that “They shall not judge on the eve of the Sabbath, nor on any festival.”
- e) **The trial concluded in one day.** Again, reading from the Mishna, “A criminal case resulting in the acquittal of the accused may terminate the same day on which the trial began (verse 14:64). But if a sentence of death is to be pronounced, it cannot be concluded before the following day.” Forcing a trial to last longer than one day allows time for witnesses in support of the accused to come forth.

However, even with these irregularities, R. Alan Cole, states that “even if the high priests could find some clear breach of the Torah, sufficient to warrant a death sentence, their task was still only half done. They also had to produce some political charge, adequate in Roman eyes to warrant the carrying out of the death sentence. Both Pilate (Mk. 15:14) and Gallio (Acts 18:14-16) show Roman reluctance to condemn a provincial on purely religious grounds.

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Many believe that the Romans had taken away the ability of the Jewish courts to impose a sentence of capital punishment, even when dealing with their own people based on John 18:31.

However, Scripture does not support this, and in fact they *did* have the power to try, convict and execute people as the following cases demonstrate.

- a) Stephen was accused of blasphemy and as a result was stoned to death by the Jewish authority, as described in the book of Acts (6:11; 7:59). The Romans were not consulted in this execution and Scripture gives no indication of their disapproval.
- b) On several occasions, in Mark, the scribes and Pharisees sought to kill Jesus (Mark 11:18; 14:1). If this were illegal, then they would have even attempted to do so.
- c) The elders of Judea brought before Jesus a woman who had been caught committing adultery, saying, "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what say you?" (John 8:5). If the Jews did not have the authority to put this woman to death, Jesus might have replied, "Aren't you aware of Roman law? You don't have the power to execute anyone." But He replied, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

What was true however was that although Jewish courts could impose the death sentence, the Roman government would intervene in criminal affairs when matters of treason, civil disobedience, incitement to revolution or attacks against Caesar were involved.

Jesus' opponents accused Him of blasphemy, (verse 14:64) but since they did not want to execute Him themselves, they created charges of treason against Him so that the trial could be brought before Pontius Pilate and thus the Romans would be responsible for Jesus' death, and not the Sanhedrin.

Verse 14:61,62 Who Are You?

Now the high priest asks Jesus the central question – who are you? If he asked Jesus if He were the Christ (Messiah), the Anointed, God's prophet, that while it could be contested, in itself it would not constitute blasphemy. So the question Caiphas asks is are you the Son of the Blessed. Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on this term saying "*It was common for the Jews to use some such term as the Blessed when referring to God, in order that they might not become guilty of taking the divine name in vain.*"

An affirmative answer here would justify the accusation of blasphemy and Jesus could be condemned to death by the Sanhedrin, as He indeed was." Jesus instead answered with a quotation from Daniel saying "I am [the Christ] and you will see the son of man..." (Daniel 7:13,14) Jesus' declaration of his divinity through the use of the term "I AM" was given under the solemn sanction of an oath, (Matt. 26:63) in the course of judicial proceedings, in the presence of the highest council of the realm and is His first public declaration of his divinity.

The final illegality of this trial was present in verse 14:65 "και κολαφιζειν αυτον και οι υπηρεται ραπισμασιν αυτον εβαλλον." Κολαφιζω is strike with the fist, with the intent to mistreat violently. Ραπισμα is to smite one with slaps. The law did not allow for the accused to be harmed without the passing of the sentence from the official court. Peter later recalls the patient endurance of Jesus amid the taunting and the beatings (1 Pet. 2:21-23)

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Verses 14:66-72 Peter's Denial

Now comes the fulfillment of what Jesus prophesied to His disciples at the Last Supper when He told them they would witness His humiliations and sufferings, and it would be a *stumbling block* to their faith, causing them to question whether He truly was the Messiah, especially when they see Him being overpowered by His enemies. Jesus' ominous quote from the prophecy of Zechariah (13:7) saying, *'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered'* is what is now happening. In these verses we have Peter coming face to face with his stumbling and an action which is in direct opposition to his earlier emphatic words to Jesus, *"ου μη σε απαρνησομαι..."*

The telling of Peter's denial is one area when there is one of the closest agreement in the details among all the four (4) Gospels. Mark's account, which is most likely based upon Peter's own recollections, provides the basic story. It begins with Peter following Jesus and His captors from a distance, *"beneath the courtyard"* where Jesus is being questioned. Luke and John indicate that Peter was among the priest's servants, one of which was the cousin of Malchus (the servant whose ear Peter had cut off). While warming themselves by a fire the first denial comes after the accusation of the servant girls, *"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus, weren't you?"* Peter's answer is more than a simple denial saying *"...ουκ οίδα ουδε επίσταμαι τι συ λεγει"*

This first denial is aorist form (ἠρνήσατο) which is a simple one-time act. The second part of Peter's statement *"ουδε επίσταμαι"* contains the verb *"επίσταμαι"* and implies a knowledge gained through prolonged acquaintance and *sustained personal contact*³⁷. An in-depth knowledge of something. With this denial comes the first crow of the rooster.

In the second denial Peter flees to get away from his accuser and is again confronted by either the same servant girl (Mark) or another girl (Matthew³⁸) who cries out, *"ουτος εξ αυτων εστιν"* *"This man is one of them!"* This second denial *"ἠρνειτο"* uses the imperfect tense that indicates he *continued to deny* knowing Jesus. Matthew strengthens this by recording that Peter, *"...ἠρνήσατο μεθ ορκου"* (denied Him with an oath). (Matthew 26:72)

The third denial comes from a group of bystanders saying, *"Surely you are one of them..."* The addition of, *"...for you are a Galilean"* and Matthew's account indicates that Peter's accent gave him away³⁹. Peter's response is much intense and much more personal, *"...ἠρξατο αναθεματιζειν και ομνυειν* *στι ουκ οίδα τον ανθρωπον τουτον ον λεγετε* (I declare anathema with an oath that I do not know this man you speak of)

The effect produced in these denials, which is highlighted in Matthew, is to show the progression Peter's denials becoming more public and more serious. Whereas the first denial had been made in a private exchange between him and the servant girl, the second denial is made in front of bystanders with an oath, and the final denial, in which Peter again says that he does not know Jesus, is then in public, made with a formal renunciation of his association with Jesus and even possibly numbering himself among those who consider Him anathema to the Jewish faith. This final denial comes with the second crow of the rooster and the culmination of Jesus prophesizing, *"you will deny me."* (Mark 14:30) The weight of his denials along with the sound of the second cock crow certainly brought Jesus' words back as a piercing recognition of what Peter had done and thus the reason for his bitter weeping.

In his book, *The Ministry of Peter, the Chief Apostle*, Eric Huntsman writes,

[Peter] becomes for Mark's audience, the perfect tragic character, good but not too good so that the reader can identify with him. His efforts to defend Jesus and then to follow him even after a temporary moment of terror and flight represent well the inadequate efforts of all of us to love and serve Jesus. This lesson may have had particular

³⁷ Επίστήμη is the Greek word for science – the art of gaining knowledge.

³⁸ This difference could be explained by a literary technique often found in Matthew, where he doubles the number of people that he found in his original source material, perhaps to establish the *"two witness"* requirement to fulfill the Old Testament for an official accusation.

³⁹ While on the surface this seems to make sense, the truth is that during the Passover Festival there would have been people from all over, including Galilee, making the association of an accent with being a follower of Jesus implausible.

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meaning for early Christians, particularly for those who are presumed to have suffered persecution in Rome, when many of them may have failed in their discipleship and even renounced their Christianity. The seriousness of such denial would have been apparent to them in the words of Jesus that “whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Mark 8:38) yet there remained hope, for he had also said, “whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him.” (Matthew 12:32)

Focusing on Peter’s weakness that night can produce a distorted portrait of the chief Apostle, detracting from his full redemption and acceptance by Jesus and his subsequent ardent, devoted service to Christ and his kingdom. What should perhaps be the greatest lesson drawn from the denial stories is that Peter, like all of us, could make mistakes, but through Jesus Christ he could be fully redeemed, rehabilitated, and able to serve faithfully.

