

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

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INTRODUCTION

I. Authorship

A. External evidence – There is strong and consistent evidence from early Christians identifying the author of the Second Gospel as Mark.

1. In the early second century, Papias was bishop of Hierapolis, a city in Asia Minor that is mentioned in Col. 4:13. According to Irenaeus, who was born in Smyrna and knew Polycarp, Papias was a contemporary of Polycarp and a follower of the Apostle John. Around A.D. 130, Papias wrote a five-volume work titled *Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord* which survives only in the fragments preserved by Irenaeus and Eusebius. Eusebius's final edition of *The History of the Church* was completed around A.D. 325.

2. As quoted by Eusebius, Papias identified the writer of the Gospel as Mark and specified that he obtained his information from Peter. Eusebius says Papias wrote the following (translation by Kirsopp Lake):

And the Presbyter [referring to John, who probably is the Apostle John] used to say this, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them."

3. Around A.D. 150, some twenty years after Papias's writing, Justin Martyr wrote in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (106.3): "It is said that he [Jesus] changed the name of one of the

apostles to Peter; and it is written in his memoirs that he changed the names of others, two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder' . . . " As the "sons of Zebedee" are called the "sons of thunder" only in the Gospel of Mark (3:17), Justin is referring to Mark's Gospel as Peter's memoirs, which fits with Papias's statement that the Gospel was based on Peter's recollection.

4. Around A.D. 180, some thirty years after Justin's work, Irenaeus, who was then bishop of Lyons, stated in his work *Against Heresies* (3.1.1): "After [Peter and Paul's] departure, Mark, Peter's disciple, has himself delivered to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching." Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria likewise identify Mark as the author of the Gospel and indicate it was based on the preaching of Peter.

5. It is almost certain that this Mark is the Mark mentioned in the New Testament, the person named both John and Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37), the former being his Jewish name and the latter his Roman name. Carson and Moo rightly note in *An Introduction to the New Testament* (p. 174), "No other early Christian Mark would have been so well known as to be mentioned without further description." Darrell Bock states in *Mark*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 7:

It seems difficult to accept the initial reception of this Gospel, if the Mark in question is an unknown or random Mark. Surely something that ended up circulating early in the church's distribution of accounts about Jesus would have had roots known to the early leaders who circulated it. After all, most Gospel scholars see Mark as a source used by the other Gospel writers.

6. New Testament scholar Barry Smith well summarizes in [The Gospel of Mark](#) what can be known about Mark from the references to him in the New Testament:

(John) Mark was probably a resident of Jerusalem, since his mother had a house in the city (Acts 12:12). He traveled with Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 12:25), and then traveled with them on the first missionary journey (13:13). He left Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia (13:13; 15:37). Later, because Paul did not want to take him along on a second missionary journey, he traveled with Barnabas to Cyprus and other places (15:39). (John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas [Col 4:10].) (John) Mark is with Paul in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (Philemon 24). During his second imprisonment, Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark to Rome (2 Tim 4:11). He is with Peter in Rome when he writes 1 Peter (5:13).

B. Internal evidence – This strong and consistent evidence from early Christians identifying the author of the Second Gospel as John Mark is corroborated by evidence in the Gospel itself.

1. Direct – There is nothing in the body of the Gospel that directly or expressly identifies the author, but the fact *every* ancient manuscript of the Gospel includes a title

identifying Mark as the author suggests the title may have been original.¹ (At the least, the title was added very early, which confirms the early understanding of authorship.)

a. That is very significant because, if as many claim, the Gospels originally were anonymous and copies circulated throughout the Roman Empire for decades before titles supposedly were added to them in the second century, certainly one would expect some manuscript evidence, a copy trail, of the original anonymous form. But there is no such evidence, neither for Mark nor for any of the other Gospels! All the ancient Gospel manuscripts have titles.

b. In addition, if the Gospels originally were anonymous and titles were not added to them until the second century, one would expect some disagreement regarding the titles. In other words, there is no reason to think a scribe in Palestine or Egypt who added a title to an anonymous Gospel would attribute it to the same person as a scribe in Rome who added a title to that same anonymous Gospel. Disagreements would be inevitable, and those disagreements would be reflected in ancient manuscripts.

c. Moreover, we know from Luke's Gospel that many accounts of the life of Jesus were circulating at the time he wrote, so there was a need to distinguish one account from another. In that environment, it is highly doubtful that any of the Gospels would have been written without an indication of their authorship.

2. Indirect – There are clues in the body of the Gospel, indirect evidence, that support not only the early church's witness to Mark's authorship but also his having relied on Peter as his source.

a. The Greek style of the Gospel is consistent with it having been composed by a Palestinian Jew. Carson and Moo state (p. 175), "The Greek style of Mark's gospel is simple and straightforward and full of the kind of Semitisms that one would expect of a Jerusalem-bred Christian." Semitisms are expressions in Greek that reflect Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic) language patterns or modes of speech, such as word order and the redundant use of pronouns and prepositions (and many others – see, e.g., David Alan Black, *It's Still Greek to Me* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 150-153). Michael Bird writes in *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 44, "The first Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, seems to have been written by a bilingualist who was familiar enough with Greek but whose primary language was Aramaic."

b. As for the author's reliance on Peter as a source, the internationally respected New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham made a significant contribution on that front in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles write in their introduction to the New Testament, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 231:

¹ See Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 12-54.

As R. Bauckham has shown, Mark's Gospel, by way of a literary device called the "*inclusio* of eyewitness testimony" (the practice of naming the major eyewitness underlying an account first and last in the document), purports to be based on the witness of the apostle Peter (see the references to Peter in 1:16 and 16:7), which is also supported by early patristic evidence. Another feature, the "plural-to-singular device," which singles out one individual from a group in order to tell an account from his perspective, makes Peter's the dominant perspective in the narrative, reproducing his eyewitness recollection in first-person terms.

c. More recently, Bauckham has added to the evidence of Mark's reliance on Peter by arguing that the Galilean geography in Mark's Gospel reflects the kind of mental map of the area one would expect a first-century fisherman from Capernaum to have. See his online lecture [Mark's Geography and the Origin of Mark's Gospel](#).

C. Barry Smith rightly concludes: "What internal, indirect evidence there is for the authorship of the Gospel of Mark agrees with the external, direct evidence. (John) Mark, being a resident of Jerusalem, would have been a Palestinian Jew, having Aramaic as his first language. The conclusion follows that (John) Mark wrote the gospel that bears his name."

II. Date

A. Most scholars today date Mark to the middle to late 60s for three main reasons: (1) earliest traditions favor a date for Mark after the death of Peter, (2) Mark's emphasis on following the "road to the cross" walked by Christ fits with a time of persecution such as began in Rome under Nero in A.D. 65, and (3) Mark 13 is thought to reflect the tumult in Palestine during the Jewish revolt that began in A.D. 66. But none of these reasons makes the conclusion certain.

B. It is quite possible Mark was written in the late 50s. The plausibility of that dating depends significantly on the claims that Acts was written around A.D. 62 (and thus the Gospel of Luke before then) and Luke used Mark in writing his Gospel. Both of those claims may be true, but they are not certain (see below).

C. The other main contender for dating is the early 70s, but that proposal is driven largely by the insistence that Mark 13 was an after-the-fact creation presented as a prediction of Jerusalem's fall. There is no reason to think the Lord Jesus did not predict the events beforehand in detail or predict the fall generally by using stock Old Testament and Jewish imagery of besieged cities. Indeed, if Mark was writing after the fall of Jerusalem, why would he invent that Jesus had exhorted the disciples to pray that the desolation of the temple not happen "in winter" and then fail to point out that the prayer had in fact been granted (as the temple was destroyed by the Romans in late July or early August of A.D. 70)? The only reason to invent the after-the-fact exhortation to pray would be to claim that the prayers uttered pursuant to the Lord's instruction had been answered, so the time of the destruction certainly would be noted.

III. Location and Audience

A. External evidence

1. A document probably from the late second century known as the anti-Marcionite prologue to Mark claims that Mark wrote his Gospel "in the regions of Italy." Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, also late second century, suggest the same thing. The fact 1 Pet. 5:13 locates Mark in Rome with Peter in the early 60s lends credence to that claim.

2. If Mark wrote the Gospel in Rome, the default assumption is that he wrote it initially for Christians in Rome, though he may have expected it to circulate beyond that group. There is no evidence contradicting that assumption. Indeed, the internal evidence fits with a Roman audience.

B. Internal evidence

1. In a number of places, Mark translates Aramaic terms (3:17, 5:41, 7:11, 7:34, 10:46, 15:22, 15:34), which indicates his audience did not speak Aramaic. He also explains Jewish terms and customs (7:1-3, 14:12, 15:6-9, 15:42-43) and notes the location of the Mount of Olives in relation to the temple (13:3), which indicates his audience was not Jewish and was not familiar with Jerusalem.

2. Mark also transliterates a number of Latin words into Greek (known as "Latinisms") – e.g., 4:21 (Lat. *modius* [a measure] to Gk. *modios*); 5:9, 15 (Lat. *legio* [legion] to Gk. *legiōn*); 6:37 (Lat. *denarius* [Roman coin] to Gk. *dēnariōn*). Elsewhere he uses Greek words borrowed from Latin to explain other Greek words (12:42, 15:16). There are also places where he uses Latin idioms expressed in Greek language (2:23, 3:6, 3:17, 15:15, 15:19). As Barry Smith concludes: "The presence of Latinisms and Latin translations of Greek words in the Gospel of Mark implies that the intended readers were Latin speakers, even though they could read or at least understand Greek. Latin speakers would have been found most readily in Italy, although not exclusively."

3. The identification of Simon of Cyrene in Mk. 15:21 as the father of Alexander and Rufus suggests his readers were familiar with Alexander and Rufus. It just so happens that a man named Rufus is mentioned in Rom. 16:13 as being a member of the church in Rome.

IV. Purpose

At the very least, Mark wanted "to help his readers understand who Jesus is and what real discipleship involves" (Carson and Moo, 186). He also probably wanted to provide his readers with a written record of Jesus' life and teaching, as encapsulated in Peter's preaching, to anchor them to the truth of the gospel and arm them for sharing that good news.

V. Conclusion

The Gospel of Mark probably was written in Rome in the middle to late 60s (possibly late 50s) by John Mark and was based significantly on information he received from the Apostle Peter. It was originally intended for the Gentile Christians in Rome but may have been expected to circulate beyond that group. Its purpose was to instruct, strengthen, and embolden.

VI. Miscellaneous Information

A. The Gospel of Mark is, of course, the shortest of the four Gospels. Some of the best known events and teachings of Jesus – such as the birth stories, the Beatitudes, and various parables – are not found in Mark. On the other hand, there is some material that is unique to Mark, such as the parable of the seed growing secretly, the healing of the deaf and mute man in chapter 7, and the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida in chapter 8.

B. When one compares the Synoptic Gospels – meaning Matthew, Mark, and Luke – it becomes immediately apparent that they have close similarities, including identical wording in places, and yet they also have some significant differences in content, wording, and order. There certainly seems to be some kind of literary relationship between the Synoptics, some kind of sharing of written material, but the nature of that relationship is unclear. That is what is popularly known as the "Synoptic Problem," though it is better termed a puzzle than a problem, and it has been the subject of intense scholarly study.

C. Most scholars today are convinced that the Gospel of Mark was the first of the four Gospels to be written. They think that in composing their Gospels Matthew and Luke each used Mark and a hypothetical second source (dubbed "Q") and also drew on a source or sources unique to each. Recall that Luke in 1:1-4 notes the existence of prior accounts and implies his use of them in composing his Gospel, so none of this poses a threat to the doctrine of inspiration or the inerrancy of Scripture. But other scholars continue to reject both Markan priority (favoring Matthew) and the alleged use of Q. For a good presentation of the majority view, see Daniel Wallace's online article [The Synoptic Problem](#).

THE TEXT

I. Beginning of the Gospel: Preparation and Presentation (1:1-15)

A. Announces the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ in 1:1.

1. Mark opens in 1:1 with "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, [the Son of God]" and then proceeds to identify that beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist and the events associated with it, namely Jesus' baptism and his subsequent testing in the wilderness.

2. The term "gospel," of course, literally means "good news." It was used in the Greco-Roman world as a celebratory announcement of some major and beneficial event, such as a victory in battle or the enthronement of a king. In the LXX, the verb form is used in Isa. 52:7 regarding the restoration of blessings as a result of God's reign (see also, Isa. 61:1; Ps. 96:2). The

blessing of the end time, the eternal state, which is the fullest expression of God's reign, is the ultimate good news.

3. And this good news is inextricably bound up with Jesus, who is the Messiah, the promised and long-awaited king from the line of David who would usher in the kingdom of God, the final state, and deliver God's people into it. Whatever else it may entail, "son of God" (note textual issue) reinforces Jesus' identity as the Messiah in that it was understood from texts like Ps. 2:7 and 89:26 that the Messiah, this ultimate Davidic king, would be the son of God in a special or ultimate sense (as Solomon had been in a lesser sense – 2 Sam. 7:14).

4. Mark locates the beginning of the good news relating to Jesus in the ministry of John the Baptist. He would not deny there is a sense in which that good news began with Christ's birth or with the eternal intention of God, but he is thinking of its having begun *in earnest* in the ministry of Jesus that was launched by the ministry of John. John's baptizing ministry is frequently presented in the New Testament in this initiating role (e.g., Mat. 3:1-17, 11:12; Lk. 3:1-20, 16:16; Jn. 1:6-8, 19-36; Acts 1:22, 10:37, 13:24).

B. Explains John's role was according to Isaiah's prophecy in 1:2-8.

1. Mark explains that John's role in initiating Christ's ministry was in accordance with what is written in Isaiah the prophet. This was not something of recent origin; it was all part of the long, unfolding story of God's work through the people of Israel to heal the consequences of Sin that invaded and spoiled God's very good creation in the time of Adam and Eve.

2. The reference in vv. 2-3 combines Ex. 23:20a, Mal. 3:1, and Isa. 40:3, but Mark probably focuses on the Isaianic contribution because he is identifying Christ's work, and therefore his own, with Isaiah's grand vision of restoration and renewal. There also is Jewish precedent for naming only the most important source for composite quotes (Stein, 42), and Mark only develops the portion of the citation dealing with the wilderness, which is the portion from Isaiah.

3. Mark cites the LXX of Isa. 40:3 which specifies that the voice that cries out is itself in the wilderness, which fits more clearly with John's ministry in the Judean desert. He is God's messenger who calls on God's people to prepare a path for the coming of the Messiah by getting themselves ready to receive him. Darrell Bock states (p. 110), "John readies the people for the program of God. A responsive heart is what shows a people ready for God's deliverance to come."

4. The fact John is ministering in the "wilderness" has a symbolic significance.

a. God brought Israel into the wilderness from Egypt as a prelude to delivering them into the promise land. It was also in the wilderness that Israel was purged of its rebellious generation prior to entering the promise land. According to Isa. 40:3, it is in the wilderness that Israel prepares the way for God's return for blessing.

b. This link between the wilderness and God's deliverance through the Messiah was understood at the time. It is reflected in the fact the Essenes dwelt in the wilderness at Qumran and other supposed deliverers of Israel operated from the wilderness. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus mentions a number of messianic movements that began in the Judean desert. Recall that in Acts 21:38 the tribune asked Paul, "Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

c. The wilderness as the location for the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ also may signify the "new wine" or "unshrunk cloth" aspect of Christ's work, the fact it could not be confined to old patterns of Jewish piety. Rather than beginning at the temple, which was central to Jewish faith and practice, beginning in the wilderness accentuates the newness or distinctiveness of religious life in the kingdom he was bringing.