Chapter 15 The Trial before Pilate, Crucifixion, and Burial

Verses 15:1-20 Order of events at Jesus’ Trial before Pilate

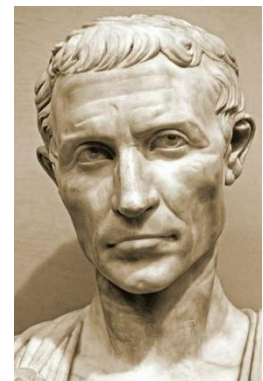
1. Second session of the Sanhedrim (Mark 15:1)
2. Formal accusation before Pilate (Mark 15:1,2)
3. First colloquy between Christ and Pilate (Mark 15:2.)
4. Acquittal; further charges; Christ’s silence (Mark 15:3-5)
5. Case sent to Herod, Jesus Before Pilate Again, and Formal Acquittal (Luke 23:6-16)
6. Jesus or Barabbas (Mark 15:6-10)
7. Message of warning from Pilate’s wife (Matt. 27:19)
8. Barabbas chosen. Cries to “Crucify him!” (Mark 27:11)
9. Efforts of Pilate to save Jesus (Mark 15:12-14)
10. Pilate washes his hands (Matt. 27:24, 25)
11. Sentence of crucifixion (Mark 15:15)
12. Scourging and mockery (Mark 15:16-19)
13. Led away to be crucified (Mark 15:20)

Verse 15:1 “...and handed Him over to Pilate”

Since the first “trial” by the Sanhedrin ended in failure without the ability to bring a formal and legally valid religious accusation, the chief priests now look to the Roman government to levy a charge of treason for which they would have no choice but to execute. In this regard, some have commented that this was as much the trial of Pilate as it was the trial before Pilate. Pilate attempts, in vain, first to avoid the issue, and then to escape responsibility for the decision, but is finally pushed into a verdict. However, this must be tempered with the reality that Pilate was no more compelled to carry out his decision than Judas was compelled to betray Jesus.

Who was Pilate? As the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea, during the reign of the emperor Tiberius the post of governor of Judaea was of relatively low prestige. Josephus records that Pilate governed for 10 years from 26 to 36 AD.

Pilate’s title of Prefect implies that his responsibilities were military and administrative and included tax collection, disbursement of funds and minting of currency. As head of the judicial system he had the power to inflict capital punishment. Additionally, Pilate shared some civil and religious power alongside the Jewish Sanhedrin. This meant Pilate had the



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right to appoint the Jewish High Priest and retained the same high priest, Caiaphas, for his entire tenure, indicating that Caiaphas and the priests of the Sadducee sect were reliable allies to Pilate. This cooperation, however, seems to have been limited to the Sadducees, as the Pharisees are absent from the gospel accounts of Jesus's arrest and trial. Pilate made his primary residence in Caesarea, going to Jerusalem mainly for major feasts in order to maintain order.

Josephus also records that Pilate was removed as governor after Pilate slaughtered a group of armed Samaritans at a village called Tirathana near Mount Gerizim, where they hoped to find artifacts that had been buried there by Moses. There is the suggestion that the leader of this movement may have been Dositheos, a messiah-like figure among the Samaritans who was known to have been active around this time. The Samaritans took their case to the governor of Syria who had Pilate recalled to Rome to be judged by Tiberius. Tiberius died prior to the date of Pilate's hearing so that it was handled by the new emperor Gaius Caligula. Whether the trial went badly or that Pilate was posted elsewhere is not known. The church historian Eusebius in his *Church History* claims that in 39 AD "*tradition relates that Pilate committed suicide after he was recalled to Rome due to the disgrace he was in.*"

Verse 15:2,3 The Accusations and Pilate's Question to Jesus

The Sanhedrin, careful not to accuse on religious grounds, had advanced a triple accusation⁴⁰ (Luke 23:2) of

1. Agitation – stirring up people with false teachings
2. prohibition of the payment of the tribute money
3. assumption of the title of "King of the Jews"

This last accusation amounted to a charge of treason, which was certainly punishable by death under Roman law. During this period the word βασιλευς, king, was used generally of tetrarchs, subject kings, and the emperor. While the first two accusations could have been dismissed by Pilate as religious matters to be settled by the Jewish courts, the seriousness of this last charge required Pilate to ask, "...σου ει ο βασιλευς των ιουδαιων?"

Jesus' answer, "σὺ λέγεις" (You say it is so) is an affirmation meaning "*You say that which is true.*" However this was not an evasive answer but an affirmative answer meaning that Jesus did not claim to be king of an earthly kingdom but, as given more clearly in John's Gospel, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.*"

When Pilate questions Jesus again after the chief priests continue to make accusations, Pilate once again asks Jesus to respond to the charges, but He makes no answer. Verse 15:5 says that Pilate's response to Jesus' silence was "...θαυμαζειν τον Πιλατον. This can be translated several ways; "he was amazed" or "he regarded with amazement", or "he speculated on the matter." This is important so as to not attach false importance to Pilate's response believing that he was converted and thus not a willing participant of the proceedings. Commenting on Jesus' silence during Pilate's questioning St. John Chrysostom points to prophesy, "*Even as the prophet declaring this self-same thing from of old, said, In His humiliation His judgment was taken away.*" (Isaiah 53:8)

While each of the four Gospel accounts record Pilate asking Jesus the question of kingship and Jesus' response, absent from Mark's account is Pilate sending Jesus back to Herod and Pilate stating, upon Jesus' return, that he finds no guilt in Jesus. These accounts are given in Luke 23. Nor does Mark have the story of Judas' return of the 30 pieces of silver and his desperate end. This is only in Matthew 27.

Verse 15:6 The Custom of Releasing a Prisoner

All four Gospels relate the idea of the custom of releasing a prisoner during Festival time and many believe this was a Jewish custom maintained by the Roman governors. Richard W. Husband, in his article, *The Pardoning of Prisoners by Pilate*, claims there is no evidence that the pardoning or release of a

⁴⁰ Mark does not include the specific accusations and also leaves out Pilate sending Jesus to Herod (Luke 23:5)

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prisoner had ever occurred, even once, before the time of Pilate. He bases this on the fact that there would be record of this somewhere in the Old Testament or at the very least a matter of such significance in inducing the nation to remember periodically the most vital incident in its national development could never have passed unnoticed in historical literature such as the Mishnah or Talmud. If it had been a feature of the ceremony of the celebration of the Passover, the sections of the Talmud Furthermore, he states that if it had been a Roman custom it would have been mentioned by the great historical recorders of the times such as Josephus or Philo. With no historical evidence Husband concludes that this custom as one instituted by Pilate and continuing only during the period of his procuratorship in Judea. This is supported by verse 15:8; *“The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.”*

Verse 15:6-15 The Choice: Barabbas or Jesus

Barabbas' name is derived from the Aramaic בר-אבא, *Bar-abbâ*, "son of the father," although some ancient manuscripts of Matthew give his name as Jesus Bar Abbas.

The story of Barabbas as related in the gospels lacks credibility from both the Roman and Jewish standpoint. The idea that Pontius Pilate, an astute governor with an understanding of what the Sanhedrin conspiracy against Jesus, would offer to release a prisoner truly convicted of capital crimes against Rome, insurrection and murder, as opposed to “created” charges in Jesus’ case, seems doubtful. Any Roman governor would not have risked his own execution to save a legally condemned criminal.

A more likely reason is that Mark and the other Gospel writers wish to show the inevitability of Jesus’ sentence of death and that the frenzy of crowd was ignited and inflamed by employees of the Jewish religious authorities. Earlier in the week Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem and hailed as “Hosanna in the Highest!” (Mark 11:7-10). What could have instituted this radical reversal unless the Jewish leadership had made sure there were a significant number of agitators in the courtyard before Pilate.

Verse 15:12-14 Crucify Him!

Pilate, in an attempt to placate the crowd and extricate himself from this difficult situation given to him by the Jewish elders, presents both Jesus and Barabbas and asks them to choose. Barabbas or the “king of the Jews.” Their answer for Barabbas causes Pilate to change the form of the question, in an attempt to hopefully enlist a patriotic feeling of the crowd on the side of the Jesus.