5. John proclaimed a "baptism of repentance," meaning he immersed the penitent, those who came to him confessing their sins, and their sins were forgiven in association with that baptism. It was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The people, in response to John's call, were preparing the way for the coming of the Great One John proclaimed, the one whose sandals he was not worthy to untie, by aligning their hearts with the will and working of God. Included in that was their looking for the one to whom John pointed. David Wenham states in *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 124-125:

The distinction between John and Jesus is the difference between the police outrider in a procession and the royal or other dignitary following in his or her official car or carriage. In other words, John was a prophet looking forward, the last in the line in fact; Jesus was the one looked forward to, the fulfillment of the prophetic hopes.

But – and this is the point implied in the parable of the two sons – John and Jesus were part of the same cavalcade, the same revolutionary movement.

6. The fact John's clothes were camel's hair and he wore a leather belt around his waist was a distinctive, symbolic identification with the prophet Elijah, who is described that way in 2 Ki. 1:8 (the literal "hairy man" is rightly understood in many translations to refer to a *garment* of hair, as such clothing was typical of prophets – see Zech. 13:4).

a. Based on Mal. 4:5, the Jews expected Elijah to return in advance of the Messiah. The angel told Zechariah in Lk. 1:17 that John would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah," and Jesus elsewhere expressly identifies John as the Elijah who was to come (Mk. 9:11-13; Mat. 11:14, 17:10-13).

b. John himself denied he was Elijah in Jn. 1:21 probably because he was not *literally* Elijah, which is how most Jews understood the prophecy (Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., 118-119). He was, however, the *prophesied Elijah*, meaning the one who came in the spirit and power of Elijah as the forerunner to the Messiah. J. H. Bernard states (*John*, 1:37; quoted in Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 76):

In a sense, John the Baptist was the Elijah of Jewish expectation, and so Jesus declares (Matt. 11:14; cf. Luke 1:17), but in the sense in which the Jewish emissaries put the question, '*Art thou Elijah?*' the true answer was *No*; for, while the Baptist fulfilled the preliminary ministry of which Malachi had spoken, he was not Elijah returned to earth in bodily form.

7. Because John's ministry was in the wilderness, his diet included locusts and wild honey, things that would be available to him in that environment. Locusts are listed in Lev. 11:20-23 among the foods Israelites were permitted to eat.

8. John says that he baptized them with water, but the exalted one coming after him will baptize them with/in the Holy Spirit. Robert Stein states (p. 50-51):

Since John, Jesus (John 3:22; 4:1-2), and the early church all practiced water baptism, it would be an error to think that Mark intended his readers to interpret the verb "baptize" in two very different ways – the first literally (for John's baptism) and the second figuratively (for Jesus's baptism). No doubt Mark intended that his readers should interpret John's words in light of their Christian baptism. The difference between the baptism of Jesus and that of John did not involve the form of baptism (immersion) or the medium of baptism (water), but the benefit associated with it. Both practiced an immersion in water associated with repentance (1:4, 15). Both associated baptism with forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 10:43, 47). John, however, was pointing forward to the day when the Stronger One would bring with him the arrival of the new age and the Spirit as the guarantee of the kingdom of God (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

9. Josephus speaks of John and his ministry in his work *The Antiquities of the Jews* (18:116-119). He confirms that John was called "the Baptist," that he was a good man who commanded the Jews to exercise righteousness toward one another and piety toward God (i.e., to repent) and to come to baptism, that crowds came to him and were moved by his words, and that Herod had him thrown in prison and put to death. Josephus does not mention the more apocalyptic aspects of John's preaching, the claim that God was breaking into history in a climactic way, or his connection to Jesus, but as Mark Strauss notes (p. 65), this is not surprising given Josephus's general disdain for messianic movements.

C. Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River is reported in 1:9-11.

1. Mark notes that Jesus came from Nazareth, which was a small and relatively unknown village in southwest Galilee. According to Lk. 3:1, John's ministry began in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, which could be either A.D. 27 or 30, depending on whether Luke is referring to the beginning of Tiberius's co-regency with Augustus or his sole reign after Augustus's death in A.D. 14. Since Herod probably died in 4 B.C. (some argue for 2 or 1 B.C.) and Jesus was born before Herod died, Jesus probably was born around 5-4 B.C. According to Lk. 3:23, Jesus was "about thirty years old" when he began his ministry, which fits more comfortably with John's ministry beginning in A.D. 27. That would put Jesus' ministry from A.D. 27-30, which fits with the statement in Jn. 2:20 that near the beginning of Jesus' ministry

Herod's temple construction had been ongoing for forty-six years (approximately 20 B.C. to A.D. 27).

2. Mark simply reports the baptism without providing any dialogue between Jesus and John or any comment on the reason Jesus was baptized. In Jesus' case, it clearly was not a repentance-based baptism that was accompanied by forgiveness of sin, as Jesus was sinless.

a. In Mat. 3:15 Jesus urges a hesitant John to go through with the baptism "to fulfill all righteousness." I take this to mean to fill to the full, to maximize, righteousness, not only within Israel but in all creation.

b. This result is tied to John's baptism of Jesus in that, in keeping with John's Elijah role as the herald and forerunner of the Lord, God ordained that baptism to be the launch of Christ's ministry, through which righteousness ultimately will permeate everything, become the sole state or reality. The pivotal nature of the baptism is evident in the fact a requirement for being an apostle to replace Judas was that the candidate had accompanied the disciples "beginning from the baptism of John" (Acts 1:21-22).

3. In keeping with the pivotal nature of the event, Jesus sees the physical heavens ripped open exposing the interlocking dimension of heaven from which the Spirit descends on him like a dove. Jesus is anointed by the Spirit (Lk. 4:18) in preparation for his ministry, and God announces from heaven, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." This brief announcement probably is an allusion to Ps. 2:7, where God speaks of the nations raging against his Davidic king, and to Isa. 42:1 where the Spirit-endowed Servant of the Lord is identified as God's chosen one.

4. John (Jn. 1:32-33) and Jesus (Mk. 1:10) saw the descent of the Spirit, but it is unclear whether others did so or whether anyone other than Jesus heard the heavenly voice. Decades after Jesus' ministry, resurrection, and ascension, Mark and his readers certainly know his identity (1:1), but that recognition comes only gradually to the characters in the Gospel. They are with Jesus as that identity is unfolding.

D. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness in 1:12-13.

1. Mark says that Jesus, under the compulsion of the Spirit, went into the wilderness for forty days where he was tempted by Satan. Unlike Matthew and Luke, he does not elaborate on the temptations. Mark's point seems to be that, as the good news relating to Jesus began in earnest with the launching of his ministry at John's baptism, so too did the spiritual war with Satan. The Spirit thrusts Jesus into the deep end of the pool, so to speak, to experience the nature and intensity of the spiritual battle that has been joined, to taste the wiles of the Enemy in a state of deprivation and physical want. This experience will serve Jesus as he walks the road of crucifixion.

2. Mark alone refers to "the wild animals" in the wilderness, which heightens the inhospitableness of the environment and thus magnifies the hardship under which the temptation was experienced. It is just possible that Mark makes specific mention of the wild animals

because at the time he was writing Christians in Rome were being thrown to wild animals by Nero. In that case, Mark would be encouraging the saints to faithfulness by noting that the Lord had been faithful in the midst of wild animals.

3. The fact the angels were serving Jesus in the wilderness reinforces his significance and that of his work. He is the Christ, the Son of God (1:1), and is carrying out God's grand plan and purposes. He is not some deluded figure who imagines he is on a mission from God; he is on the greatest divine mission there has ever been.

4. Mark does not describe Christ's triumph over Satan in the wilderness, but that is understood from the continuing narrative. For example, he is reported in 1:26 and 1:34 as having authority over demons.

E. Jesus comes to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God in 1:14-15.

1. With Matthew and Luke, Mark does not report the time that Jesus' ministry overlapped with that of John the Baptist prior to John's arrest, the time between Mk. 1:13 and 1:14. That overlap and the journey to Galilee through Samaria are reported only in John chapters 1-4. The Synoptics move from Jesus' testing in the wilderness straight to his ministry in Galilee after John's arrest to emphasize the distinction between Jesus and John in terms of ushering in the new age, the kingdom of God. John was the last of the old age, the herald of the kingdom bringer; Jesus was the new dawn.

2. In Galilee Jesus preached the good news of God that the long-awaited kingdom of God was at hand.

a. As I have said on many occasions, the story of the Bible is the story of God's work through the people of Israel to rescue his creation, which includes mankind, from its fallen state. People are the high point of God's creation, but his rescue effort includes all of creation because all of creation was harmed as a result of sin. That is why Paul in Rom. 8:19-22 says that creation itself looks forward to the day it will be freed from the consequences of human sin.

b. The Old Testament ends on a note of unfulfilled hope. It was clear that in one sense God always had ruled the world from the time of creation. He was on his heavenly throne (e.g., Ps. 11:4; Isa. 6:1) and reigned over all (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:31; Ps. 93:1, 96:10). But there was some sense in which his kingly rule was not being fully expressed. He was allowing creation to go on out of step with his ultimate intention for it, to continue in a state of sin and suffering that was contrary to his ultimate purpose and vision.

c. But the prophets saw that a day was coming in which God would express his rulership of creation in such a way that all things would be brought into harmony and conformity with his ultimate will and purpose. His creation would be redeemed from the dreadful consequences of sin that had invaded it. This world of rebellion, sin, hostility, and fragmentation would be rescued by God, transformed by him into a true utopia, a perfect reality of love, joy, and fellowship with God and one another.

d. This full and ultimate expression of God's sovereignty and rule, revealed in the Old Testament, is the state for which God's people longed. In Mk. 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea is described as one who was "waiting for the kingdom of God" (TNIV). Robert Saucy explains in "The Eschatology of the Bible" in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 1:105:

According to the Scriptures, there is a sense in which God has always ruled and is even now the King over all creation (1 Chron 29:11, 12; Ps 103:19; 145:13). But there is another thread of truth that views the kingdom as yet to come (Zech. 14:9; Mat. 6:10). It is this last theme that dominates the eschatological hope of Scripture. God is king over all his creative works, but his kingdom is not established on the earth in human history. While he rules over the affairs of the earth with nothing occurring apart from his permissive will, he has allowed sin and rebellion to enter history and Satan to have a certain dominance as the "god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4). God's rule might be said therefore to be *over* the earth, but not directly *on* the earth. It is the coming of God to establish this latter condition, to bring his kingdom to earth in the vindication of his sovereign holiness, that has constituted the hope of God's people throughout all time.

e. Jesus was announcing God's definitive intervention in history. The "good news of God" was that the kingdom was at long last arriving in the person and ministry of Jesus. He was the "kingdom bringer!" David Wenham writes (p. 25): "To sum up: in proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus was announcing the coming of God's revolution and of God's new world, as promised in the Old Testament. God was at last intervening, Jesus declared, to establish his reign over everything, to bring salvation to his people and renewal and reconciliation to the world." That is why he tells the disciples in Mat. 13:17, "For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

f. The Jews expected the kingdom to come suddenly and decisively. They thought God's final intervention would be a one-shot deal – the Day of the Lord – where the old age would be terminated abruptly and the new, glorious age would begin. This caused people to wonder how Jesus could be ushering in the kingdom of God when the hallmarks of the old age – death, decay, suffering, etc. – still were present. You remember how even John the Baptist began to question as he sat in Herod's jail whether Jesus was in fact the one who would bring in the kingdom of God (Mat. 11:2-3; Lk. 7:18-19).² Jesus explained in parables and elsewhere that the kingdom comes in two stages. It is introduced or inaugurated, then there is an interval of time, and then there is a decisive intervention when the kingdom is consummated or finalized. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

² John Nolland writes in *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 450-451: "John speaks through the mouthpiece of his disciples: the words are his not theirs. . . . John needed to come to terms with the fact that the one of whom he had now been hearing such remarkable things was, despite the quite unexpected form of his ministry, the one whom he had heralded as eschatological judge and deliverer – 'the one coming after' John (Mt. 3:11)."

3. The exhortation to repent and believe in the gospel was a call to turn from whatever alternate course they were on and embrace the truth that he is the Christ, the Anointed One, through whom God is doing this great rescue work. That was essential for receiving the blessings of the work. Thus, "the good news of God" (1:14) is "the good news of Jesus Christ" (1:1). The content of that faith will expand as the specifics of Jesus ministry unfold, ultimately encompassing his death, burial, and resurrection, but faith in Jesus as the kingdom-bringing Messiah is constant.

II. Jesus' Early Ministry in Galilee (1:16 – 3:6)

A. Jesus calls four fishermen to follow him in 1:16-20.

1. From the shore of the sea of Galilee, Jesus calls two pairs of fisherman brothers to follow him: Simon, who is better known as "Peter," and his brother Andrew; and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Mark makes no mention of their prior history with Jesus as reported in the Gospel of John perhaps because this was after the Baptist's execution and when the call to journey permanently with Jesus was issued, which Peter with hindsight may have viewed as a pivotal stage in their discipleship.

2. Jesus tells Peter and Andrew, which intention certainly applied also to the others, that he would make them become "fishers of men." In other words, he was going to make them more active agents in his work of rescuing people from sin and death by calling them into God's kingdom. They now would be proclaimers of the gospel. The four immediately leave occupation and family to follow the Lord.

3. Peter, James, and John become what is sometimes dubbed Jesus' "inner circle" of disciples. This is the James who will be executed by Herod Agrippa in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:1-2) and the John who will later write the Gospel and Epistles of John and the Book of Revelation.

B. Jesus teaches and casts a demon out of a man in a synagogue in Capernaum in 1:21-28.

1. Peter and Andrew (and Philip) were originally from Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), but it seems they lived in nearby Capernaum as adults (Mk. 1:21, 29; Mat. 8:5, 14). James and John were partners with Peter (Lk. 5:10), so they too may have lived in Capernaum. That presumably is why they go into Capernaum, where Jesus teaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

2. As I explain in [Archaeology and the Bible](#):

A large limestone synagogue was discovered in Capernaum that was thought to belong to the first century, but in the early 1970s it was determined that this structure dates from the fourth and fifth centuries.

In 1975 excavators discovered black basalt walls under all four corners of the limestone synagogue. Further work revealed that these walls are four feet thick, much too thick for a private dwelling, and associated pottery demonstrates

that the basalt structure was built in the first century. Recall from Lk. 7:1-5 that a centurion was praised for having built the synagogue in Capernaum. The underlying structure is the same size as the limestone synagogue and is laid out like that synagogue. These reasons and the tendency to build religious sites on existing ones have convinced many that the basalt structure is a first century synagogue on which the later synagogue was built. Archaeologist John McRay, for example, says in *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 163-164 that it "is certainly the remains of the synagogue in which Jesus preached." Others are not yet convinced it is a synagogue.

3. Note that the word rendered "immediately" in many translations of 1:21 (*euthus*) can carry a more general sense of "then" or "so then." It is one of Mark's favorite terms, one he uses 41 times in the Gospel. It often is just a way of introducing the next reported event, which is why some translations of 1:21 state simply "when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue" (e.g., NRS, NET, NIV 2011).

4. Mark 1:22 says they were astonished at *how* he taught, as one who had authority and not as the scribes (see also Mat. 7:29). The scribes apparently taught by citing previous teachers as authoritative voices in establishing the steps of their argument. This is similar to how attorneys argue by linking appeals to various authorities to construct an argument. Jesus did not do that; he did not support his teaching with appeals to others. Rather, he taught based on his inherent and transcendent authority as the Messiah and Fulfiller of the Old Testament.

5. There is a man in the synagogue who was possessed by a demon, here called an "unclean" or "defiling" spirit. The demon, through the man, cries out literally, "What to us and to you?" This is an idiom (Semitic in origin that made its way into colloquial Greek) that means something like "What business do you have with us?" or more colloquially, "Leave us alone," which is how it is in NET and NKJV (see NET note). When the demon asks, "Have you come to destroy *us*?" the "us" probably refers to fellow demons. He feels both hostility and fear in the presence of the Lord.

Excursus on Demon Possession

Compared to the rest of the Bible and to modern western society, demons took possession of people with astonishing frequency during Jesus' ministry. Many in churches of Christ insist the Bible eliminates any possibility of demon possession today, so any alleged cases necessarily are fraudulent or a mental illness that is mistaken for demon possession, but I am not convinced the Bible reveals definitively that all demon possession has ceased. In other words, I am not willing to say it is impossible from a biblical standpoint. We know from the Book of Acts that demons continued possessing people for decades after Christ's ascension (Acts 5:16, 8:7, 16:16-18, 19:12-16). And in the end demons will empower people to perform fantastic miracles that will deceive many people (Mat. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 13:13-14, 16:14, 19:20).

If demon possession is indeed a current possibility, there may be other explanations for why it is so rare or nonexistent in western culture today compared to the New Testament. Duane Garrett

offers several possibilities in *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 31:

First, demon activity may have been more common when Jesus was on earth because of the spiritual conflict surrounding the incarnation. Second, perhaps demon possession is still common but we do not recognize it as easily as Jesus did. Third, Jesus happened to come during a time that was politically, socially, and religiously unstable when people embraced strange new types of spirituality. Thus, demon possession was more common. On the third view, demonic activity waxes and wanes in different times and different places in proportion to the behavior of the society. Personally, I think there is truth in all three explanations.

And I would say that part of that waxing and waning of demonic activity would depend on what Satan thinks is the most effective strategy in a particular time and culture. He may be convinced, for example, that he can do more damage in post-enlightenment western societies, which deny there is a spiritual dimension, by keeping a lower profile to fuel that false belief.

But whatever the overall level of demon activity, I do not believe a Christian who is faithfully abiding in Christ can be demon possessed in the sense of being *indwelt* by a demon. Paul says in Rom. 8:9 that the Christian is controlled by the indwelling Spirit of God. Our body is the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19), and there simply is no agreement between the temple of God and idols (2 Cor. 6:16). There are no examples in Scripture of a faithful Christian being indwelt by a demon nor are Christians instructed to have demons cast out of them. Indeed, James instructs the saints in Jas. 4:7, "resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Paul commands Christians in Eph. 4:7, "do not give an opportunity to the devil" and in 6:11 says, "Put on the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

This is not to say that Christians are immune to demonic *influences*. Satan and his minions are always scheming to draw saint and sinner alike into evil and away from God's purposes. Paul speaks of these schemes in Eph. 6:11 and says in 1 Thess. 3:5 that he feared the tempter might have tempted the Thessalonians so that the efforts of him and his companions might have been useless. Peter indicates in Acts 5:3 that it was Satan who filled Ananias's heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. The issue is the nature and degree of demonic influence to which faithful Christians may be subject. I submit that they cannot be subject to the nature and degree of demonic influence that is associated with possession.

6. The demon shouts, "I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" and Jesus rebukes him, commanding him to be silent, and tells him to come out of the person.

a. This is the first example of what is known as the "messianic secret" in Mark's Gospel. At various times in the Gospel Jesus commands demons, people he has healed, and disciples to keep quiet about his identity or works that would reveal it. In the case of demons, as here, "[h]is purpose for [the] command is likely twofold: first, to demonstrate his supreme authority over Satan's forces; second, because the demons are inappropriate heralds of

his person and mission (cf. 1:25). Jesus will reveal his identity in his own time and through his own words and deeds" (Strauss, 155).

b. The most plausible explanation for commanding silence from healed people and disciples is that Jesus was orchestrating the timing of the revelation of his identity in fulfillment of the divine plan. Even when his demand for secrecy was seemingly ignored, he knew precisely what influence it would have on those instructed and those who overheard, the extent to which it would restrain or even fuel reporting, and he did it all to bring events to a head at the time of God's choosing while keeping premature distortions of his nature and mission from taking root.

c. Unlike other exorcists of the time, who relied on incantations and various rituals to coerce demons into submission, Jesus relies simply on his innate authority. The demon throws the man into convulsions, perhaps a last, futile attempt to injure him, and then exits him with a loud shriek.

d. Again the people are astonished. They ask each other, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Strauss comments (p. 94):

Notice that they refer first to Jesus' authority in teaching and only second to the exorcism. Jesus' primary mission is to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. The exorcisms and healing are not showy displays of his power for self-aggrandizement, but evidence that the power of the kingdom of God is breaking into human history through the Messiah's words and deeds.

e. At his first coming, Jesus not only announced the kingdom's arrival but also demonstrated its character and gave us a foretaste of it. John Piper remarks in a sermon titled "Christ and Cancer":

The answer to why Jesus did not raise all the dead is that, contrary to the Jewish expectation, the first coming of the Messiah was *not* the consummation and full redemption of this fallen age. The first coming was rather to purchase that consummation, illustrate its character, and bring a *foretaste* of it to his people. Therefore, Jesus raised some of the dead to illustrate that he has that power and one day will come again and exercise it for all his people. And he healed the sick to illustrate that in his final kingdom this is how it will be. There will be no more crying or pain any more.

7. Verse 28 states that his fame was spreading throughout Galilee. It was rapidly becoming known, in the words of the old Buffalo Springfield song, "there's something happening here."

C. Jesus performs more healings and exorcisms in Capernaum in 1:29-34.

1. Jesus and the four brothers go to Simon and Andrew's home in Capernaum. It is quite likely that this very home has been discovered by archaeologists. As I explain in [Archaeology and the Bible](#):

In 1968 Virgilio Corbo and Stanislaw Loffreda began investigating a fifth-century octagonal church building located 84 feet south of the synagogue in Capernaum. During the Byzantine era, which includes the fifth century, octagonal churches were built over sacred sites in the Holy Land. Beneath this octagonal church was a fourth-century church, and beneath that church was a house dating to the mid-first century.

The walls of the house were narrow and would not support a masonry roof, meaning the roof would have been made of wooden branches covered with earth, like the one in Mk. 2:4. The walls, ceiling, and floor of the central room of the house had been plastered in the first century, as was done with public rooms that were used for special purposes. It is the only house known in Capernaum to have plastered walls, and the walls and floors had been replastered at least twice.

In the mid-first century there was a change in the pottery that was used in that room indicating a change from normal residential living. More than 150 inscriptions were scratched on the plaster walls in Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin beginning in the second century and perhaps even earlier. These include appeals to Christ for help, possible references to Peter, and various Christian symbols like crosses. Sometime after the first century the roof of the central room was raised, and the fifth-century octagonal chapel was centered on this room. This is the only house in this area of Galilee that has been identified by archaeologists, pilgrims, and ancient tradition as Peter's house.

Many scholars are persuaded by this evidence that this is indeed the house of Peter.

2. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever and then that evening the house was mobbed with people from the city bringing their sick and demon-possessed to be healed. Mark says hyperbolically, "The whole city was gathered together at the door." Jesus healed them and again commanded the demons not to speak because they knew who he was.

[D. Jesus travels throughout Galilee preaching and healing in 1:35-45.](#)

1. Jesus goes out to a desolate place before daylight and prays there. Peter's search party locates him, and they tell him everyone is looking for him. Jesus tells him they need to go to the other towns so he can also preach there, as he came to announce or inaugurate the kingdom of God, a task that is not limited to Capernaum. As Strauss notes (p. 107), "Jesus apparently avoided the larger cities of Galilee, like Tiberias and Sepphoris, which are never mentioned in the Gospels."

2. Mark reports in v. 39 that Jesus preached in the synagogues throughout Galilee and cast out demons. He also healed diseases, as the text and other summaries of his work make clear, but exorcisms may be emphasized because they are such direct expressions of spiritual dominance.

3. A leper comes to him at an unidentified location and begs to be healed, declaring his confidence that Jesus is able to heal him if he chooses to do so.

a. Jesus is moved with compassion, touches the man, and heals him immediately. (Note there is a textual variant with weak external support that has Jesus being angry as he heals the man. If that were original, it would mean Jesus was angry at Satan or Sin for the suffering it has brought.) Rather than the leper making Jesus ritually unclean as indicated in the Mosaic law – note that ritual defilement was not sin but was part of everyday life (e.g., Lev. 11-15; Num. 19:11-26) – Jesus heals and cleanses the leper.

b. Jesus tells the man not to talk about the healing but to show himself to the priest and to make the offerings prescribed in Leviticus 14 for a cleansed leper. This priestly certification of his healing was necessary to regain acceptance into Israelite society.

4. The healed leper's excitement gets the best of him, and contrary to the Lord's instruction, he spreads the news of his miraculous healing. As a result, the crowds drawn to Jesus were so large that it was too disruptive for him to enter a town openly. For that reason, he chose at that time to remain outside the towns, but even then people kept flocking to him.

E. Jesus returns to Capernaum and heals the paralytic in 2:1-12.

1. Jesus was able to slip back into Capernaum, but the news quickly spread that he had returned. People mobbed the house where he was staying, presumably Peter's house, to such an extent that all access to him was blocked. And Jesus was preaching to them "the word," meaning the message of the kingdom of God.

2. Four men arrived at the house carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher, a friend they were bringing to Jesus to be healed. We know nothing about how he came to be paralyzed or how long he had been in that condition. The crowd stuffed in and around the house was so dense that they could not reach Jesus by the doorway. So they took the outside access to the roof, which would have been flat and made with wooden crossbeams covered with thatch and a layer of compacted dirt. They began digging through the dirt and pulling the thatch away, and then lowered their friend into the room through the now exposed wooden crossbeams.

3. Seeing their faith, as expressed in their effort and persistence to reach him, Jesus tells the paralyzed man his sins are forgiven.

a. There is a general sense in which all sickness, debilitation, and suffering are related to Sin's invasion and corruption of creation; we live in a fallen world. But it is also the case that sickness, debilitation, and suffering *can be* related more specifically to an individual's sin in the way of divine punishment or discipline. It may well be that Jesus knew this particular man's condition was related to his sins in that more specific sense and that his healing therefore necessarily involved forgiveness of his sins. But it is also possible his condition was not related specifically to his sins and that Jesus announced the forgiveness of his sins, which he like all people needed, to highlight his unique authority to forgive.

b. Whatever the reason for the announcement, it raised the issue of Jesus' authority. The scribes were thinking he was blaspheming by claiming for himself a power that is reserved exclusively for God. Jesus knew what was in their hearts, which interestingly is something true only of God (1 Ki. 8:39; 2 Chron. 6:30). This is the first sign of opposition to Jesus in Mark.

4. Given their internal grumbling about his announcement, Jesus asks them whether it is easier *to say* (not to do) "Your sins are forgiven" or "Rise, take up your stretcher and walk."

a. The former is easier *to say*, to pretend to achieve, because the claim to have forgiven sins cannot be verified objectively, whereas there is no faking the claim to heal this (no doubt well known) man's paralysis. So Jesus tells them he will perform the verifiable miraculous healing, the thing that cannot be faked, as evidence ("that you may know") that the thing that could be faked, the forgiveness of sins, was not (i.e., that he does indeed have authority to forgive sins).

b. It is not a logical proof that he can forgive sins, as he conceivably could be able to heal without being able to forgive; rather, it is support for his claim to be able to forgive. In other words, one who can perform such a great miracle is more likely to be able to forgive someone's sins than one who cannot.

5. Jesus tells the paralytic, "Rise, take up your stretcher, and go home," and he rose and waltzed out in front of them all. Mark exclaims, "They were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"

F. Jesus calls Levi (Matthew) in 2:13-17.

1. Jesus is again teaching large crowds by the Sea of Galilee. As he is walking along, he sees Levi son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax collector's booth. Levi, who in the Gospel of Matthew is identified by his (presumably) second name of Matthew, works for Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, and collects a toll or duty on goods in transit, such as fish caught in the Sea of Galilee. Strauss writes (p. 130): "Tax collectors were despised because of their reputation for dishonesty, their exorbitant surcharges, and their duplicity with oppressive rulers, both the Romans and their client kings like Herod Antipas. Since they made their living from the money they could collect over and above the taxes owed, extortion and corruption were rampant."

2. That popular contempt notwithstanding, Jesus calls Levi to follow him, which he promptly does. Levi then hosts a formal banquet or dinner party (indicated by the fact they were reclining) at his home where many tax collectors and other sinners ate with Jesus and his disciples. "Sinners" here refers to unscrupulous riffraff, those who were sinners in a way distinct from the disciples (who, of course, also were sinners in a literal sense). There were many such people at the dinner because the number of people following Jesus was so large that it included many of them (who presumably were invited by Levi).

3. The scribes of the Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples why Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. As Strauss comments (p. 132): "In Judaism a scrupulous Pharisee would never eat at the home of a common Israelite since he could not be sure that the food was ceremonially clean or that it had been properly tithed (*m. Demai* 2:2). He would especially not eat with a defiled and sinful tax collector. The Pharisees expect Jesus, a respected rabbi, to act in the same exclusive manner."

4. Jesus answered them by applying a common proverb to his ministry. He has come to call the sick, the spiritually needy, to the restoration and healing that is bound up with the kingdom of God. Indeed, their presence at the banquet with him points to God's heart that all sinners end up sharing in the eschatological banquet, the glory of the consummated kingdom.

G. Jesus responds to a question about his disciples not fasting in 2:18-22.

1. On the heels of being accused of blaspheming in claiming to forgive sins (Mk. 2:7) and being questioned about eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mk. 2:16), people ask him why his disciples do not fast like the disciples of John and the Pharisees.

a. The Old Testament prescribed a national fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Num. 29:7; Acts 27:9), and it seems from 1 Sam. 14:24 and Jer. 36:6 that a fast could be called in special times of penance, such as times of crisis or emergency. Several fasts apparently had become customary after Judah's exile to Babylon, falling on days that were significant in terms of the siege of Jerusalem (see Zech. 7:1-5, 8:19). Robert Guelich says of fasting in *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 108-109:

Fasting was a common rite in Judaism with roots deep in the OT. At times it was an expression of mourning for the loss of someone or something (1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 1:12). More often it was an expression of contrition and penitence, a sign of repentance marked by the symbols of mourning (Matt 6:16). Combined with prayer, fasting was a statement of self-denial and self-humiliation depicting one as self-effacing and submissive to God's will.

b. In the intertestamental period, fasting in Judaism increased. Luke 5:33 says the disciples of John fasted often, and Lk. 18:12 indicates that the Pharisees fasted twice a week. Note also Anna's fasting in Lk. 2:37. Fasting had become an expected mark of piety. But Jesus and his disciples did not engage in regular voluntary fasts. On the contrary, Jesus was more associated with feasting, so much so that he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard (Mat. 11:19; Lk. 7:34).

2. This was such an obvious difference between Jesus and his disciples on the one hand and the disciples of John and the Pharisees on the other that he was asked to justify it (Mk. 2:18; also Mat. 9:14; Lk. 5:33), to explain the reason for the difference. Jesus' answer is theologically loaded, but it requires some background understanding to grasp its import. He says to them: "*Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have*

the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day."

a. According to Craig Keener in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 685, "Jewish weddings normally lasted seven days," and "[m]any of the closest associates of the bride and groom remained the full seven days." He states (p. 686):

Jewish people emphasized joyous celebration at wedding feasts; texts often use weddings to symbolize the greatest joy, in contrast to the epitome of sorrow, grief at a funeral (1 Macc 9:39-41; Josephus *J.W.* 6.5.3 § 301). As one must mourn with the bereaved, one was also obligated to celebrate with the couple at a wedding (*y. Ketub.* 1:1 § 6).

b. Julius J. Scott Jr. writes in *Customs and Controversies: Intertestamental Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 250:

There were prescribed stages for the wedding celebration: "(1) preparation of the bride, (2) transfer of the bride from her father's home to that of the groom, (3) the bride's introduction into the home of the groom, and (4) blessings and festivities within the husband's home." [Quote from S. Safrai, "Home and Family" in S. Safrai, M. Stern, et al., eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 757.] The celebration included many guests, both invited and otherwise. Witnesses were required for the reciting of blessings throughout the week of the wedding. There were feasting and a general atmosphere of merriment and rejoicing.

c. David Wenham writes (p. 28):

The normal procedure seems to have been for the guests to gather at the bridegroom's house on the day appointed for the marriage. The bridegroom would go to the bride's home to claim her, and then he would bring her in joyful procession to his own home. The eating and drinking would then begin, and would often go on through the night. The coming of the bridegroom with his bride was thus the signal for the wedding feast to begin.