In Mark Pilate’s second question is *“What am I to do with the man YOU call the king of the Jews?”*

In Matthew Pilate’s second question is *“What shall I do, then, with Jesus, which is called CHRIST?”*

Mark leaves out Pilate’s continued efforts to appeal to the people’s compassion which are found in Luke and John. Also, Mark does not mention Pilate’s symbolic hand washing as an indication of his separation from the responsibility for the verdict he pronounced.

After Pilate released Barabbas, Mark states that Pilate sent Jesus to be φραγελλώσας (verse 15:15). This is a Greek term transliterated from the Roman word flagellum which means to whip or scourge.

Flogging was typical before any crucifixion, except maybe in the case of mass crucifixions when the number to be killed each day allowed no time for the whips. While Hebrew law was strict on the number of lashes the condemned could receive, limiting it to 40, the Romans had no limit. The only “rule” was that the condemned should be left with just enough strength to carry their crosses to the place of execution. Since Mark and the other Synoptic Gospel writers record that Jesus could not carry his cross

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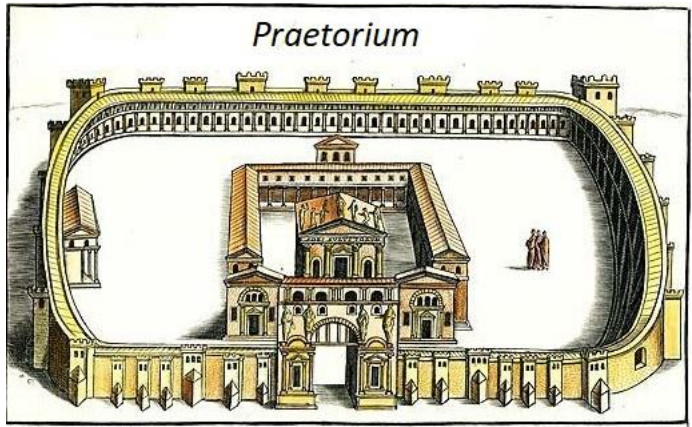
(verse 15:21) and that it was required for the Romans to call on someone to help Jesus suggests He endured a very severe beating.

Verses 15:16-20

Purple Robe and Crown of Thorns

Pilate's soldiers now led Jesus into "into the palace (that is, the Praetorium)." Interestingly here Mark uses the term which John had used earlier, [σπειραν](#) to describe the band, or cohort, of soldiers which was gathered to join in the mocking of Jesus. (verse 14:43)

The Praetorium, a Roman word meaning "hall of judgment," was originally the headquarters of a Roman camp but in the provinces the name became attached to the governor's official residence. The term "Praetor" means commander-in-chief.



Herod built two palaces each surrounded with porticoes. The first castle, called the Fortress of Antonia was built in honor of Mark Antony. The second was built some years later on the north side of Mount Sion. Archeological evidence seems to support that Pilate's praetorium was located at the Fortress of Antonia.

Purple Robe Mark tells that the Roman soldiers clothed Jesus in purple before beating him and crucifying him. Although Mark does not state this, they were clearly doing this as a mockery however the irony is that Jesus was in fact royalty, the King of the Jews.

In Jesus' time the dye used for making the color purple was extracted from shellfish and was one of the most expensive dyes. This non-fading dye was considered a luxury item and was used by the Romans to create ceremonial robes. Equally, throughout the Old and New Testament purple identified royalty, authority or wealth.

- **Authority**, Ex. 26:31 [for the tabernacle] thou shalt make a veil of blue, and **purple**, and scarlet, and fine twined **linen** of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made:
- **Authority & Royalty**, Judges 8:26 "The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian."
- **Wealth**, Proverbs 31:22 "The virtuous woman makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple."
- **Royalty**, Esther 8:15 "When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen."
- **Wealth**, Acts 16:14 "One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God."

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Crown of Thorns is a reminder of several things:

1. Jesus is the true Messiah-King. What was meant as a mockery was in fact a picture of Christ the King. Their mocking of Jesus extended to These soldiers would be among those written in Revelation: *“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.”* (Rev 1:7)
2. Jesus is the suffering servant foretold in Isaiah 53. St Paul speaks of this when he tells the Jews about Christ saying; *“...Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. The One who was crowned with thorns suffered on our behalf and has been crowned with glory.* (Hebrews 2:9)
3. Jesus reversing the curse in Genesis brought on by the disobedience of Adam and Eve, *“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.”* (Gen 3:18)

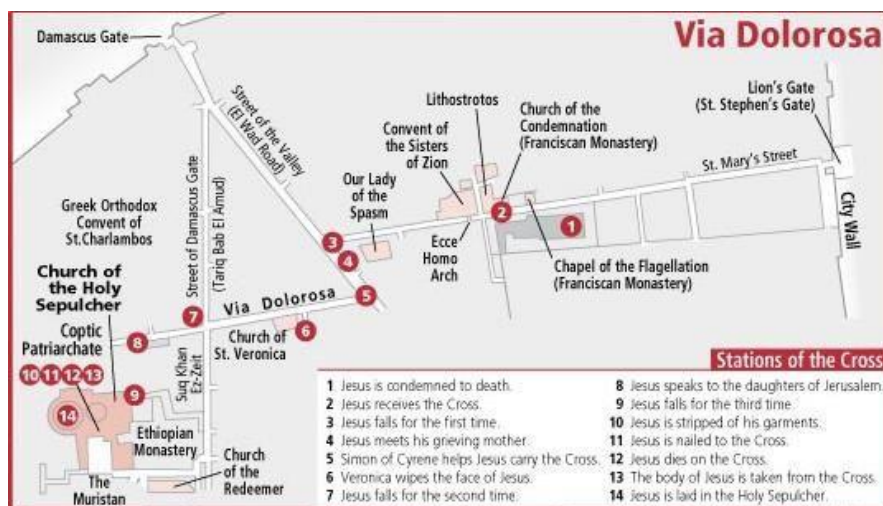
St Paul reveals that thorns were considered a curse is evident when he writes:

“For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.” (Hebrews 6:7-8)

Verses 15:20-22

Verse 15:20 ends with, *“Then they led Him out to crucify him.”* Jesus carried His cross from the Praetorium to Golgotha. This route has become famous as *The Via Dolorosa* which is Latin for “the path of suffering. This is not one street but a winding route of several streets that runs from the former Antonia Fortress to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, a distance of about 2,000 feet (600 meters).

The Via Dolorosa



Following the crucifixion and resurrection this path became a pilgrimage site dating from the time of the Byzantine era. On Holy Thursday, a procession would begin from the top of the Mount of Olives, through Gethsemane, entered the Old City at the Lions' Gate, and followed approximately the current route to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher without any stops along the route. In the 4th century St. Jerome, while living in Bethlehem, attested to the crowds of pilgrims from various countries who visited the holy sites and followed *The Via Dolorosa*. William Wey, an English pilgrim, who visited the Holy Land in 1458 is credited with the term *Stations of the Cross*, with the first of these stations being the place where Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Jesus' cross. The Catholic Church identifies 14 stations.

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The Way to the Cross

Like most people to have been crucified, Jesus would have carried only the horizontal crossbeam of the cross called the *patibulum*. It ranged in weight, but the average would have been about 100 pounds. The vertical part of the cross was called the *stipes* and would have already been at the top of the hill waiting for the condemned to arrive and then the two pieces would be attached. The total weight of both would have been about 500 pounds, far too much for the average Galilean to carry, much less a severely beaten One.



The centurion in charge of the crucifixion would march directly ahead of the victim with an assistant to the right of him. This assistant carried the placard (titulus) which read the charge in which the victim was being crucified. In front and behind them were the soldiers, two in front and two in back. They were there to make sure there would not be any escape attempts.

Verse 15:21 Simon of Cyrene



*“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they **ἀγγαρευουσιν** (compelled) him to carry the cross.”*

Each of the Synoptic Gospel accounts tell of this Simon of Cyrene who was compelled to help Jesus carry His cross to Golgotha. Cyrene was located in northern Africa in modern day Libya. It was a Greek city in the province of Cyrenaica and had a Jewish community of about 100,000 Jews from Judea who had been forced to settle there during the reign of Ptolemy Soter (323–285 BC). Cyrene became an early center of Christianity. The Gospels nor any evidence of the time suggest that Simon performed this act out of sympathy for Jesus and the use of the Greek word,

ἀγγαρευουσιν, supports this.