3. Jesus says that his disciples do not fast because the current period is like the celebration of a wedding feast when the groom is present. Wenham notes (p. 28), "The implication is that something joyful and significant, like a wedding, is taking place in Jesus' ministry and, furthermore, that Jesus is the bridegroom at the wedding, being the reason for the joy and celebration."

4. The joyful and significant thing that is taking place in Jesus' ministry is the ushering in of the long-awaited kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was central to Jesus' ministry and teaching. Again, that is why Jesus says in Mat. 13:17 (ESV), "*For truly, I say to*

you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

a. France comments in *Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 515:

The prophets looked forward to the day of eschatological restoration, to the coming of what Jesus now calls 'the kingdom of heaven,' but saw it only in prefiguration and promise, not in existential reality. . . . Like Abraham, who 'rejoiced to see my day' (John 8:56), the prophets spoke of 'the grace given to *you*,' aware that their service was not for their own benefit but for '*yours*,' things which even angels are agog to get a glimpse of (1 Pet 1:10-12)! There is an incredulous wonder running through these NT reflections on the privilege of those who live at the time when God's saving purpose comes to fruition.

b. David Turner says (p. 340) regarding Mat. 13:17: "[T]he disciples are graciously blessed with seeing eyes and hearing ears. This blessedness exceeds that of many prophets and righteous people, who longed to hear and see what the disciples have heard and seen. Jesus's disciples are privileged to experience the eschatological words and deeds of Jesus that inaugurate the kingdom."

5. Linking the kingdom to a feast is not surprising in light of a text like Isa. 25:6-8, which employs that imagery. Isaiah 25:6-8 states (ESV): *On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.* ⁷ *And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.* ⁸ *He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.*

6. Indeed, Jesus makes explicit the connection between the kingdom and a wedding feast in Mat. 22:2, where he says (ESV) *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son . . ."* He does it again in Mat. 25:1-13. In speaking of himself as the bridegroom, Jesus appropriates for himself imagery that in the Old Testament is used of God. See, e.g., Isa. 5:1, 54:5-6, 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2, 2:32; Ezek. 16:6-8; Hos. 2:19. This is a somewhat veiled identification of himself with God.

7. Jesus prophesies in Mk. 2:20 that the joy and celebration (and thus lack of fasting) his disciples properly exhibit in his presence will turn to fasting when he is taken from them. This seems to be a reference to the temporary mourning they will experience after his arrest and execution and prior to his resurrection (see Jn. 16:16-22). He is revealing that his coming violent death is something he knows and embraces.

a. So Jesus indicates that fasting *is not* appropriate when he is physically present with the disciples and *is* appropriate when he is arrested and executed, but he does not address the propriety of fasting in the period between his ascension and his return, the time when he is physically in heaven but present on earth in and through the Spirit. There is a sense in

which Jesus is with us always (Mat. 28:20), but also a sense in which he is away from us, as reflected in the prayer "Come Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20) and "Our Lord come!" (1 Cor. 16:22) and in Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 5:6 that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

b. We know Jesus told the disciples in Jn. 16:20-22 that their sorrow at his death will at his resurrection turn into a joy that will not be taken from them, and we also know that the church fasted on occasion after Christ's ascension (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23). So it seems that fasting is acceptable, perhaps even expected (Mat. 6:16-18),³ as we long for the consummation and all that it will entail, including the Lord's "full presence," but that this fasting is to take place in the overarching realization of the kingdom's inauguration. Just as we still grieve in this overlap of ages but not as others who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13), so we still fast in this overlap but with a different perspective. See Kent D. Berghuis, *Christian Fasting: A Theological Approach* (N.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 2007), 47-52 (though he believes that Mk. 2:20 and parallels speak directly of fasting during the overlap of ages).

8. After explaining in Mk. 2:19-20 why his disciples do not fast, he says in Mk. 2:21-22 (ESV): *"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins--and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."*

a. Jesus is saying that the kingdom he is ushering in is such a radical new reality that it cannot be confined to the old patterns of Jewish piety. It is not a mere tweaking of the status quo; it is the kingdom of God invading the present age. Of course, Jesus did not see himself as starting something completely new, something with no connection to the past. Rather, he "saw himself as building on and bringing to fulfillment God's plan and purpose revealed in the Old Testament and in the history of the people of Israel" (Wenham, 33).

b. That is why he says in Mat. 5:17 that he has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. This link with the past is indicated in Mat. 13:52: *And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."* Wenham comments (p. 33):

Jesus implies that Christian teachers are similar to the Jewish theological experts in some ways, and yet, whereas the Jewish teachers looked back to the past, to the great figure of Moses above all, Jesus' disciples had not only the old but also great new treasures as well – in Jesus and his message of the kingdom, being the fulfillment of Moses and the prophets.

³ I say *perhaps* even expected because, as I. Howard Marshall notes regarding Mat. 6:16-18 in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Into God's Presence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 125:

The saying is directed to those who hear the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1 – 8:1) and is cast in terms of their current religious practices – that is, the giving of alms, the saying of prayers, and fasting.

Elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount the practice of offering sacrifices at the temple is taken for granted. It follows, therefore, that not all of the practices assumed by Jesus in order to communicate with his audience on its own terms necessarily carry forward as things that his followers will do.

c. Wenham's conclusion about the unshrunk cloth and the new wine (p. 33-34) is worth quoting at length:

Jesus was not an iconoclastic revolutionary, smashing everything that had gone before, but he did see his coming as bringing a decisively new stage in God's purpose. Once the space rocket's motors have fired and the rocket lifts off the launch-pad, the space mission moves into a quite new and most exciting stage for which everything else has been preparation. So Jesus' ministry represented the 'lift-off' of God's revolution, and things could never be the same again. As with Jesus' parable of the bridegroom and the feast, so with the parables of the patch and the wine Jesus makes a remarkable claim for himself: he has brought God's promised revolution into the world. God has worked in the history of his people in wonderful ways, but now something of a decisively new order was taking place.

d. Luke's account includes (5:39) Jesus' statement (ESV), "*And no one after drinking old wine desires the new, for he says, 'The old is good.'*" I think Wenham is correct in seeing this as an ironical comment on people's resistance to Jesus' ministry. As he sums up the meaning (p. 32-33), "The conservative 'old-guard' who are unwilling to receive the revolution of God are like people extolling the virtues of old wine; but this time it is the new 'wine' which is far superior!"

H. Jesus responds to Pharisees' accusation that his disciples were breaking the Sabbath in 2:23-28.

1. Mark reports that on one Sabbath Jesus' disciples picked heads of grain as they were traveling through grainfields. According to the rabbis, this constituted reaping which was among the activities prohibited as working on the Sabbath. The Pharisees hold Jesus accountable for the disciples' alleged Sabbath breaking because he is their teacher.

2. Jesus does not address whether the Pharisees are correct in considering this action to be prohibited work. Rather, he assumes for purpose of the argument that picking heads of grain qualifies as work within the Sabbath regulation and indicates the disciples are exempt from the requirement because they are with him.

a. He suggests the situation is analogous to David's companions (and David) eating the consecrated bread in 1 Sam. 21:1-6. Though only the priests were allowed by the law to eat the old loaves from the table in the Tabernacle's Holy Place after they were replaced with fresh loaves each Sabbath (Lev. 24:5-9), David's companions did so in that instance without culpability. The lack of culpability is implied by the absence of any rebuke or punishment from God or negative assessment in the text. It is also evident in Matthew's account where Jesus adds in Mat. 12:5 that priests working in the Temple on the Sabbath are innocent of violating the Sabbath prohibition of work. Jesus thus implies that David's status as the Lord's anointed (1 Sam. 16:1-13) and the divine mission associated with that anointing took precedence in God's sight over that specific requirement at that time.

b. He then says, "The Sabbath was made for mankind, not mankind for the Sabbath," emphasizing that God intended for the Sabbath regulations to have some play, some flexibility in unusual circumstances, so God would not be contradicting his word in allowing an exception in the case of Jesus' disciples. Jesus is the Messiah, the ultimate Anointed One, and he is on the mission of all missions. That is what Jesus means in the final statement, "So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." His status and mission can take precedence over Sabbath requirements. By not recognizing that fact, they have, as reported in Mat. 12:7, "condemned the innocent."

3. Much ink has been spilled over the reference to "Abiathar the high priest" in 2:26. The high priest who gave David the consecrated loaves was Abiathar's father, Ahimelech (1 Sam. 21:1-6, 22:20). This is alleged by critics to be a mistake, but it is not clear Jesus asserted Abiathar was the high priest when David ate the bread.

a. The key phrase, the one often translated "*when* Abiathar was high priest" or "*in the time of* Abiathar the high priest," is ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως (*epi Abiathar archiereōs*). That preposition normally refers to location, so though it can mean "in the days of" Abiathar the high priest, it also can mean "in the Scripture relating to" Abiathar the high priest, meaning in the portion of Scripture relating to him. For example, as John Wenham has pointed out, Mk. 12:26 says "have you not read in the book of Moses, ἐπὶ τοῦ βάλτου (*epi tou batou*)," and that last clause is routinely translated in the account or passage about the burning bush.

b. But why would Jesus refer to Ahimelech's giving the consecrated bread to David as something "in the Scripture relating *to Abiathar*"? It may well be that 1 Samuel 21 and 22, chapters dealing with Ahimelech and Abiathar, respectively, were combined in traditional Jewish readings of Scripture on the Sabbath. Abiathar may have served as the landmark for that section because, as Craig Blomberg notes in *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 244, "Abiathar is the more noteworthy of the two priests throughout the larger context of 1 Samuel, as the man who first brought the priesthood to David's side in his struggle against Saul."

I. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath in 3:1-6.

1. Jesus again enters the synagogue in Capernaum (implied) on the Sabbath, and Pharisees were watching for him to heal someone so they could accuse him of working on the Sabbath, as they previously accused his disciples. Jesus knows what they are up to, and he tells a man with a withered hand, a hand atrophied from some injury or disease, to stand up in the midst of everyone. Jesus here initiates the healing as a way of confronting the hypocrisy of his opponents. It is a dramatic scene filled with tension.

2. With the disabled man standing in full view, Jesus asks the Pharisees, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" His question assumes that the nature of the activity done on the Sabbath – whether it is doing good or doing harm, saving life or killing – is the key to its lawfulness rather than the physical action involved.

3. Posed that way, the Pharisees refuse to answer because that would force them to draw distinctions they do not want to defend in a public debate with Jesus. Specifically, they would be forced to argue that it was *lawful* (even required) to take action on the Sabbath that was necessary to *save* someone's life, that being a known position of theirs, but it was *not lawful* to take action necessary to *restore fullness* to someone's life.

a. That distinction is vulnerable because it relies on a subjective and dubious judgment that human life is valuable enough to justify lifesaving action on the Sabbath but not valuable enough to justify life-restoring action. The question the Pharisees fear is: If life is so valuable that action can be taken on the Sabbath to save it, on what basis do you insist it is not valuable enough that action can be taken on the Sabbath to restore it to fullness by healing?

b. Whether the healing could be delayed (Lk. 13:14) is beside the point. The question is not whether the healing could be done on another day but whether the Sabbath requirement *demand*s that it be delayed. It does not. As the value of human life takes precedence over the Sabbath regulation so that the life can be saved, it likewise takes precedence over the Sabbath regulation so that the life can be restored. Jesus initiated this healing to deny emphatically the Pharisees' twisted understanding of the Sabbath regulation.

4. Jesus is angry over their misrepresentation of God and grieved by their hardness of heart, their refusal to engage him and thus to open themselves to enlightenment. They have already chosen their side as an enemy of the Messiah. He then has the man stretch out his withered hand, and it is restored immediately.

5. The Pharisees go out and plot with the Herodians how to kill Jesus. The Herodians were supporters of the Herodian dynasty, which in Galilee at the time would mean they were partisans of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea. The Herodians and Pharisees are strange bedfellows in that the former was pro-Roman and the latter anti-Roman, but they found common cause in that both felt threatened by Jesus.

III. Jesus' Later Ministry in Galilee and Beyond (3:7 – 8:26)

A. Jesus withdraws from Capernaum to the Sea of Galilee, draws huge crowds in 3:7-12.

1. Matthew expressly attributes Jesus' move to the nearby Sea of Galilee to his awareness of the plotting to kill him (Mat. 12:15). Jesus drew huge crowds as people from various places flocked to him when they heard what he was doing. He healed many people, so hordes afflicted with diseases pressed around him to touch him. It was so intense, Jesus told the disciples to have a small boat ready so he could get in it to provide a buffer space to keep from being crushed by the crowd.

2. Whenever the demons who were possessing people saw Jesus, the demon(s) drove the person to fall before Jesus, immediately succumbing to his overwhelming presence, and acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God. As before, Jesus silences them to display his authority over them and because they were inappropriate heralds of his person and mission.

B. Jesus commissions the Apostles in 3:13-19.

1. Jesus went into the hills surrounding the Sea (*eis to oros* [lit. "to the mountain"] was an idiomatic way of saying "into the hills") and summoned those he wanted, and they came to him. He selected twelve to be with him, to be his closest disciples (the phrase "calling them apostles" is textually questionable), and to send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons.

2. Mark identifies the Apostles: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. They would be sent to preach the kingdom of God, the fact Jesus was ushering in that kingdom, and would exorcise demons as a sign of that kingdom's invasion, its breaking into history in the person and ministry of Jesus.

3. From this point, the term "disciples" in Mark refers almost exclusively to the Twelve. The fact he chose twelve apostles symbolizes the establishment of a new or reconstituted Israel, one that descends in lineages of faith from these twelve true Israelites (as physical Israel descended biologically from the twelve sons of Jacob), men who share the faith of Abraham as reflected in their allegiance to Jesus. All of this would not have been evident at the time, but the tie to the twelve tribes would have been unmistakable.

C. Jesus is accused of being possessed by Beelzebul and identifies his true family in 3:20-35.

1. Mark reports that Jesus entered an unidentified home in an unidentified location. A crowd gathered that was so dense and/or needy that Jesus and the disciples were not able to eat. When Jesus' family heard that he was foregoing the basic human need of eating, they assumed the pressure, stress, and intensity of his ministry had caused some kind of mental breakdown, so they planned to seize him and take him home to recuperate.

2. Mark interrupts this story of the family's intervention with the story of the scribes who came from Jerusalem. These scribes could not deny Jesus' mighty works, but given that he did not fit with their traditional notions of piety (hobnobbing with sinners, not fasting, and not observing the Sabbath in the way they thought he should), they conclude in 3:22 that a demon was empowering him. Indeed, his power was so extraordinary that they say he was possessed by Beelzebul, the chief of demons, and claim that that was the secret of his remarkable exorcisms. (A majority of scholars believe the name Beelzebul means "lord of the dwelling," with "dwelling" referring either to the house of demons or the house of a pagan god.)

a. In 3:23-26 Jesus shows the implausibility of that accusation by pointing out that such serious infighting within Satan's household would spell its doom. (In Mat. 12:27 and Lk. 11:19 he makes an additional point by exposing their double standard.)

b. In 3:27 he gives the correct explanation of his exorcisms. He says, "*But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.*" The point is that Jesus' exorcisms are the opposite of working for Satan. They are an unprecedented expression of power over him. Satan is the strong man Jesus has tied up so as to be able to take away his goods, that is, to free those he had taken over. In Mat. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20, Jesus expressly ties his extraordinary exercise of power over Satan to his ushering in of the kingdom of God. He says, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

3. Because these scribes, experts in the law, had made a considered and final judgment that Jesus was a vessel of Satan, to the point they declared it publicly in his presence, Jesus says in 3:29 that whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness; he is guilty of an eternal sin. In other words, whoever declares with finality that the Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered Christ is satanic has committed a sin that will never be forgiven because acceptance of Christ as divine is a prerequisite for all forgiveness.

4. In 3:31-35 Mark completes the report of Jesus' family coming to take him away because they think he is out of his mind. The fact that report was interrupted by the insertion of the Beelzebul accusation, a literary technique called intercalation of which Mark is fond, highlights the parallel in the episodes. "The skepticism and false conclusions about Jesus made by his family are parallel to the rejection and false claims about him made by the religious leaders of Israel. In both cases, Jesus' own people reject him" (Strauss, 166).

5. Jesus' mother and brothers (perhaps meaning siblings, which would include his sisters) pass word to him from outside, presumably because they cannot penetrate the crowd. When Jesus is informed they are outside asking for him, he asks, "*Who are my mother and my brothers?*" And then looking at the group seated around him, his disciples, he says, "*Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.*" There is a *spiritual* family that results not from biological descent but from a shared commitment to the will of God, which commitment is now expressed preeminently in faith in Jesus. Those who share that faith are his and each other's family.

D. Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God in parables in 4:1-34.

1. Jesus is again beside the Sea of Galilee. He sits in a boat just in the water with a very large crowd close to him on the shore. Mark says in 4:2 that Jesus was teaching them many things in parables, the first of which was the parable of the sower in 4:3-9.

Excursus on Parables

The English word "parable" was taken from the Greek word *parabolē*, but *parabolē*, like its Hebrew/Aramaic counterpart (*mashal/mathla*), has a much broader meaning in the Gospels than our word "parable." In addition to what we would call parables, *parabolē* covers sayings we would classify as proverbs, maxims, riddles, and even comparisons and contrasts. The parables of Jesus can perhaps best be defined as a word picture of a familiar but fictional or imaginary

circumstance that is given to communicate indirectly by analogy truth about the hearer's circumstance so as to motivate the hearer to act on his or her new insight. That is more detailed, and I think more adequate, than the popular definition "earthly stories with heavenly meanings."

Inherent in this definition is the notion that the purpose of parables is to communicate effectively. That Jesus intended to communicate by his parables is obvious from the fact he told them rather than remaining silent, and this intention is confirmed by his urging people to hear what he was saying through the parable (e.g., Mat. 13:9, 21:33). His questions to the disciples in Mk. 4:13 make clear his intention that they understand the parables, and Mat. 13:34-35 indicates that his speaking in parables had a revelatory function.

The question arises as to how that communicative purpose squares with Mk. 4:10-12 (and the parallels in Mat. 13:10-15 and Lk. 8:9-10). It states: ¹⁰ *And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.* ¹¹ *And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,* ¹² *so that 'they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.'"*

This text (and parallels) could be read to teach that Jesus told parables to obscure the truth so as to prevent some people from coming to understanding and salvation, but I think that is a misinterpretation. What Mk. 4:10-12 teaches is that Jesus speaks the truth about the kingdom in the disarming and defense-piercing form of parables so that the Isaianic hardness of the outsiders in failing to perceive and understand the truth, without which hardness they could turn and be forgiven, will be manifested clearly. By giving the unbelievers the maximum opportunity to engage, and thus ultimately to receive, the truth by presenting it indirectly in pictorial language, he put their hardness in the boldest relief possible. So he speaks to them in parables *because* they are hard hearted (Mat. 13:13) and *so that* they will manifest that hardness (Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10) as a testimony against themselves. The report of this stated purpose functions in the Gospels as encouragement for the readers to receive the message; to reject it is to show oneself to be among the hard hearted.

That parables are intended to communicate effectively does not mean that all parables are immediately or easily comprehended; they are not. The disciples found some of Jesus' parables puzzling and had to ask for an explanation (e.g., Mat. 13:36; Mk. 7:17; Lk. 8:9). The effectiveness of a parable sometimes depends on its meaning *not* being apparent on the surface. That is part of how it draws one in and gets past one's defenses. Parables communicate *effectively* in their ability to bring a message home, not in their ability to convey information directly or patently.

As Klyne Snodgrass puts it in *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 163: "Parables are not always obvious and self-explanatory, but even when enigmatic, their purpose is to enlighten. The very uncertainty of their reference is part of their appeal and often the means of their effectiveness, but they are not meant to obfuscate." He sees (p. 171) Mk. 4:22 as an apt summary of the purpose of parables: nothing is hidden in parables except that it should be brought into the open.

Robert Stein states in "The Genre of Parables" in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 38:

Through a parable Nathan was able to discuss the issue of David's murder of Uriah and his adultery with Uriah's wife, for the reality part of the parable was only recognized after the parable had been told and explained. How far would Nathan have gotten if he had said to David: "O King, I would like to talk to you about your adultery with Bathsheba and your murder of Uriah?" The nature of a parable, however, enabled the prophet to speak to David about both his adultery and his murder. For disarmed by the innocuous nature of the parable, David was open to judge honestly the issue at hand.

a. In 4:13 Jesus asks if they understand the parable of the sower. He then gives this explanation to his disciples in 4:14-20. The focus of the parable is the receptivity and conditions of the soils that receive the word, so much so that some refer to it as the parable of the soils. It serves as a warning to those hearing the good news of the kingdom not to be like those portrayed by the first three soils. Simply being exposed to the word is not enough. One must receive it as good soil, meaning one must respond to it in repentance and with perseverance. Klyne Snodgrass states (p. 170):

The parable is a description of various responses to hearing God's word and surely depicts the responses Jesus encountered in his own ministry. . . . The parable warns against superficial hearing, but it also anticipates real and productive hearing. Real hearing is hearing that leads to obedience, and we should not forget that the Hebrew verb for hearing (*šama* ') is often translated in English as "obey."

b. C. F. D. Moule states in his commentary on Mark (quoted in Walter W. Wessel, "Mark" in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984] 8:651):

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

2. Jesus gives the parable (or analogy) of the lamp on a stand in 4:21-23.

a. The lamp is not brought (or does not come) to have its purpose of providing illumination negated by concealment. Rather, it is brought to have that purpose fulfilled by being placed on a stand. And the reason its purpose is fulfilled rather than negated is that things are hidden or concealed in order to be revealed or illuminated. Hiding or concealing is different from discarding. One who hides or conceals something does so with the intent to retrieve it later and thus does so with the intent to make that thing manifest at some future point, to reveal or illuminate it at a chosen time. Truths were hidden or concealed by God ultimately to

be revealed by the light of his word, the message of the kingdom of God, that Jesus is proclaiming, placing on a stand.

b. In Mat. 5:15 Jesus uses the same imagery of people putting a lamp on a stand instead of under a basket, but his purpose is different. There he is speaking of the need for Christians to live openly righteous lives that others may see our good works and give glory to God (v. 16).

c. In 4:23 (also 4:9) he calls those who have "ears to hear," those who are sufficiently open to the truth to consider it fairly, to exercise that hearing capacity diligently. They need to "hear" the message in the sense of come to accept it, internalize it as the truth.

3. Jesus gives the parable (or analogy) of the measure in 4:24-25.

a. Jesus elaborates on the command that they "hear" him, that they put effort into that process so that they receive the message. He commands them to pay attention and encourages them to do so with a proverb: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.

b. The proverb essentially means, "You get back what you give." Strauss comments (p. 196): "Those who take the time and energy to hear and respond to Jesus' kingdom teaching will receive back their investment, and even more."

c. The "even more" is fleshed out in v. 25. It refers to the reception of divine revelation. Strauss states (p. 197):

Those who hear and respond to the message of the kingdom of God will receive even greater revelation, while those who reject what they have heard will be blinded even further. The sayings thus parallel Jesus' explanation for why he teaches in parables in 4:11-12. To those who are responsive to Jesus' kingdom teaching, the parables provide even greater spiritual insight. But for the hard-hearted "outsiders" who reject the message, they will "look and look but not perceive, and hear and hear but not understand" (4:12). Their spiritual blindness will only increase.

4. Jesus tells the parable of the growing seed in 4:26-29.

a. Jesus' teaching about the arrival of the kingdom of God raised questions. People saw in Jesus and his ministry something new, exciting, and powerful, but there was a disconnect between what they saw, as great as it was, and the glorious state for which they longed. Given their understanding that the arrival of the kingdom would mean the end of the old, sin-marred age, they questioned how Jesus could speak of the kingdom's presence when they were surrounded by hallmarks of the old age: sin, fragmentation, suffering, sorrow, and death.

b. One of the parables in which Jesus addresses this problem is the parable of the growing seed, which occurs only in Mk. 4:26-29. He says (ESV): "*The kingdom of God is*

as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

c. The kingdom of God is analogous to the entire scene narrated by the parable. In the parable, there is an initial sowing of seed that without any visible cause (i.e., by the hand of God) ultimately culminates in the blessing of a crop of grain ripe for harvest; it culminates in an expression of the seed that looks quite different from its initial state, the newly-sown field. The kingdom of God is like that in that the kingdom that is inaugurated through the complex of Christ's ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Spirit will without any visible cause ultimately culminate in the blessing of the consummated kingdom, an expression of the inaugurated kingdom that looks quite different from its initial state.

d. C. E. B. Cranfield summarizes the point of the parable this way in *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 168, "As seedtime is followed in due time by harvest, so will the present hiddenness and ambiguousness of the kingdom of God be succeeded by its glorious manifestation."

e. In Snodgrass's words (2008, 189):

Jesus ministry has inaugurated a sequence of action leading to the fullness of God's kingdom just as surely as sowing sets in play a spontaneous process leading to harvest. Even if hidden (cf. 4:22) and unrecognized, the kingdom is present and will be fully revealed in God's time. The point is not merely that the kingdom is coming, for most Jews would assume that. The parable asserts that the kingdom process is already under way with Jesus' teaching and activity and that the glorious revelation of the kingdom has its beginning in, and is directly tied to, what he is doing.

f. You see, the kingdom's coming is more complex than the expectation that political subjugation, evil, and want would disappear as soon as it arrived. Snodgrass comments (2008, 188), "From the parable people would have to expand their understanding of the kingdom to allow for its not being so obvious and for some passing of time before it was fully in effect." He adds (p. 188-189):

Often overlooked is the importance of this parable for understanding Jesus' eschatological teaching. . . . [T]his parable . . . anticipates some length of time between Jesus' present and the end-time appearing of the kingdom. The kingdom involves the passing of time. No hint is given as to how long that time might be, but this parable should at least slow down any overemphasis on a soon appearing kingdom. This and other parables assume at least two stages of the kingdom, a time of sowing and growth and the time of harvest.

g. As it is God who in ways unknown to man produces the precious harvest from something as subtle and unobtrusive as a seeded field, so it is God who will in ways

unknown to man produce the new heaven and new earth from something as seemingly insignificant as the ministry of a Jewish carpenter in a backwater of the Roman Empire. Because this is God's work and not man's, we can be confident in its accomplishment. Snodgrass states (2008, 189), "The parable then is optimistic; in spite of appearances people may be confident that what has begun with Jesus will lead to the full realization of the kingdom. Although they are not mentioned in the text, patience and encouragement are results flowing from this parable."

h. With many commentators, I do not believe the reference to growth in the parable is intended to teach that the inaugurated kingdom gradually transforms over time into the consummated kingdom, that this world gradually morphs into the perfect existence where there is ultimate fellowship with God and man and no death, mourning, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:1-4).

(1) It is clear from Jesus' teaching (including some discussed below) and other teaching in the New Testament that the final judgment, the expulsion of evil, the resurrection, and the transformation of creation will occur in conjunction with Jesus' second coming. His return will effect the consummation, which will be a radical change, the "heavenization" of creation, brought about miraculously by the power of God. Snodgrass remarks (2008, 226), "The point is frequently made that the kingdom does not grow, and in one sense this claim is justified. If the kingdom is defined as God coming to be king in fulfillment of the OT promises, growth is obviously not pertinent. The kingdom – God's coming – needs no growth."

(2) I think the parable (and others) uses growth, which is a *gradual*, drastic transformation *over* a period of time, because there was nothing in their common experience, which is the currency of parables, exhibiting a *sudden* (miraculous), drastic transformation *after* a period of time. The point is the God-created contrast between the beginning and the end, not the process by which God brought about the contrast. As Beasley-Murray states (p. 123) regarding the similar parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (see below), "Most scholars agree that the stress in the parables falls on the beginning and the end of the operation of the kingdom and that the *process* that lies in between is ignored." Charles H. H. Scobie likewise comments in *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 140:

The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven . . . do *not* speak of the gradual growth of the kingdom, and still less of the triumphant progress of the church in history. They are parables not of growth, but of *contrast*, for they contrast the seeming insignificance of the kingdom at work in Jesus' ministry with its *future* coming in power and glory (cf. Jeremias 1963: 146-149). Similarly, in the parable of the seed growing secretly (Mark 4:26-29), the emphasis is not on growth but on the fact that "with the same certainty as the harvest comes for the husbandman after his long waiting," so God will "bring in the Last Judgment and the Kingdom" (Jeremias, 151-52).

(3) On the other hand, "natural" growth does have something in common with a sudden miraculous transformation in that both are mysterious, God-given

transformations. So perhaps the reference to growth functions analogically to that extent. Larry Hurtado states in *Mark*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 77: "The reference to the stages of growth (the stalk . . . the head . . . the full kernel in the head) does not refer to stages of church growth but simply elaborates the wonder of the mysterious, God-given result of the sower's work."

(4) Another possibility is that the inaugurated kingdom "grows" in the sense its presence achieves over time God's unknown purposes, the fulfillment of which brings the consummation. In that view, the growth of the kingdom is not some kind of gradual transformation into the consummated state but the accomplishment by the inaugurated kingdom of purposes related to God's hidden timing of the consummation.

5. Jesus makes the same point in the parable of the mustard seed in 4:30-32.

a. The mustard seed was proverbial for its smallness and was the smallest of all the seeds that were sown by Palestinian gardeners. The plant grows to a height of ten feet or more, which explains the nontechnical reference to it as a "tree" in Matthew and Luke.

b. Snodgrass's explanation of the parable (2008, 225-226) is worth quoting at length:

Nearly all agree that this similitude addresses the implicit question about the unimpressive and unexpected nature of the kingdom Jesus claimed was already present. . . . Was not the kingdom supposed to be a mighty display of God's defeat of evil and the removal of nations afflicting Israel? Jesus' miracles are nice, but where is the rest of the story? Such questions would have gone through the mind of many of Jesus' hearers, whether friend or foe. The Mustard Seed similitude urges, possibly warns, that no one should be put off by what appears unimpressive. Like the tiny mustard seed which grows to a large plant, so the kingdom is present, even if hidden, unnoticed, or ignored, and its full revelation with its benefits will come.