The verb is ἀγγαρεύω is a word of Persian origin which mean to **employ a courier**. ἄγγαροι were public couriers appointed by the king of Persia for transmitting royal messages. These couriers had authority to press into their service, in case of need, horses, vessels, even men they met.

Two interesting points are worth mentioning here.

- a) While the other Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke only mention Simon’s name, Mark adds the additional detail of Simon being “...the father of Alexander and Rufus.” The question raised by scholars is why would Mark provide these additional names, with the primary idea being that Simon’s sons would be known to the Christians and Romans reading Mark’s gospel and would serve as witnesses of the last days of Jesus from their father⁴¹. Also, there is the suggestion that

⁴¹ The article τινα σιμωνα translates into “somebody called Simon” which suggests that this Simon was not well known by the Christian community.

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the “Rufus” who was mentioned by St Paul in Romans 16:13⁴² was a prominent Christian in Rome and that possibly some of Simon’s family had converted to Christianity.

- b) According to some Gnostic traditions, Simon of Cyrene was actually the one who suffered the events of the crucifixion and died on the cross instead of Jesus. Basilides⁴³ in his gospel is reported by Irenaeus, in his apology Against Heresies, as having taught a docetic doctrine of Christ's passion.

“He appeared on earth as a man and performed miracles. Thus, he himself did not suffer. Rather, a certain Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry his cross for him. It was he who was ignorantly and erroneously crucified, being transfigured by him, so that he might be thought to be Jesus. Moreover, Jesus assumed the form of Simon, and stood by laughing at them.”

Verse 15:22 Golgotha, The Place of the Skull

Golgotha is a Hebrew word, גולגלת (*gulgoleth*) meaning skull or head. The Greek equivalent, used by the Gospel writers is κρανιο. This was rendered in the Vulgate as Calvaria, (calva being a skull) from which we have the word “Calvary”.

An interesting tradition among the Jews is that the skull of Adam, after having been confided by Noah to his son Shem, and by the latter to Melchisedech, was finally deposited at the place called, for that reason, Golgotha. The Talmudists and the Fathers of the Church were aware of this tradition, and it survives in the skulls and bones placed at the foot of the crucifix. The Evangelists are not opposed to it, inasmuch as they speak of one and not of many skulls.



Verses 15:23-32 The Crucifixion

Mark: *Then they offered Him wine (οινον) mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it.*

Matthew *There they offered Jesus sour wine (οξος) mixed (μεμιγμενον) with gall (χολης), but after tasting it, He refused to drink it.*

After reaching Golgotha, but before being crucified, both Mark and Matthew indicate that Jesus was offered a wine mixture, however each evangelist differed in their account of, a) what the mixture was and b) Jesus’ reaction to this offering of wine and bitterness.

a) What Was this Mixture?

Sour wine was both a staple for the Roman soldier's and drunk by the poor but was certainly not suitable for the upper classes of Jewish and Roman society. This sour wine that was offered to Jesus during His crucifixion, which is often referred to as vinegar, is most likely strong wine that had turned sour.

Mark then records that this sour wine was mixed with smyrna (εσμυρνισμενον). The root word here is [σμύρνα](#) (smyrna), which you recall from earlier, is myrrh, a bitter herb, which acted like a narcotic helping to deaden the pain of the crucifixion.

Matthew records the same sour wine but uses the term οξος translating to vinegar but essentially is sour wine. However, Matthew records that what was mixed with the wine was gall (χολής).

Gall is also a bitter tasting substance thought to have been derived from a berry producing plant. This word, gall, is used as the Old testament prophesy connection in Psalm 68:22, *“They gave me (χολήν) gall for my food, and they gave me (οξος) vinegar for my drink.”*

⁴² Romans 16:13 - *“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, also.”*

⁴³ Basilides was an early Christian Gnostic religious teacher in Alexandria, Egypt who taught in the early 2nd century and claimed to have inherited his teachings from the apostle Matthias.

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Gall, in both the Old and New Testaments has been a metaphor for the suffering of God's people.

Deuteronomy 32:32

"Their grapes are grapes of gall."

Jerimiah (Lamentations 3:15)

"He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink."

Jeremiah again (Lamentations 19–20)

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall."

Peter says to Simon in Acts 8:23

"For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness (in your heart) and in the bond of iniquity."

With regards to why the mixture was offered to Jesus before He was crucified does not seem to be done out of mercy but more as a method for sedating those who were being crucified by making it easier for the soldiers to carry out the task of nailing the condemned to the cross. The narcotic effect of either the myrrh or the gall would have made the prisoner easier to handle as they would resist less.

There is also Jewish tradition says that merciful women in Jerusalem customarily provided wine mixed with myrrh or some other pain-deadening substance for condemned prisoners to drink just before they were executed. A possible indication of this is given in Luke 23:27⁴⁴.

b) Why did Jesus refuse it?

Although Matthew adds that Jesus first tasted the wine mixture and then refused it, Mark only records that Jesus *ουκ ελαβεν* (did not take it). The reasoning here for Jesus' refusal to drink demonstrates the wide chasm between the Protestant and Orthodox understanding of redemption and expiation or atonement of Jesus' suffering on the cross.

At the heart of this chasm is the proper understanding of St. Paul's use of the Greek word "ιλαστηριον" in Romans.

"God presented Christ as a sacrifice of ιλαστηριον (atonement), through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness..."

Romans 3:25

When this verse is read through the lens of the doctrine of **Substitutionary Atonement or Expiation** states that all people are in need of a substitute offering since all are guilty of sinning and deserve punishment because all sin is personal rebellion against God. While animal sacrifices took on the guilt of God's people in the OT (Lev 16), these sacrifices could never fully atone for the sins of man. Christ came and died in the place of his people (substitution), taking upon himself the full punishment that they deserved so that God's righteousness and justice, are satisfied in His death. Through the substitutionary offering of Christ, God has not compromised his justice since Christ has taken on our penalty for sin, dying as a substitute in the place of sinners.

Early church fathers did not deny the redemptive work of the cross as a "substitution." In his seminal work "On the Incarnation" St. Athanasius writes:

"Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death in place of all, and offered it to the Father (an offering, not a penalty – my emphasis). This He did for sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death

⁴⁴ "And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him."

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thereby be abolished because, when He had fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was therefore voided of its power for men...His death on the Cross was a sufficient exchange for all.

For by the sacrifice of His own body He did two things: He put an end to the law of death which barred our way; and He made a new beginning of life for us...It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for his human brethren by the offering of the equivalent."

Thus, for Orthodox, Christ's death was not seen as a legal substitution to appease God's sense of justice, but to rescue mankind from death brought about through Adam and Eve.

"through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all."

This view leads us to an alternate understanding of Romans 3:25 which could be read as, *"That which God purposed as an act of conciliation through Jesus' faithfulness to death."*⁴⁵

Verses 15:25 *"It was the third hour when they crucified him."*

In the time of Christ, it was the custom of the Jews to divide the daylight portion of the day into twelve hours. (John 11:9) This is understood to mean the working day, from sunrise to sunset. (Matt. 20:1-12.) The Gospel writers used this method of time reckoning when they wanted to specify the hour of the day when an event took place. The Table to the right gives a comparison of the Jewish style of time with the Roman. There was also the term *"watches"* used throughout the Gospels however this is different reckoning and refers to the following.

1st Watch – Sundown to 9pm

2nd Watch – 9pm to Midnight

3rd Watch – Midnight to 3am

4th Watch – 3am to Sunrise

JEWISH TIME	ROMAN TIME
FIRST HOUR	DAWN -8AM
SECOND HOUR	8-9AM
THIRD HOUR	9-10AM
FOURTH HOUR	10-11AM
FIFTH HOUR	11-12PM
SIXTH HOUR	NOON -1PM
SEVENTH HOUR	1-2PM
EIGHTH HOUR	2-3PM
NINTH HOUR	3-4PM
TENTH HOUR	4-5PM
ELEVENTH HOUR	5-6PM
TWELVETH HOUR	6PM-SUNDOWN

Verses 15:24 *Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.*

John's Gospel provides significantly more details here (John 19:23-24) regarding the distribution of Jesus' garments. However, there is some difficulty here as to possibly forcing the prophetic connection of this

⁴⁵ A more detailed examination of this translation can be found in John B Cobb, Jr's article, *Did Paul Teach the Doctrine of the Atonement?* <https://www.religion-online.org/article/did-paul-teach-the-doctrine-of-the-atonement/>

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action to Psalms 22:19. While it was a common practice for Roman soldiers to take possession of personal items from those crucified, either to sell later or use themselves, if Jesus was scourged and his clothes were once again placed on his wounded bloody body (Mark 15:20) of what value would they have been to soldiers.