. . . The point is that what one sees with Jesus will lead to what one hopes for in the kingdom. The focus is on the *organic unity* between Jesus' present ministry in Israel and the coming kingdom of God. The end, the end that everyone knows and longs for, is already in the beginning, the beginning inaugurated by Jesus and now at work. What is at stake with this similitude is a restructuring of Jewish expectation. The kingdom, which has already begun with Jesus, does not come with a glorious bang and the defeat of Rome; rather, it comes unexpectedly, almost unnoticed. But all that is necessary is already there, and the end is present in the beginning. The focus on the birds dwelling in the branches or shade of the tree should not be lost, regardless of the origin of the idea. In the end the greatness and benefit of the kingdom will be a pleasant and wonderful reality.

c. Arland Hultgren similarly states in *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 396-397:

The parable would most likely have been told in response to the question, How could the ministry of Jesus and his disciples have anything to do with the kingdom? The glorious kingdom of Israel's expectation has not arrived. The preaching and healing ministry of Jesus hardly seems significant enough as the dawn of a new age. The response to that charge is that one should look to the mustard seed. In spite of its small size, a great plant grows from it.

d. Donald Hagner in "Matthew's Parables of the Kingdom" in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 114, summarizes the point of the parable (in Matthew) this way:

The point of the parable is simply the miracle of nature symbolized by a mustard seed, which develops from the smallest of beginnings to an astonishing fullness. In the same way, the kingdom has begun inconspicuously. Yet *it has begun!* And in the end its greatness, when compared to its size at its beginning, will provide as amazing a contrast as that between a mustard seed and a full-grown mustard plant.

e. Larry Hurtado states in *Mark*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 77:

The point of the parable is the *contrast* between the insignificant mustard seed and the fully grown plant that it produces, not the *process* involved. So, the lesson is not that the kingdom of God comes by quiet, prolonged growth, but rather that, though many might think the manifestation of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry insignificant, they would be proven wrong in the day of its full appearance.

6. Mark comments on Jesus' teaching in parables in 4:33-34. Jesus spoke "the word" about the kingdom of God to the people "as they were able to hear it," referring to the fact that some could not accept the message even when presented in parables because they were hard-hearted. He notes Jesus regularly or commonly employed parables (in the broad sense), he was "always" using them, and would privately explain to his disciples the fullness of that teaching.

E. Jesus calms the storm in 4:35-41.

1. As evening fell that day, after an extended time of teaching from the boat, Jesus told his disciples to go over to another part of the lake. So they shoved off right from there with Jesus still in the boat, and some other boats followed along. As can happen in the Sea of Galilee, which is in a kind of bowl, a great storm suddenly arose, and waves were breaking into the boat. The boat was filling with water, and the disciples were afraid they all were going to die. And in the midst of this ferocious storm, Jesus is sleeping in the back of the boat.

2. This situation echoes that in Jonah 1:3-6. You will recall that Jonah was aboard a ship that was facing a storm so violent that it threatened to break the ship apart. The sailors were terrified, and each cried out to his god, but Jonah had gone down to the inner part of the ship and was sleeping. The captain came to him in v. 6 and said, "What do you mean, you

sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."

3. In this case, the disciples awaken Jesus and ask, "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" The import of that question is like that of the captain in the Book of Jonah. They are asking why he is sleeping instead of trying to help, specifically why he is not calling out to God for protection. They certainly did not think he was able to command the storm by his own power, as they are frightened when he does so.

4. Jesus commands the wind to be quiet and the waves to be still, and they obey immediately, leaving a state of great calm. What a sudden contrast! This was such an amazing exercise of power that it frightened the apostles. This kind of power in a human being would indeed be frightening if he was sinful like the rest of us, and at this point the disciples are not clear just how different Jesus really is.

5. Having worked the jaw-dropping miracle, Jesus then asks the disciples, "Why are you so afraid (cowardly)? Have you still no faith?" The implication is that they would not be fearful of perishing if they believed he was the ultimate Anointed One, the Messiah, who is on the ultimate divine mission. If they believed that, they would be confident that nothing, no storm or anything else, could thwart that mission, *whether he was asleep or awake*; he does not become vulnerable when he sleeps. In other words, they would be confident that neither Jesus nor they, those he chose as his coworkers for the mission, would die prematurely, would die short of fulfilling their purpose in God's work.

F. Jesus casts out demons from Legion in the country of the Gerasenes in 5:1-20.

1. After arriving at the "country of the Gerasenes," which refers to Gentile territory somewhere on the eastern side of the sea (there are textual and geographical issues regarding the location), Jesus is met immediately by a demon-possessed man who lived among the tombs, probably meaning cave tombs, which contact with the dead would make the man ritually unclean (Num. 19:16-18).

2. This man at one time could be bound with shackles and chains, which had been done often presumably to prevent him from harming others or himself. But even when he was subject to being bound, he still was strong enough eventually to break his restraints so that he needed to be restrained again. Now, however, no one had the strength to subdue him. Perhaps his physical strength grew as he was possessed by more and more demons.

3. We see in this pitiful man Satan's hatred of human beings, what he intends for them when he has full control over them. Satan gilds his appeals with false promises of fulfillment and satisfaction, but his true intent is to drive one to emptiness, despair, and self-inflicted harm. Thus the demoniac wanders among the tombs and hills night and day crying out and cutting himself.

4. When he sees Jesus, he runs up to him, but it is not clear whether it is the man running to Jesus in hope of obtaining help or the demon controlling the man with an intent to

drive Jesus away. The former seems unlikely because a Gentile presumably would be unaware of Jesus' identity and the man is so thoroughly controlled by the demons within him. I think it is more likely the demon uses the man to charge Jesus but then can only fall before him in submission.

5. Jesus commands the spirit to come out, which prompts the demon controlling the man to scream literally, "What to me and to you?" As I explained in 1:24, that is an idiom that means something like "What business do you have with me?" or more colloquially, "Leave me alone" (see NET). The demon refers to Jesus as the Son of the Most High God, so he recognizes his authority.

6. The demon, speaking for the multitude of demons, then implores Jesus *by God* not to torment him. He appeals to God presumably because God has decreed their torment at the final judgment, not before, and he is asking not to be tormented by Jesus "before the time" (Mat. 8:29) (see Strauss, 217-218). This plea not to be tormented probably corresponds to the plea in Lk. 8:31 not to be sent to "the abyss," a place of confinement for certain demons prior to the final judgment (called Tartarus in 2 Pet. 2:4). The abyss is not the demons' final place of torment (that is the lake of fire – Mat. 25:41), but it is a place of torment nonetheless, as suggested by the smoke (indicative of fire) that spews from it in Rev. 9:2.

7. Jesus asks the demoniac his name and is told it is "Legion" because he is indwelt by many demons. A legion was a Roman military unit of 6,000. That need not mean the man had 6,000 demons, but it certainly means he had many, as he says in v. 9.

8. The demon, through the man, begs Jesus with desperate insistence not to send them *out of the region*. Apparently these demons had some kind of attachment to this Gentile territory and would prefer to inhabit pigs in that region rather than be banished to wandering elsewhere (see, Mat. 12:43-45). Jesus grants their request, and as this horde of demons leaves the man and enters the pigs, the herd of about 2,000 pigs rushes into the sea and drowns.

a. The pigs' freaking out and rushing into the sea serves as objective confirmation of the exorcism and its magnitude. Jesus is on a mission to save mankind eternally, and he is uniquely suited to assess the contribution that the pigs' destruction makes to that effort. As Strauss notes (p. 219), "The losses must be seen as casualties of the war being waged between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan." If God can call Job to suffer as he did for his purposes and for the man in John 9 to be born blind that God might be glorified in his healing, the life of some animals and the wealth of a man certainly can be taken in his service.

b. Mark does not state what happened to the demons when their pig-hosts drowned. Perhaps one is to think they were thereafter confined to Tartarus, like those in 2 Pet. 2:4, but at the very least they were left in the state they had hoped to avoid by asking to be sent into the pigs. Jesus allowed the demons to go into the pigs not to benefit them but to demonstrate objectively the magnitude of his exorcising power, knowing they would be left with neither pig-hosts nor permission to remain in the territory. So the Lord outwitted them, using their request to serve his purpose and leaving them with no advantage if not worse off.

9. The pig herders ran away, and when they reported what had happened, people went out to see for themselves. When they saw the formerly demon-possessed man sitting clothed and in his right mind, they were afraid, as the disciples had been when Jesus calmed the storm in 4:41. They were afraid because this kind of power in the hands of a sinful human being, which they assumed Jesus to be, would be dangerous. When some eyewitnesses described for them just what had happened, they begged Jesus to leave. They preferred the peace of their routine lives to the uncertainty and disruption that Jesus represented.

10. In contrast, the healed demoniac begs to go with Jesus. He had tasted the transforming power of the invading kingdom of God, and he wanted to stay with the Lord. For an unexplained reason, Jesus refuses his request and instructs the man to go home and tell his own people what the Lord did for him. Perhaps Jesus did not command this man to keep quiet about his healing because he was in Gentile territory and thus Jesus did not have to worry about managing Messianic expectations as he did in Judah and Galilee.

11. The healed man left and proclaimed in the Gentile area called the Decapolis, a confederation of ten cities, what Jesus had done for him. The people were amazed.

G. Jesus heals Jairus's daughter and the woman with bleeding in 5:21-43.

1. Matthew 9:18 ties the occurrence of these events to the time of Jesus' teaching about fasting ("While he was saying this"), which teaching Mark reports in 2:18-22, but Mk. 5:22 says simply that one of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up; the beginning *kai* provides no express chronological link. So though Mark and Luke report Jairus's approach after Jesus' return from the region of the Gerasenes (after he crossed again in the boat to the other side – v. 21), they do not specify that the report is chronological, and Matthew indicates it was not.

2. In Mk. 5:23 (and Lk. 8:42), Jairus, a synagogue ruler or leader, falls before Jesus and tells him his young daughter, who we learn in v. 42 is twelve years old, *is dying*. In Mat. 9:18, however, Jairus tells Jesus his daughter *now has died*. Skeptics, of course, have long claimed this as a contradiction in the Bible, but that is not a necessary conclusion.

a. I suspect Jairus's little girl was right at death's door when he left in desperation in search of Jesus. When he finds the Lord, he tells him that his daughter "is dying" *or* "now has died" in the time since he left her, but whatever her current state, if Jesus would touch her she would live.

(1) It turns out that his daughter had in fact died, as is reported to Jairus when they were on the way to his house, so when Matthew condenses the story he includes only Jairus's statement that his daughter now has died. That allows him to omit the material about people from Jairus's house confirming that she was dead.

(2) Mark and Luke do not include Jairus's statement "or now has died" because either they or their source considered it better storytelling to omit it; it makes the

subsequent announcement of her death more dramatic. In any event, there is no necessary contradiction.

b. At least one major English version (CSB) translates the relevant phrase in Mat. 9:18 as "is near death" rather than "now has died." If that is correct, then there is not even a surface conflict in the various accounts.

3. As Jesus is heading to Jairus's house, large crowds are mobbing him. A woman was present who for twelve years had suffered from a bleeding disorder, probably menstrual in nature. She went to all the doctors she could find and spent all that she had in pursuit of a medical cure, but she had only gotten worse. Her bleeding not only threatened her health but also rendered her ritually unclean which limited her participation in Israel's religious life (e.g., Lev. 15:19-31). Having heard the reports of Jesus' healings, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment because she was thinking (saying to herself) that if she just touched his clothes she would be healed. In other words, she was motivated to struggle through the mob because of her conviction that a mere touch from Jesus would be sufficient to remedy her hopeless situation.

4. She may have been trying to be healed secretly because she was embarrassed by her condition or afraid that others would rebuke her for daring to touch Jesus in an unclean state or prevent her from doing so. What we know is that she was healed immediately upon touching Jesus' garment, and she knew it. And Jesus, with countless people in the crowd contacting him, perceived that in her case healing power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

a. The disciples, like everyone else, are oblivious to what has happened and do not understand that Jesus is asking specifically about the one who touched him so as to be healed. In terms of touching him generally, the answer is "Everybody!"

b. I am not convinced Jesus did not know who touched his clothes. Mark 5:32 says literally that he looked around to see *the woman* having done this. He wanted a visual on her in the crowd, not to learn *who* had touched him (although "the woman" could reflect Mark's voice as the narrator rather than Jesus' knowledge). He would not let her receive the healing mercy of God and then slip off without giving God the glory.

5. The woman comes forward with fear and trembling because she knew what had happened to her. In other words, she is awestruck by the divine power and authority resident in Jesus. She falls before him and tells him the whole truth, which includes bearing witness to the great miracle done by the Lord.

6. Jesus speaks tenderly to her (Daughter) and tells her that her faith, meaning her trust in his authority and power to heal, had saved (healed) her in that God had responded graciously to her faith with healing. It is worth noting in terms of debates about baptism and salvation that she was not healed until she expressed her faith in touching Jesus' clothes but that did not nullify the truth that her healing had been received by faith. That is, the faith-motivated

"work" of touching Jesus' garment did not mean her healing was received by works rather than by faith.

7. Jesus tells her to go in peace, to depart as one who by God's mercy is free from all the distress and alienation she had endured during her prolonged illness. He also tells her to be healed of her affliction, which is "a word of assurance, ratifying what has already taken place and guaranteeing that her healing is permanent" (Stein, 271, citing Donahue and Harrington).

8. At that time, some people arrived from Jairus's house with the news that his daughter had in fact died. Though Jairus understood his daughter might already have been dead by the time he reached Jesus, and believed intellectually that Jesus still could heal her even if that were the case, the message that she was in fact dead put that belief to the test. It went from hypothetical to actual. That is why Jesus told him when that news was delivered not to be afraid but to believe. Jesus has the power in his earthly ministry even to resuscitate the dead to illustrate the power he will exercise for all his people when he comes again and raises them to resurrection life.

9. Jesus, with only Peter, James, and John, arrives at Jairus's house where people are weeping and wailing over the dead girl. Jesus tells them she is only sleeping, expressing his intention of raising her from the dead, but they laughed at the idea. Jesus then takes the parents and his disciples to the dead girl's room, takes her by the hand, and says to her, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." She got right up and began walking, which blew everybody's mind. Mark says they were overcome with amazement.

10. Jesus told them not to tell what had happened – again, probably managing his life and ministry in light of Jewish expectations about the Messiah – and to give the girl something to eat. That demonstrates the completeness of her recovery and also speaks of the Lord's tender concern for her.

H. Jesus is rejected at Nazareth in 6:1-6a.

1. Jesus goes with his disciples to his hometown, the small Galilean village of Nazareth (see 1:9, 24). He teaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and the people are amazed. They cannot understand where he got the wisdom with which he spoke or how he was able to do such mighty works. But the fact he was a local boy, one they knew as the carpenter and whose family was well known in the village, caused them to "take offense" at him in the sense they rejected his message and authority. Strauss states (p. 243), "They are offended (and perhaps jealous) that this young upstart is acting with greater authority than his family background and social status warrant."

2. That is why Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." It is difficult for those who know a person well to accept that the person can be so much more special than they are. This is similar in meaning to our English proverb, "familiarity breeds contempt."

3. Because of their lack of faith, Jesus' miracles were limited "only" to healing a few sick people. In other words, he chose in Nazareth to perform miracles in response to faith, as he had done with the woman afflicted with bleeding (5:34) and Jairus's daughter (5:36), and because there was so little faith in that village, there were few miracles. Jesus was amazed at their refusal to believe, which obstinance foreshadows the coming cross.

I. Jesus sends out the twelve disciples in 6:6b-13.

1. Jesus traveled about the villages teaching and sent out the Twelve in pairs, giving them authority over demons, unclean spirits. Their work included preaching and healing (v. 12-13), but Mark summarizes it by focusing on the exorcising power probably because that paints most starkly the spiritual war that is raging with Jesus' inaugurating the kingdom of God.

2. Jesus charged the disciples to carry nothing with them on the journey except their normal staff. They were not to carry bread, a traveler's bag of items, or money in their belts. They were to go with only the clothes they wore (not carried): their sandals and one tunic. Instead of packing in anticipation of a possible lack, they were, at this time, to trust that God would meet their needs through the hospitality of people.