Verses 15:26 *The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the Jews.*

It was the Roman custom to place on the cross over the criminal's head, a titulus, or placard, stating the crime for which he was charged. In this case it is likely that Pilate was more interested in a final display of irony to the Jewish leaders. (John 19:21-22) Each of the Gospel writers indicate a slight variation in what was written but the point is well made by all the evangelists.

While Mark and Matthew record only the title "King of the Jews" John records that the title was written in the three commonly spoken languages, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, so that all spectators would be able to read it.



An interesting observation has been made that the Hebrew inscription formed the acronym YHWH—the sacred name of God which would have further infuriated the Jewish elders. Jesus even prophesied this saying, "When you have lifted on high the Son of Man then you shall know that I AM." (John 8:28)



Verses 15:27 *And they crucified two ληστας (thiefs) with him, one on his right and one on his left.*

While their names are not mentioned in any of the Gospels, an apocryphal writing known as the Acts of Pilate, (presumably written by Nikodemus) provide the names of the thieves crucified with Jesus.

*"Then Pilate...said unto Jesus: Thy nation hath convicted thee as being a king: therefore, have I decreed that thou shouldst first be scourged according to the law of the pious emperors, and thereafter hanged upon the cross in the garden and let **Dysmas** and **Gestas** the two malefactors be crucified with thee."*

Mark only mentions that two criminals were crucified with Jesus and that they both (συν-εσταυρωμενοι) denounced Christ. St. Augustine however believed that Mark was speaking in general terms as a class of people that joined in deriding Jesus, but the Greek does not seem to support that. Only Luke mentions the exchange between the criminals and Jesus and of a penitent thief asking Jesus, "Remember me when thou comes in thy kingdom." (Luke 23:39-43)

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Verses 15:33 *At the 6th hour (12pm), darkness came over the whole land until the 9th hour (3pm).*

NASA has charted the paths of some 5,000 years of solar eclipses, from 2000 B.C. to 3000 A.D. and discovered eight (8) total solar eclipses and a multitude of annular and partial eclipses between 26 A.D. and 36 A.D.

One of those total solar eclipses even falls in the year 33 AD, however, the path of that eclipse was nowhere near Jerusalem but instead over Antarctica. Another solar eclipse occurred in 34 AD but its path crossed the ocean near Australia. Neither eclipse would have done much to darken the skies of Judea.

Assuming an eclipse could have been the explanation of the darkness that descended during the Crucifixion it was too long to be a solar eclipse. While a partial eclipse can occur over about three hours, the darkness of a total solar eclipse only spans minutes.

Verses 15:34 *Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"*

Mark "...**ελωι ελωι λαμμα σαβαχθανι** ο εστιν μεθερμηνευομενον **ο θεος μου ο θεος μου εις τι με εγκατελιπες.**

Matthew "...**ηλι ηλι λαμα σαβαχθανι** τουτ εστιν **θεε μου θεε μου ινατι με εγκατελιπες.**

Mark transliterates *Eloi* which is Aramaic. Matthew transliterated *Eli* which is Hebrew but both translated this into My God! *Sabachthani* appears to be from the Aramaic word *sbq* which means to *forsake* or *abandon for a purpose*. The Aramaic word for abandon or forsake because it is unwanted is *taatani*. There is another Aramaic root word, *shwaq* that could fit here. This meaning is to be *kept, spared or allowed or to fulfill an end*. If Jesus' words here are to be understood as a forgetting by God Jesus would have used the word *taatani* (forsake) or *nashatani* (forget).

The other question is why did the Gospel writers transliterate Jesus' words into Greek at all, why not just write the Greek translation, *my God my God why hast thou forsaken me?*

Scholarly commentary believes that the Gospel Writers who wrote this out in Greek transliterated it into the Greek with the Greek translation being a short commentary to ensure the prophetic connection with Psalms 22.

Raymond Brown⁴⁶ notes that Jesus now addresses God not in His usual intimate manner used throughout His ministry, that is "Father"⁴⁷ even during His anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:36), but now with a form common to the suffering human being, "My God"

Verses 15:35,36 **Is Jesus Calling Elijah?**

Why would the bystanders at the crucifixion have thought Jesus was crying out to Elijah? Elijah (יהוֹאֵל), [in Greek Ηλίας (Elias)] was a 9th century BC prophet of the Hebrew Bible.

It is thought that the crowd at the crucifixion was a mix of people many of whom might not have been well versed in Hebrew and/or Hellenists who misheard Jesus cry of **ηλι** or **ελωι** and interpreted that as "Elias". In Jesus' time there was the expectation of a Messiah and based on Hebrew prophesies the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by the appearance of Elijah. The Old Testament refers to

⁴⁶ Source: *Introduction to the New Testament* by Fr. Raymond Brown. Fr Brown was a Catholic priest and author of 25 full-length books on the Bible and professor emeritus at the Protestant Union Theological Seminary for 23 years.

⁴⁷ Examples include Matthew 7:21, John 17:1, Mark 13:32

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three (3) “forerunner” prophecies prior to the arrival of the Messiah, a) Isaiah which spoke of a *voice crying out to prepare the way of the Lord* in the desert (Isaiah 40:3–4), b) Malachi prophesied of a *messenger (prophet) preparing God’s way* (Malachi 3:1), and c) of the Lord *sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes* (Malachi 3:23).

This expectation of the coming of Elijah and the unnatural darkness could have predisposed some to believe that they heard Jesus cry out for Elias, and interpreted that as Elijah.

Certainly, during His ministry Jesus had spoken several times about the coming of Elijah.

- In Matthew, Jesus speaks of John the Baptist, saying *“If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* (Matt 11: 14-15)
- After the Transfiguration the disciples ask Jesus, *“Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? Jesus’ answer tells why and who.”*
“To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.” [Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist. (Matt 17:13)]
- All three Synoptic Gospels record that Jesus asked his disciples, *“Who do people say that I am?”* and that the disciples offering Elijah as one of the answers. (Matthew 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:18-19).

This belief about Elijah's return is also reflected following the death of John the Baptist. When reports of Jesus' miraculous cures became known following John's death, some, like Herod, thought Jesus himself was John the Baptist or Elijah returning (Mark 6:14-16).

As with the first time Jesus was offered a drink and He did not take it (Mark 15:23), so here also with this second offering of drink Mark does not say that Jesus received the offer. In fact, only in John do we hear that Jesus said, *“I thirst”* and that Jesus *“ελαβεν το οζοζ”* (had received the vinegar).

Verses 15:37 Jesus Breathes His Last

The word used here is *εξεπνευσεν* which would be better translated as “and from Him (εξ) came His breath or spirit (επνευσεν). A cautionary note here. We should not think of Jesus in a human form as having received the spirit (Gen 1:7) and is now returning that “spirit” to God. Jesus is the Lord of the spirit and will also be the One who dispenses the spirit after His resurrection (John 20:22)

Rev. Edward Bickersteth (19th century English clergyman) makes an interesting commentary on the cry of Jesus:

“Usually the voice fails the dying man ... but Christ cried out just before he expired, by that supernatural power which his Godhead supplied to him ... he did not die of necessity, but voluntarily ... By this action the Lord Jesus proved that he had his whole life, and his death, in his own free power.”

Notice also that Mark is once again absent with any details regarding the content of Jesus’ final cry and it is only in John’s Gospel that we hear Jesus say *“τετελεσται”* (It is finished.)