3. Matthew (10:9-10) and Luke (9:3-4) express the same point but do so in a way that has led to the charge that the accounts are contradictory. But they need not be read that way.

a. As Matthew conveys Jesus' meaning, Jesus instructed the disciples not to *acquire* things for the journey, not to gather items in preparation for traveling but rather to go as they were. This means they were not to carry money, a traveler's bag, or an *extra* tunic (forbids two tunics), pair of sandals (note in Lk. 10:4 he prohibits *carrying* sandals in distinction to *wearing* them), or staff. They were to go with only the clothes they wore (sandals and tunic) and the staff they already possessed (not acquired for the journey). As the extra tunic and sandals could be bartered for food or shelter in a pinch, presumably the same is true of an extra staff. In Gen. 38:18 Judah's staff seems to have some economic value (in addition to being a means of identification). That these travel items functioned as a potential means of self-provision, hedges against a lack of hospitality, is supported by the explanation in Mat. 10:10 for their prohibition: *for the laborer deserves his wages* (i.e., there is no need to supply their own).

b. Luke conveys Jesus' meaning by saying Jesus told them to take nothing for the journey, meaning no travel-specific item designed to protect against not being provided for through hospitality. He specifies no staff (meaning no *extra* staff, no staff acquired for the journey), nor bag, nor bread, nor money and says they are not to have two tunics (only the one they wear).

c. Note that in Lk.22:35-38 Jesus draws a contrast between how things were when he previously sent them out (9:2-3; 10:3-4) and how things will be in times to come, when the world's hostility is focused on him in fulfillment of Scripture. Formerly, the disciples could depend on a warm welcome from a sufficient number of people that there was no need for them to take what was necessary to provide for themselves. Then, however, they will no longer

be able to depend on that. Instead they will face hostility and persecution, which means they must be prepared to meet their own needs.

4. Jesus commands them to remain in the home that first receives them. This is probably a safeguard against the temptation to accept progressively better accommodations from wealthier people. That would insult the poorer man, breed jealousy and disunity among those receptive to the gospel, and fuel a love for money among the disciples.

5. If a place will not receive them, will not extend to them common hospitality, or listen to their message, Jesus tells them to disassociate from them (depicted in shaking the dust off their feet) and leave them to suffer the consequences of their rejection. There is no obligation for them to search for some new angle or approach that might persuade the rejecters, as though the missionaries were responsible for the rejection. Their role is to proclaim or announce the work of God that is underway in Jesus; they are not guarantors of a positive response.

6. They preached that the people should repent, which Mark probably intends to be understood as a shorthand for Jesus' proclamation that Mark reported in 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God is at hand*; repent and believe in the gospel." Indeed, Luke makes clear in 9:6 that at this time the disciples were "preaching the gospel," which as Jesus makes clear in Mk. 1:15 was the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of God.

a. Notice that Christ's death and resurrection had not yet occurred nor had the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and yet they were preaching the gospel, announcing some great and epochal news. That news, as I have said, was that God at long last was acting to assert his sovereignty over creation in such a way as to heal its broken and sin-sick state, to implement his final vision for a reality in which there will be no more sin, sickness, death, mourning, crying, or pain.

b. There was much more to be revealed about the way God was going to bring that about, but that did not detract from the greatness of the news that he now was working in a unique and distinctive way toward that end, a way in which Jesus was intimately involved. That truth demanded that people repent, turn from the way they had been thinking and going and get on board with God's work in Jesus. The disciples ultimately will be brought to a realization of Jesus' identity and glory and how he was/is the turning point of all history.

7. The power of the invading kingdom of God, this expression of divine sovereignty over creation, is represented and illustrated in the power given to the disciples by Jesus to drive out demons and heal sicknesses. Interestingly, these healings are accompanied by anointing with oil, which presumably functions as a sign or symbol that the sick person is being set apart for God's special attention and care or as an expression of faith that the sick person will be returned to normal. You will recall that the elders in Jas. 5:14-15 who are called to pray over the seriously ill were told to anoint the person with oil in the name of the Lord.

[J. The Death of John the Baptist is reported in 6:14-29.](#)

1. The mission of the Twelve increased public awareness of Jesus and his activities, and those reports came to the attention of Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, who was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. The reference to him as "king" was a popular designation rather than an official title. This is the Herod before whom Jesus appears in Lk. 23:7-12.

2. Mark reports that some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. They most likely meant that the spirit of John was in some sense at work in Jesus. After all, Jesus and John were contemporaries, so it was well known that Jesus was alive long before John died. This is confirmed by the fact Herod showed no interest in locating John's body, which would have been a natural step if he were thinking of a literal rising from the dead. The people apparently assumed that such a return of John's spirit could account for the miraculous powers at work in Jesus.

3. Others thought Jesus was the prophet Elijah, whom many Jews expected to return as a herald of the coming end (Mal. 3:1, 4:5-6). Of course, John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come (Mat. 11:14, 17:10-12) in that he was the herald of Jesus who ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk. 1:17). And still others speculated that Jesus was a prophet like one of the prophets of long ago. Herod thinks (or fears) it is option 1: Jesus is in some way John the Baptist whom he had beheaded.

4. Mark presents the death of John the Baptist as a flashback.

a. Herod Antipas arrested John because John was telling him his marriage to Herodias, who formerly was the wife of Herod Antipas's brother Philip, was contrary to God's law. That law forbid a man from marrying his brother's (former) wife (Lev. 18:16, 20:21), except in the case of levirate marriage where the brother died without children (Deut. 25:5-10). According to Mat. 14:3-5, Herod wanted to kill John but settled for arresting him because he feared the people who considered him a prophet. Presumably his subsequent interaction with John caused him to recognize and appreciate that John was someone special.

b. Mark says Herodias resented John and wanted to kill him, but Herod now was afraid of him, knowing he was a righteous and holy man, and thus kept Herodias from realizing her intentions. Indeed, Herod liked listening to John, even though he was baffled by the things John said.

c. Herodias got her opportunity at Herod's birthday party when her daughter pleased Herod so much with her dance that he told her, no doubt under the influence of alcohol, that he would give her whatever she wanted up to half of his kingdom. This was a hyperbolic way of saying she could make a big request of him and he would grant it, but there no doubt was a socially understood limitation on the request. After consulting with her mother, she immediately, meaning the guests were still present, asked Herod for John's head on a platter.

d. Though distressed by the request, Herod chose to have the righteous John beheaded rather than lose face with his guests. That is quite a contrast to the moral courage

of John, the man he murdered. When John's disciples learned of it, they took his body and laid it in a tomb, giving him an honorable burial.

K. Jesus feeds the five thousand in 6:30-44.

1. The apostles return and report to Jesus the exorcisms and healings they had done and the teaching they had given. According to Lk 9:10-11, they then went into (or toward) the town of Bethsaida, which probably was near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee just east of the Jordan River. The crowds that followed them there (Lk. 9:11) made it impossible for them even to eat (Mk. 6:31), and realizing that the disciples needed some rest and recuperation from their mission, Jesus decided to sail with them down the coast to a sparsely inhabited region on the northeast of the Sea. (Luke omits this boat journey, but it is clear from Lk. 9:12 that they are no longer in or near Bethsaida.) The crowds, however, saw them leaving and ran to where they were heading ahead of them.

2. When they landed and Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. In other words, these Israelites were not being adequately directed and protected by Israel's leaders and therefore were vulnerable to being scattered and devoured. Jesus, of course, is the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20), and thus he expresses his compassion on them *by teaching them* many things, no doubt relating to the kingdom of God.

3. Late in the day, the disciples urged Jesus to send the crowd away so they could go buy something to eat in villages in the surrounding countryside.

a. Jesus' answer, "You give them something to eat" (6:37), is not instruction for them to perform a miracle (they certainly did not understand it that way). Rather, the fact they think the crowd must be sent away indicates a lack of appreciation on their part of the Lord's power. "You give them something to eat" seems clearly to be an allusion to 2 Ki. 4:42-44 where the prophet Elisha told his servant to feed 100 men with twenty loaves of barley and some fresh ears of grain. The servant was baffled how so many could be expected to eat so little, and Elisha said "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" 2 Kings 4:44 says, *So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.* Jesus' direction was designed to bring that prior miracle to their minds.

b. The disciples miss the point, and complain that a "food run" for so many people would cost 200 denarii, over 6 months wages for a laborer. Surely Jesus was not expecting them to spring for that!

c. Jesus has the disciples confirm the limited amount of food available, only five loaves of bread (probably pita-sized flatbread about eight inches in diameter and an inch thick) and two fish (dried or smoked), and then tells the people to sit on the green grass in groups of hundreds and fifties. He says a blessing, probably meaning he praised God, breaks the bread, gives it to the disciples to set before the crowd, and divides the fish. The miracle is reported matter-of-factly: They all ate and were satisfied.

d. As in the account of Elisha, so much food was provided there were leftovers. This is all the more impressive given that the number of men who ate, not counting the women and children, was 5,000! Presumably the crowd was unaware of how the food had been provided. Otherwise, one would expect their amazement to be recorded by Mark.

L. Jesus walks on water in 6:45-52.

1. Jesus sent the disciples in the boat back to the region of Bethsaida, dismissed the crowd, and then went up on the mountain (hill) to pray. Reading Mark's account with those in Matthew 14 and John 6, it appears that Jesus instructed the disciples to *go ahead of him* to the region of Bethsaida, suggesting there was a plan for him to meet them there later. He then dismissed the crowd and withdrew again to the nearby hills by himself to pray. Commenting on Mark's account, Strauss theorizes (p. 311-312):

Jesus sent his disciples ahead of him to nearby Bethsaida, "while he dismissed the crowd" (ἕως αὐτὸς ἀπολύει τὸν ὄχλον). He planned to meet them there, but if he was delayed, they were to embark westward toward Capernaum and Gennesaret. This solution finds some support from Matthew's account, which says they were to go ahead of him "while [ἕως οὗ] he dismissed the crowd" (Matt 14:22). It would also explain why the disciples were still in the middle of the lake hours later (v. 48), i.e., they first went to Bethsaida and waited several hours for Jesus. Only later, when Jesus was delayed on the mountain, did they embark toward Gennesaret.

After sending off the disciples and "saying farewell" (ἀποταξάμενος) to the crowds, Jesus goes up the mountain to pray.

2. By the fall of darkness, Jesus still had not caught up with the disciples in the region of Bethsaida, so they, presumably pursuant to a prior arrangement, set sail toward Capernaum (Jn. 6:16-17). Around the fourth watch of the night (begins around 3 a.m.), in the midst of a storm, Jesus came out to them walking on the water. They had rowed several miles but were a considerable distance from land (Mat. 14:24) toward the middle of the lake (Mk. 6:47), presumably having been blown off course by the storm winds.

3. The phrase at the end of v. 48, "he was wanting to pass by them," is certainly curious given the implication of v. 48a that he was motivated to go out to them because they were having difficulty and given the statement in v. 48b that he went out to them. Why go out to them and then desire to pass by them? It is likely that "pass by them" is an allusion to the Old Testament, specifically Ex. 33:17–34:8, where God revealed his glory in "passing by" Moses (see also, 1 Ki. 19:10-12 with Elijah). In other words, Jesus came to them wanting to exhibit to them through the miracle of walking on the water the glory of God inherent in him.

4. When the disciples saw this unrecognized person approaching on the water, they were terrified because, knowing that bodies with mass sink in water, they believed it was a spirit of some kind. Jesus identified himself, told them not to be afraid, and got in the boat, and when he did so, the wind ceased!

5. The disciples were floored, and Mark says the reason was that they did not understand about the loaves. Despite that very recent astounding miracle, they still did not realize Jesus' true significance and power, the revelation of God in Jesus. Their hearts were hardened, not in the sense of being hostile to the Lord but in the sense of not being fully open to Jesus as the unique manifestation of God. They did not let the great miracle have its full impact in shaping their understanding of who Jesus is.

M. Jesus heals the sick in Gennesaret in 6:53-56.

1. After Jesus joined them in the boat, they proceeded to Gennesaret on the west coast of the Sea instead of their original destination of Bethsaida. Presumably their having been blown off course introduced a change of plan.

2. The people there recognized him immediately and spread the word, and he was followed everywhere by people bringing their sick to him and begging him to let them touch just the fringe of his garment. And so mighty is Jesus' healing power, a power that will be exercised fully and globally when the kingdom of God is consummated at his return, that everyone who touched his fringe was healed.

N. Pharisees and scribes challenge Jesus over his disciples eating with unwashed hands in 7:1-23.

1. Some Pharisees and experts in the law who came from Jerusalem (it is unclear if both or only the scribes came from there), the center of opposition to Jesus, saw some of the disciples eating food (lit. the loaves) with "unclean" hands, meaning they were not ritually washed. The Mosaic law required priests to wash their hands before entering the Tent of Meeting and offering sacrifices (Ex. 30:20-21, 40:12, 30-32), but a longstanding oral tradition had extended that requirement to all Israel before they ate. The Pharisees considered this "tradition of the elders" to be fully authoritative, even claiming it had originated with Moses, and the practice of hand washing before eating was widely observed by Jews in the first century.

2. Mark says literally in v. 3 that they do not eat unless they wash the hands with/by/to a fist. That meaning is unclear, which is why some translations say they wash their hands "in a special way" (NKJV) or "ritually" (CSB) or "thoroughly" (NRS) or "carefully" (NASU) or "properly" (ESV). He adds in v. 4 that when they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash (lit. immerse) themselves, presumably because in the marketplace it was easy to come into contact with ritually defiling people or things. (Note that the switch to the verb "immerse" may mean Mark is saying they would immerse themselves in a ritual pool [a *mikveh*] after coming from the marketplace.) Mark notes that they hold to other traditions regarding the washing of various objects such as cups, pitchers, copper utensils, and possibly dining couches (textual issue).

3. The Pharisees and scribes ask Jesus to defend the conduct of his disciples in breaking the tradition of the elders by eating with unwashed hands. Jesus gives two responses.

a. He says in vv. 6-8 that they are hypocrites to whom Isaiah's condemnation (Isa. 29:13) well applies. They offer God mere lip service while elevating their own traditions above the commands of God, points he develops in vv. 9-13.

b. In vv. 9-13 he rebukes them for rejecting God's commandment in order to observe their own tradition.

(1) Exhibit A is their rejecting of God's command to honor one's mother and father (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), which involves caring for their physical needs in their old age. Indeed, honoring one's parents is so important that failing to do so by slandering, reviling, or cursing them is subject to the death penalty.

(2) And yet, the scribes and Pharisees reject the obligation to care for aging parents by teaching that a man who pledges some of his wealth as "Corban," a gift devoted to God, is no longer allowed to use it to care for his parents even though the property remained at his disposal during his life. (Note that some rabbis argued for an exception to a Corban oath if it caused hardship for one's parents, but others argued the oath was inviolable. [Strauss, 302]. Jesus is addressing that latter view.) This essentially nullifies the command for the sake of their own tradition. Jesus adds that they do many things like this.

4. Having attacked their source of authority for objecting to eating without washing, the tradition of the elders, Jesus then addresses the question of ritual impurity in light of the kingdom of God that he is ushering in.

a. He says that eating unclean food does *not* defile a person, but rather one is defiled by evil that flows from one's heart. That is a change from the Mosaic law, which indicates that eating unclean food is defiling (e.g., Leviticus 11, 17). Jesus can say that only because of who he is and what he is doing.

b. With the new covenant that God establishes in conjunction with the coming of the kingdom, the Mosaic covenant is rendered obsolete or no longer operative (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15 – 4:7, 4:21-31; Heb. 7:11-22, 8:6-13). And not all the requirements of that prior, superseded covenant are re-expressed in the new covenant. On the contrary, as is made clear throughout the New Testament, the requirements of the Israelite cult, the ritual purity laws, the food laws, and things tied to Israel's nationhood are fulfilled in Jesus and in the "denationalizing" of God's people that results from his work. Indeed, Mark says plainly in v. 19 that Jesus declared all foods clean.

c. The things that are re-expressed and even deepened in the new covenant, the ethical requirements of the kingdom, are the kinds of things Jesus mentions to the disciples in v. 21: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and moral foolishness. These are relational matters rooted in the biblical concept of love, which is the center of Christian ethics.