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Verses 15:38

The Temple Curtain is Torn

What is the Temple Curtain? In Exodus (25:8,9) God commanded Moses to construct the Tabernacle in which He could dwell in their midst. As with the building of the Ark and the Temple God provided Moses precise details about the design. One of the provisions was that there be two curtains, or veils, (in Greek καταπέτασμα) to separate the people from the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The first curtain was at the entrance of the Tabernacle and the second curtain (פרוכת)

separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. "Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy." (Exodus 33)

The Holy of Holies was where the Ark of the Covenant was placed.

Only the high priests were allowed behind this second veil and even then, only once a year to offer blood for the Day of Atonement (see Hebrews 9:7). No one could

enter in at any other time as they would die (see Leviticus 16:1-2). These curtains or veils are especially durable and does not tear easily like modern day veils or curtains. While not mentioned in Scripture, early Jewish tradition states that the Temple veil was as thick as a man's hand. In his book *Hebraic Literature: Translations from the Talmud, Midrashim and Kabbala* (M. Walter Dunne writes about the temple Curtain,

"...for it is taught that Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel declared in the name of Rabbi Shimon the Sagan that the thickness of the veil was a handbreadth. It was woven of seventy-two cords, and each cord consisted of twenty-four strands. It was forty cubits⁴⁸ long and twenty wide. When it became soiled, it took three hundred priests to immerse and cleanse."

What is the Symbolism of the Temple Curtain Tearing If this is true regarding the durability of the temple curtain, most likely it would have taken something more significant than an earthquake to "...tear the temple curtain from top to bottom." (Mark again is absent of the details of the cause of the curtain tearing which is given in Matthew.

Andee-Sue Clark, in her paper entitled, Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain provides commentary on the symbolic versus the historical perspective on the tearing of the temple curtain⁴⁹.

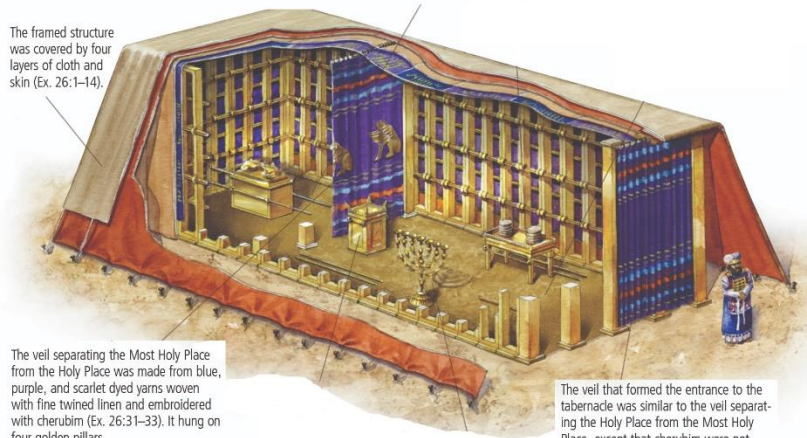
One of the main ideas theologians claim the tearing of the temple curtain symbolized, was the start of a new relationship with God. This new relationship is understood through Christ's portrayal as the new High Priest offering the final and perfect sacrifice. Before this time Jews were expected to follow rituals

THE TABERNACLE TENT

The entire tent was 45 feet (13.7 m) long, 15 feet (4.6 m) wide, and 15 feet (4.6 m) high. It was a wooden skeletal structure, overlaid with gold, with no solid roof or front wall (Ex. 26:15-29). Five wooden bars (overlaid with gold) passed through rings attached to each frame (Ex. 26:26-30).

The Most Holy Place was a 15-foot (4.6-m) cube, containing only the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10-22; 37:1-9). It was here that Yahweh would descend to meet with his people in a cloud theophany (divine appearance). The high priest could enter only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (see note on Heb. 9:7).

The framed structure was covered by four layers of cloth and skin (Ex. 26:1-14).



The veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place was made from blue, purple, and scarlet dyed yarns woven with fine twined linen and embroidered with cherubim (Ex. 26:31-33). It hung on four golden pillars.

The veil that formed the entrance to the tabernacle was similar to the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, except that cherubim were not embroidered on it. It was suspended on five golden pillars (Ex. 26:36-37).

⁴⁸ A cubit is about 1.5 ft so the curtain measured 60 ft high and 30 ft wide.

⁴⁹ *Significance of the Tearing of the Temple Curtain* (2012) Verbum: Vol. 10 : Issue 1, Article 14.

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and perform sacrifices. An example of such rituals is one of the Jews' most important and sacred holidays known as Yom Kippur or the day of Atonement, when on one day of the year when the high priest ceremoniously entered the Holy of Holies. On this day animal sacrifices were made to purify the people of Israel for a year to come, renewing God's covenant with the people. Theologian Timothy Luke Johnson says that the tearing of the temple curtain could symbolize "the end of the old covenant of atonement through animal sacrifice and the beginning of a 'new covenant'". In this "New Covenant" a priest would no longer be needed...(Hebrews 10:4). John P. Meier puts more weight on this idea of a 'new covenant' by describing the tearing of the temple curtain as an "apocalyptic event" that signified a "turning point of the ages." ...This "turning point" was one of the major ways the new religion of Christianity differed from its mother religion of Judaism. With this "new covenant" Christians claim that Christ allowed new access to God, which theologians also say is signified by the tearing of the temple curtain.

The Jerome Commentary symbolically connects Christ's blood and His Body to the temple Curtain through the words of St Paul to the Hebrews.

"...we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings. (Hebrews 10:19)

Verses 15:39 The Centurion's Confession

A centurion was a professional Roman officer who commanded 80 to 100 men (hence the name centurion). They were harsh disciplinarians, fierce, merciless, and loyal to Rome. The only person a loyal Roman would ever call "Son of God" was Caesar, and certainly not to someone who he just witnessed dying a humiliating and gruesome death.

However, we must be cautious to not mistranslate the Greek in Mark's verse. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states:

"The centurion's declaration that Jesus was THE Son of God ought not to be taken in the full Christian sense. In the first place, the article (o) does not appear in the Greek text, ουτος υιος ην θεου. It should, therefore, read 'a son of God' or, at the most, 'God's Son.' The pagan background of the Roman officer must not be overlooked. He may well have viewed Jesus as a superhuman being, but that he possessed the full Christian concept of the deity of Christ is unlikely especially since his statement is in the past tense, "He was God's son".

In any case, Mark, who was writing for a Gentile audience, this would be an important message. While the Jewish Peter had recognized Jesus as Christ (8:29), so now a Gentile (pagan) centurion had confessed Jesus as Son of God.

Verses 15:40,41 The Women at the Cross

Each of the gospel writers gives a varying account of the women looking on at Jesus' crucifixion and death.

Mark: Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome (15:40-44).

Matthew: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, the mother of the Sons of Zebedee (27:55-56).

Luke: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James (24:10).

John: Mary Magdalene, Mary of Clopas, the sister of the Virgin Mary, and the Virgin Mary herself.

These were women who had followed Jesus during His ministry. They are mentioned in Luke as one of two distinct groups of followers, the Twelve and "certain women" (Luke 8:1-3). It is interesting that none of the Gospel writers mention any of the male disciples or followers of Jesus as present at His crucifixion. While the thought is that out of

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fear of persecution and death the men hid but historical accounts indicate that the women had as much to fear from the Romans as did the men.

The Orthodox and Catholic Church recognize Mary Magdalene as “equal to the Apostles.” Tradition relates that Mary Magdalene visited Emperor Tiberias (14-37 A.D.) and proclaimed to him Christ’s Resurrection. According to Tradition, she brought him a red egg as a symbol of the Resurrection, a symbol of new life with the words: “Christ is Risen!” Mary repeated the words of the Apostles, that we are redeemed from the vanity of life not with perishable silver or gold, but rather by the precious Blood of Christ.

Another note of interest is that thus far throughout his gospel Mark has mostly depended on the eyewitness account of the apostle Peter. However, Mark did not mention that any of the men were present at the crucifixion or burial of Jesus and thus could not share a firsthand account of the events. So here Mark relies on the witness of multiple women, who remained. To emphasize the women’s credibility as eyewitnesses to the events, several times Mark uses verbs of observation to describe their state of attention during Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. In this verse (15:40) the Greek word for looking is θεωρουσα, which means to observe and concentrate on the meaning of an action and not just passing by casually observing. As was the case during Jesus’ trial Mark wants to assure that he satisfies the ancient requirement of multiple witnesses. (Deut 19:15)

These same women will again be mentioned together at the beginning of chapter 16, coming to anoint Jesus’ body before His burial.



Verses 15:42-47 The taking of Jesus’ Body by Joseph of Arimathea

Verse 15:42 “...ην παρασκευη ο εστιν προσαββατον.” (it was the Day of Preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath).

For the Jews every week, preparations had to be made for the Sabbath—food had to be prepared ahead of time. In the Gospels the Greek term used for this day of preparation was παρασκευής. The root verb is σκευάζω which means to furnish, supply or make ready, i.e. prepare. Over time this led to the “Day of Preparation” becoming the common term for Friday. In this verse Mark makes clear that this Day of Preparation was Friday by including the explanation, “that is the day before the Sabbath.”

This preparation had to occur prior to the Sabbath since according to Jewish law no work could be performed on the Sabbath.

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:11)

This prohibition and the requirement to bury the dead within 24 hours required that Jesus be removed from the cross before the Sabbath. Due to the next day being a High Sabbath, a linen wrapping (verse 15:46) was all that time allowed to be done in preparation for His burial, since Torah (law) does not allow one to buy or sell on a Sabbath.

The reason the Joseph of Arimathea rush to take Jesus down from the cross stems from two important Torah considerations.

- a) As was mentioned previously, the impending Sabbath prohibited performing acts of labor.
- b) The requirement to take down those who die by “hanging on a γύνη (tree, pole) or in Greek Septuagint; ξύλο.

This second reason comes from Deuteronomy 21:22-23;

“If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, you must not leave the body hanging on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed by God.”

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The body is taken down quickly since the body is cursed by God it must be taken down to avoid cursing the surrounding land. In this way we can understand what St Paul means when he writes,

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung ἐπι ξυλου (on a tree).”

Galatians 3:13

Who was Joseph of Arimathea? Not much is known about Joseph although the legend surrounding the later life of Joseph of Arimathea was that he traveled to Britain with his disciples and landed on the island of Avalon. Climbing up to Wearyall Hill he and his twelve followers established the first monastery in England at Glastonbury. While this is tradition regarding Joseph, there are several important facts we can determine from the Gospel.



a) He was from Arimathea

Mark and Matthew mention that Joseph was from Arimathea. (Greek Ἀριμαθαία). Arimathea is a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew phrase הַרמַתַּיִם (ha ramat aim). The name Ramah comes from the verb רוּם (rum), meaning to be high or hill. There are four places in Palestine with the name Ramah. One of the places thought to be Arimathea is Mt Ephraim, the birthplace of Samuel the priest who served during the time of Saul and a portion of David's reign. (1 Samuel 1:1, 19)

b) He was a good and just man

Luke, says that Joseph of Arimathea was ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ δίκαιος (a man who was good and just) and that he was waiting for the kingdom of God (23:50, 51), and like the other disciples was hoping that Jesus was the Messiah and would establish His kingdom during his lifetime.

c) He was a secret follower of Jesus

Both Matthew (27:57) and John (19:38) state that Joseph of Arimathea was a secret follower of Christ because he feared the Jews. Like Nicodemus, it wasn't until after Jesus' death that he openly claimed to be a follower of Jesus. Mark also tells how much Joseph cared for Jesus by recording that he took Jesus down from the cross and lovingly and carefully wrapped His body in linen.

d) He did not agree with the decision of the Sanhedrin

even though he was a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea is said to have not “consented to their decision and deed” with regards to the Jewish council's accusations against Jesus. (Luke 23:5)

e) He was a prominent and wealthy Jewish leader

Mark describes Joseph as not only a prominent member of the Jewish council but also εὐσχήμων (Mark 15:43). This term implies several traits; good community standing, honorable, influential, wealthy, and respectable which would have made Joseph of Arimathea a well-known public figure who had the respect of his peers. Also the fact that he owned his own personal tomb hewn out of rock (Mark 15:46 and John 19:41)

f) He was courageous

Joseph courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (...τολμησας εισηλθεν προς πιλατον και ητησατο το σωμα του ιησου (Mark 15:43). The Gospel writers record that only Joseph approached Pilate. Joseph, being a prominent member of the Jewish Council that sent Jesus to His death, was certainly risking exposing himself as a follower of Jesus by his actions to receive Jesus' body and bury Him.

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Verses 15:44-45 Was Jesus Really Dead?

In his book, *The Passover Plot*, Hugh Schonfield presented what became known as The Swoon Theory. This theory states that Jesus never really died on the cross but that He was crucified and came very close to death suffering shock and a coma. He claims that Jesus had planned for His closest disciples to quickly remove Him from the cross and place Him in the tomb. After three days the coolness of the tomb revived Him and He managed to roll away the stone, come out of the tomb and appear to the disciples making everyone believe He had risen from the dead.

There are several points that would refute this possibility.

- 1) There are no records of anyone surviving a Roman crucifixion, however there was the expectation that the condemned would not die quickly as crucifixion was meant to be a lingering and agonizing death thus serving as a strong deterrent to future transgressors. This expectation is supported by Mark when he reported that *"Pilate was astonished (εθαυμασεν) to hear that he was already dead."*
- 2) The scourging that Jesus received left His back muscles were so badly damaged that His skeletal structure was exposed. Add to this the trauma induced by His forced march with the upper cross beam and the nailing of His hands and feet. The combination of these events would have resulted in significant blood loss which would have placed great stress on Jesus' heart eventually causing it to rupture.
- 3) Pilate "Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. As professional executioners who would themselves face death if they made a mistake in this matter, Roman soldiers would have made certain Jesus was dead. Mark states that "when [Pilate] learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph."
- 4) When the soldier pierced Jesus' side blood and water came out indicating that the heart had stopped beating and the blood was settling in the chest cavity, a clear indication that Jesus was dead. (John 19:34)
- 5) Jesus was placed in a cold tomb for 3 days without medical attention. That nobody was able to provide care for Jesus is supported by Matthew who wrote that Pilate ordered, *"the tomb be made as secure as you know how."* So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." (Matt 27:65-66)

Verses 16:1-8 The Women arrive and Find the Empty Tomb

Burial in a stone tomb was not uncommon. Many Jewish families buried their dead in caves and tombs carved out of the soft rock following the pattern set by the Jewish patriarchs such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and others who were buried in caves⁵⁰.

Mark records that the women arrived at the tomb *"when the sabbath was over..."* Sunday was the day after the Sabbath and was also the first day of the week (John 20:1, Acts 20:7). This day in Christianity became known as the Lord's Day to separate it from the Jewish Sabbath and to celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death.

Anointing and Shroud Mark also states that the women had brought spices with which to anoint Jesus'

body. According to Jewish law the dead had a right to ceremonial care. The **TOHORAH** (טְהוֹרָה) is the ritual cleansing or purification to prepare the dead for burial⁵¹. The basis for *tohorah* is found in Ecclesiastes 5:15, *"as he came, so shall he go,"* meaning that as when man is born, he is washed, so too when he dies, he is washed.

Day of the Week	Time	Event	Source	Duration
Thursday	Morning	Jesus crucified	Mark 15:25	1/2 day
	Evening	Joseph takes Jesus from the cross	Mark 15:42	
		Tomb is sealed	Mark 15:46	
Friday		Tomb is sealed		1 day
Saturday		Sabbath - Tomb is sealed		1 day
Sunday	Morning	Women arrive at tomb to anoint Jesus	Mark 16:1,2	1/2 day
		Tomb is found empty	Mark 16:5	

⁵⁰ Reference Genesis 23:19, 25:8,9, 49:29-31, 50:13

⁵¹ See also Acts 9:37

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The *tohorah* was practiced throughout the ancient and medieval times and is still practiced by Orthodox and Conservative Jews today and while man can only prepare men, in the case of a deceased man this can be performed by either a man or a woman. According to Rabbi and professor David Golinkin,⁵²

“Washing the dead and anointing them with oil are not mentioned in the Bible and are mentioned incidentally in the Mishnah without any explanation as to how this was done. He believes that these rituals were borrowed from the Hellenistic world where the dead were washed and anointed with oil.”

Early 14th century Rabbinical texts state that the body is to be washed to remove the dirt so that the people will not abhor carrying the body to the cemetery. The head is anointed with beaten eggs as a sign so that the gravediggers will know that the deceased is Jewish, and eggs were chosen because they indicate the cycle of life.”

While not a requirement for burial preparation, the practice of anointing has varied over time and location, but in ancient tradition, after the body was washed it was anointed with oils and sometimes wrapped with aromatic herbs such as olive, myrrh, nard and aloes to help fight the effects of the rapid decomposition common in the Mediterranean heat. By the time of Christ, the custom was that the entire body was wrapped in a shroud including the face. The hands and feet were wrapped separately with strips of cloth. (John 11:44) All of this occurred within hours of death since the hot climate demanded a quick burial.

Verse 16:3 Who Will Roll away the Stone for us?

This comment, and their response in verse 16:4, seems to indicate that the women were not aware of the command by Pilate to seal the door of the tomb and post guards. Mark gives no indication how the stone came to be rolled away. Matthew explains this as, *“a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it⁵³.”* Note that the earthquake was the result of the angel’s action to remove the stone so that the earthquake was not the cause of the stone rolling away.

Upon entering the tomb each of the Gospel writers has a different account of what the women observed.

- Mark: a νεανισκον⁵⁴ (young man) “dressed in a λευκην (white) robe.
- Matthew: an angel of the Lord whose appearance was as lightning, and his raiment λευκον (white) as snow
- Luke: two men stood by them in αστραπτούση (dazzling) apparel
- John: two angels in λευκοίς (white) sitting...where the body of Jesus had lain.

So, what do we make of these varying accounts? One idea is that differences, due to errors of human memory, imply these are real accounts recollected by different people across time. Perfect alignment of four non-eyewitness accounts (except for John) would support a hoax written to deceive. Peter Carnley⁵⁵ argues that the four accounts do originate in a single story but were then subsequently modified by the four evangelists for apologetic and kerygmatic reasons. A single story originating from one source is not uncommon throughout the Gospel narratives.

Also note that the rolling away of the stone was not done for Jesus’ benefit⁵⁶, but so that the women and disciples could enter the tomb and see that Jesus’ body was no longer there.

⁵² Rabbi David Golinkin is President Emeritus of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies. He has his Ph.D. in Talmudic Studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and served 20 years as Chair of the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly and also directs the Center for Women in Jewish Law

⁵³ Matthew 28:2

⁵⁴ This is the same term Mark used to describe the young man who ran away after Jesus’ arrest (verse 14:51).

⁵⁵ Peter Carnley, formerly Archbishop of Perth, is the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia and a leading theologian amongst the bishops of the Anglican Church.

⁵⁶ Reference John 20:19

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Verse 16:6 Do Not Be Amazed!

Mark is the only one who mentions that the “...women were *εξεθαμβηθησαν*.” From the root verb θαμβέω it means to be struck with amazement; to be thoroughly amazed, or to be astounded. It can also have the connotation of “to be terrified or deeply distressed” which leads to one of the translations being “*and they were frightened*.”

The young man in white tells the women “*Don’t be amazed*,” however there could also be read into the is also a somewhat sarcastic tone; “Why are you amazed? Jesus told you He was returning. (Mark 14:28)

The young man refers to Jesus using the title “Jesus of Nazareth” rather than Christ the King or Son of God.

Though the title **Jesus of Nazareth** is used 21 times in the New Testament⁵⁷, the words of Nathanael, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” (John 1:46) and of the Pharisees against Nicodemus, “*Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.*” (John 7:52) indicate that this area of Israel was not held in high esteem and certainly not a place from which a Messianic King would come from. Judea, to the south, was the city of David. (Luke 2:4)

Nazareth was Jesus’ birthplace, but it also had a prophetic connection with the coming Messiah, “*And [Joseph] came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.*” (Matt 2:23) Matthew’s use of the plural “prophets” (as opposed to a particular prophet as is seen throughout most of the New Testament) represents a summary of what several prophets have said. In each of these references the Messiah is represented as the suffering servant. A few examples include:

- **Isaiah**, when speaking about the coming Messiah says, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3)
- **Isaiah**, when describing the Messiah says, “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” (Isaiah 53:2)
- **Zechariah**, speaking about the arrival of the Messiah says, “See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9–10)
- **Zechariah** also speaks of a shepherd who will not be recognized by his people, “Lord my God says: “Shepherd the flock marked for slaughter. 5 Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished...Their own shepherds do not spare them.

While the young man goes on to speak of Jesus’ resurrection (He has risen.), he also reminds the women (and us) of the human Jesus who as a humble servant who would suffer for our salvation.

Verse 16:7 He is Going Before You...

The young man then goes on to confirm that Jesus is truly alive and says to the women, “*Tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you’*” referring to Jesus’ earlier promise to the disciples, (ref 14:28)

In the Matthew Henry Commentary and the Gospel of Mark Commentary by John Shultz there is an interesting observation with regards to the young man’s comment in verse 7.

One touching feature in the message given to the women is the mention of Peter: “Go, tell his disciples and Peter.” Peter was, obviously, singled out because of his denial of Christ. For Peter it was a message of pardon. It will be news more welcome to him than to any of them; for he is in sorrow for sin, and he will be afraid lest the joy of this good news do not belong to him.”

⁵⁷ Matt-2, Mark-5, Luke 3, John 4, and Acts 7

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Verse 16:8 “...and they said nothing to anyone.”

Upon hearing the command to go and tell Jesus’ disciples the good news the women fled the tomb in τρομος και εκστασις which is commonly translated trembling and bewilderment. A more fitting definition of εκστασις is given by Plutarch⁵⁸,

The condition of a man who by some sudden emotion is transported as it were out of himself, so that in this rapt condition, although he is awake, his mind is so drawn off from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on things divine that he sees nothing but the forms and images lying within, and thinks that he perceives with his bodily eyes and ears realities shown him by God.

Mark states that the women didn’t say anything to anyone, but according to Luke they did report the news to the disciples, who thought they were talking nonsense. (Luke 24:11) Shultz comments that, “*They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid*” should therefore be read as “*they said nothing to anyone on their way to report to the disciples.*”

The most ancient extant manuscripts of Mark end with verse 8 of Chapter 16. There has been, since the time of the Church Fathers, an ongoing scholarly debate about the authenticity of the additional verses found in other copies of the Marcian Gospel. Specifically, there are two endings: one Short and one Long:

But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus Himself sent out by means of them, from east to West, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

9 Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. 10 And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. 12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. 13 And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them. 14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. 15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. 17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. 19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. 20 And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen

⁵⁸ Plutarch (45–120 CE) was from Chaeronea in Greece and famous as a Platonist philosopher.

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The earliest extant copies of the Bible containing the Gospel of Mark which include *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*—circa 4th century, *Syriac Sinaiticus*—late 4th century, and *Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae*—circa 300-400, do NOT include the Long Ending of Mark 16:9-20.

The main reason for doubting the authenticity of the ending is that it does not appear in these oldest existing manuscripts and are absent from Gospel commentaries by early Church writers. Also, the ending has some stylistic features which also suggest that it came from another hand, mainly in its rhetorical tone that differs significantly from Mark's simple style. Also it is believed that early Christian writers wished to align Mark's gospel so that it harmonized better with the other 3 gospels which spoke clearly about the appearance of the resurrected Jesus. Jerome, in his commentary, agrees with these views but does state that,

“Establishing that none of the extent endings were written by Mark is not the same as proving that Mark ended his gospel at 16:8”

Jerome posits that Since Mark's gospel ends on such an “unfulfilling note” (and also on the word γαρ which grammatically is incorrect) that possibly there is a missing page to the original manuscript which was lost or that Mark was interrupted in completing his gospel and that the longer ending was supplied during the 2nd century.

Scholars have pointed out that these verses are quoted by church Fathers, as early as the 2nd century. Some of these include St Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*, Justin Martyr in *First Apology*, and Hippolytus. These early Christian writers who lived in the 2nd century, hundreds of years before the earliest manuscripts were citing almost verbatim the Longer ending of Mark offering evidence that these verses (16:9-20) were known and in circulation at the time.