O. Jesus casts out a demon from the Syrophenician woman's daughter in 7:24-30.

1. In Mk. 7:24 Jesus leaves Galilee and heads to the region of Tyre or the region of Tyre and Sidon. Some early manuscripts include Sidon in the verse, and the parallel in Mat. 15:21 refers to both Tyre and Sidon. The city of Tyre is in Phoenicia, about 35 miles northwest of Galilee on the Mediterranean coast, and Sidon is about 22 miles to the north of Tyre. The two cities often are mentioned together. In the centuries after kings David and Solomon, this region came to symbolize idolatry and paganism, and there was significant animosity between it and Israel in the first century.

2. It seems Jesus goes there seeking a break from the crowds, perhaps to devote more time to the disciples. This is suggested by the fact he did not want people to know where he was staying, but his reputation makes anonymity impossible. A Gentile woman, an ethnic Phoenician, who heard of his reputation as a healer and was aware of his presence in the area, falls at his feet begging him to cast out the demon that possessed her little girl. (Matthew calls her a Canaanite, but Mark describes her more specifically as a Syrophenician. This may be because Phoenicia was in the Roman governing province of Syria or because she was of mixed Syrian and Phoenician ancestry.)

3. Jesus tells her to let the children eat *first*, meaning to let Israel, God's children, be the first to receive the benefits of his kingdom-bringing ministry. This prioritization is in keeping with a proverb (so I suspect) that expressed the point "first things first": it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs (diminutive form), that is, to place the secondary (feeding dogs) ahead of the primary (feeding one's children). If this was indeed a proverb, citing it simply reinforces the point that the Jew comes first in God's plan; the personal edge is removed.

4. But the woman will not be deterred and thus manifests the kind of determined faith that the Lord elsewhere blessed. She responds in terms of the proverb, saying, "Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." The implication is that he is so great that the exorcism she is requesting is no more than a crumb of the power he possesses and the blessings he brings.

5. Because of that response, Jesus tells her that she may go; the demon has left her daughter. He accomplished it simply by willing it. And sure enough, she went home and found her daughter lying in bed and no longer possessed by a demon. This episode is another pointer to the fact the gospel, though given first to the Jew, ultimately will embrace all people.

P. Jesus heals a man who was deaf and speech-impaired in the Decapolis in 7:31-37.

1. Jesus went from the region of Tyre north to Sidon, for an undisclosed reason, and then to the Gentile area of the Decapolis on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Strauss states (p. 320), "The phrase 'in the midst of the borders' (ἐνὰ μέσον τῶν ὁρίων) is an idiom meaning 'within the region of.'" Jesus' interactions here presumably were with Gentiles.

2. Some people bring to Jesus a deaf and speech-impaired man and beg him to place his hands on him, which was a way of asking him to heal the man. It is noteworthy that in

all the Bible (LXX and NT) the word *μογιλάλος*, speak with difficulty, appears only here (7:32) and in Isa. 35:6, which the rabbis interpreted as a reference to the messianic age.

3. Jesus takes the man aside privately and performs a number of actions. He puts his fingers in the man's ears, spits (probably on his finger), touches the man's tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs, and says "Be opened."

a. Since Jesus can heal with a word or simply by willing it, we are puzzled by some of the actions he takes in association with this healing. We understand the praying, the sighing as a reflection of his emotional involvement in the prayer, and the command for the ears and mouth to be opened, but why the fingers in the ears, the spitting, and the touching of the tongue?

b. We are not told why Jesus performed these actions. The touching of the affected organs (ears and tongue) obviously symbolizes the healing he was about to perform, as does the use of saliva which was commonly viewed in the ancient world as having healing properties. The question is why he employed those symbols of healing in this case, similar to the anointing with oil the apostles performed in conjunction with some healings. We can only speculate, but perhaps he did so to produce precisely the impact he wanted given that man's or that group's particular expectations about miracle workers. He is playing "chess" at dimensions we cannot imagine, orchestrating the reaction to him throughout the region to reveal himself to those who have ears and to culminate in his death at the time prescribed by God. It is a complex calculation to say the least.

4. When Jesus said "Be opened," the man was able to hear and to speak clearly. He told them to tell no one, knowing (I believe) the effect that admonition would have and using it in his control of the public's perception and expectations of him as part of his orchestration of events. Mark reports the people were utterly astonished and said "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Q. Jesus feeds the four thousand in 8:1-10.

1. The phrase "in/during those days" most like refers to the previously mentioned visit to the Decapolis. If so, then the feeding of the four thousand occurs in a Gentile setting, which is how the majority of scholars understands it. As had happened with the feeding of the five thousand, a large crowd was again present in a remote area.

2. In this case, Jesus takes the initiative. He summons the disciples and explains he has compassion on the crowd because they had been present for three days, no doubt as Jesus was teaching, and have exhausted whatever food they were able to bring with them. He is concerned that at least some of them will collapse on the journey back to their homes unless they receive some food.

3. Even though the disciples already witnessed Jesus feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fish (6:30-44), they ask, "Where in this wilderness can anyone get enough bread to satisfy them?" You would hope they would realize that Jesus the Messiah could, but as

Mark noted in 6:52, they did not understand about the loaves because their hearts were "hardened," meaning they were not sufficiently open to Jesus as the unique manifestation of God. They still don't get it; they are spiritually dull.

4. Jesus has the crowd sit on the ground, takes the available seven loaves, gives thanks, breaks them, and gives them to the disciples to distribute, which they did. He then does essentially the same with the few fish available. So much food was provided that about four thousand people ate their fill and there were seven baskets full of leftovers. The word used here for "basket" (σπυρίς) is used in Acts 9:25 for the basket in which Paul was lowered down the wall of Damascus.

5. Jesus thereafter dismissed the crowd, got in the boat with the disciples, and went to the region of Dalmanutha. This is the only mention of this place in ancient literature, and we are not sure where it is. Matthew refers to the destination as the region of Magadan, but that is not much help because we are not sure where that place is either. Presumably these are related villages, twin villages if you will, or a village that had a dual name Magadan-Dalmanutha. Most would place it on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, but even that is not certain (e.g., Bauckham places it on the northeastern coast).

R. The Pharisees demand a sign from heaven in 8:11-13.

1. The Pharisees challenge Jesus seeking to discredit him by demanding some kind of "sign from heaven" (from God) that will establish irrefutably that he is God's agent. Never mind the public healings, exorcisms, and other miracles he has performed; their demand frames those as inadequate for the purpose. They say, in essence, provide something beyond all that, something that would be impossible to dispute or rationalize away. But there is no limit to what a hard heart will refuse to see.

2. Jesus sighs deeply in his spirit, reflecting his distress over his rejection by the Jewish leaders, those representatives of the chicks he longed to gather under his wings, and asks why "this generation" demands a sign, the very generation before which he has manifested unprecedented divine power. The phrase "this generation" here carries a pejorative sense, "recalling the sinful generation of the flood (Gen. 7:1) or the grumbling generation of Israelites in the wilderness (Deut 1:35; 32:5, 20; Ps 95:10-11)" (Strauss, 339). He tells them emphatically that no such sign will be given to them. He will not pander to their unbelief.

3. The parallel in Mat. 16:4 adds "except the sign of Jonah" (see also, Lk. 11:29). This is consistent with Mark's report that no sign would be given in that the sign of Jonah is not the kind of sign they were demanding, one that could not be denied, as demonstrated by the fact they denied it (whether it referred to the resurrection [Mat. 12:40] or to the preaching of repentance [Lk. 11:29-32]). According to Mark, Jesus denied emphatically that any sign *like that* would be given; Matthew includes Jesus' reference to a different kind of sign that would be given, a sign that, like the others, would support belief but not compel it.

4. Wherever the region of Magadan-Dalmanutha is, it was on the "other side" of the Sea from Bethsaida. They cross to the "other side" and end up near Bethsaida (8:22). (Note

that in Bauckham's view, Peter's cognitive map of the Sea of Galilee would put the north and northwest part of the lake [with Capernaum near the middle] on one side, the "home side," and the rest of the lake on the "other side," so Dalmanutha could be on the northeast side of the lake and still be on the other side from Bethsaida.)

S. Jesus warns against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod in 8:14-21.

1. The disciples forget to bring bread with them when they get in the boat, which leaves them with only one loaf, probably a pita-sized flatbread about eight inches in diameter and an inch thick. That would only amount to lunch for one person.

2. Jesus warns them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. "Leaven" is a more general term than yeast. In the ancient world, leaven was fermented dough that was kept back from baking and used to ferment the next batch of dough. Based on the Passover regulations, leaven often was viewed negatively, symbolizing the permeating influence of sin (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:6). The leaven Jesus is warning against is probably the blindness to his identity and resistance to his kingdom-bringing work that characterized the Pharisees and Herod.

3. Right on cue, the disciples begin arguing among themselves about not having bread, no doubt debating which of them had dropped the ball. Jesus asks them why they are so concerned over the failure to bring bread when they are with him. Are their hearts hardened and their eyes and ears so dull that they fail to recognize who he is and what he is doing? Do they not remember the miracles he has performed?

4. He asks them how many baskets of leftovers there were after he fed the five thousand and the four thousand. They saw him on those occasions provide from small amounts of food more than the multitudes wanted to eat, and yet they are all upset over having only one loaf. You can feel his disappointment and perhaps weariness in his question, "Do you not yet understand?" They are in danger of being infected with the kind of blindness that gripped the Pharisees.

T. Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida in 8:22-26.

1. In Bethsaida, some people bring a blind man to Jesus and beg him to touch him, which is a request for him to heal him. Jesus leads the man out of the town, presumably as part of his managing people's reaction so as to orchestrate events in keeping with God's will. He then spits on the man's eyes and puts his hands on his eyes (see v. 25). As I noted earlier, saliva was commonly viewed in the ancient world as having healing properties. As before, we are not told why Jesus used it in conjunction with this healing, but presumably it filled some symbolic role similar to the anointing with oil the apostles performed in conjunction with some healings.

2. This is the only case where Jesus chooses to heal someone in stages. He asks if he can see anything, and the man's vision is partially restored to the point he can see people but only as indistinct vertical objects, which is why he says they look like trees walking around. Jesus touches his eyes again, and then the man's sight is fully restored; he sees everything clearly.

3. It seems that Jesus intends this healing to function as a kind of parable for the disciples' gradual (represented by the two stages) gaining of full spiritual vision. Peter confesses Jesus' identity in the next scene, but afterward the disciples exhibit lack of spiritual insight when they respond to Jesus' predictions of his death. It is only after his resurrection that they see his identity clearly.

4. Jesus sent the healed man home and told him not to go into the town, This presumably is Jesus once again managing the public reaction to him for a larger purpose.

IV. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah in 8:27–30.

A. From Bethsaida, Jesus and the disciples headed for the villages around Caesarea Philippi (not to be confused with Caesarea Maritima), a city 25-miles north of Bethsaida. "Throughout the first century Caesarea Philippi was predominantly inhabited by Itureans and Phoenicians. The city had very few Jewish residents and a distinctly non-Jewish character" (Richard S. Ascough, "Caesarea Philippi" in Craig A. Evans, ed., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* [New York: Routledge, 2010], 89).

B. On the way, Jesus asks who the people say that he is. As in Mk. 6:14-15, they report that some say John the Baptist (the spirit of John was in some sense at work in him), others say Elijah (who was expected to return as a herald of the coming end), and still others say one of the prophets (of long ago). Interestingly, no one is reported to be claiming he is the Messiah (the Christ), which highlights Peter's confession.

C. Jesus asks the disciples who they say he is, and Peter answers saying, "You are the Messiah." Strauss comments (p. 360-361):

"You are the Messiah" (σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός) stresses Jesus' most fundamental identity as God's end-time agent of salvation (see comments on 1:1). Although Jesus does not use the title for himself, probably because of its nationalistic and militaristic connotations . . . , this does not mean it is not true. From Mark's perspective, Jesus is indeed the Messiah (1:1), the promised Savior from the line of David, who will accomplish God's end-time salvation and establish God's eternal kingdom in justice and righteousness (2 Sam7:11-16; Isa 9:1-5; 11:1-10). Yet Jesus will define this messiahship on his own terms.

D. In Matthew (16:7) Jesus declares that this was revealed to Peter by Jesus' father in heaven, but that revelation was given through Jesus' words and actions: "proclaiming the kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the multitudes, and raising the dead" (Strauss, 362). As with the initial healing of the blind man at Bethsaida, a light has dawned on the disciples, but their concept of what Messiah means is still blurry, as will soon become evident. But as they continue the journey, the concept increasingly comes into focus.

E. Jesus strongly warns them not to tell anyone about him. He has previously silenced demons and people he had healed. Strauss comments (p. 363), "Finally, he now commands the

disciples to keep his messiahship a secret until he has defined its true nature (cf. 9:9). This purpose becomes clear in the following verses, as Jesus begins to define his suffering role as the Son of Man."

V. Jesus predicts his suffering and death, teaches, and manifests his identity in 8:31-10:52.

A. Jesus begins his passion predictions in 8:31-33.

1. With Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus begins teaching the disciples about the necessity of his rejection, suffering, death, and rising again. This is the divine plan of redemption, and Scripture has predicted it (Isa. 52:13-53:12).

2. The elders, chief priests, and scribes represent the Jewish leadership. The most influential lay leaders, priests, and experts in the law were in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court that would condemn Jesus.

3. The statement that he will rise "after three days" is sometimes claimed to be an error since Jesus was crucified on Friday and raised on Sunday morning. But as Strauss explains (p. 364), "'after three days' reflects the Jewish custom of treating any part of a day as a full day, so that 'after three days' is the same as 'on the third day.'"

4. Jesus spoke of the matter plainly, which prompted Peter to rebuke him. Though Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, his vision of the Messiah, his understanding of what that role entailed, was still blurry. He no doubt was thinking of the Messiah as one who would reestablish the kingdom of Israel through military defeat of the Romans and their collaborators. The notion of a suffering Messiah just does not compute.

5. Jesus turns and either looks at or sees the disciples and then rebukes Peter. If he looks at them, it is probably because they shared Peter's view and thus the rebuke encompasses all of them. If he sees them, he recognizes they overheard the remark and rebukes Peter so they will not be misled by his mistaken view of the Messiah.

6. Jesus blasts Peter for denying that he (Jesus) needed to suffer and die. His death on the cross is the centerpiece of all redemption, the healing of the broken and sin-sick creation, and by suggesting it was not necessary Peter was unwittingly, with blurred vision, opposing God's plan and inviting Jesus to shirk the cup of the cross. He calls him Satan because he is saying what the Enemy would say if he knew what Jesus had revealed plainly to his disciples, that his death and resurrection were necessary in fulfillment of God's plan. Given Satan's role in bringing about Jesus' crucifixion (e.g., Lk. 22:3; Jn. 13:2, 27), I do not believe Satan understood that the cross was God's victory; he was outwitted not just overpowered.

7. The call to "get behind me" seems to be a call to fall in line behind him, to repent and get reoriented as a disciple. Marcus (p. 607) describes this understanding, which he prefers, "as a command to Peter to resume the path of discipleship rather than trying to *lead* Jesus."

B. Jesus teaches about the requirements of discipleship in 8:34-9:1.

1. Jesus tells the crowd and his disciples that if anyone wants to follow behind him (as he told Peter to get behind him), meaning wants to be a disciple of his, he must do three things: deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him.

a. Denying oneself means to remove oneself from the throne of one's life. "It is to renounce your claim to yourself – desires, ambitions, personal goals – and to submit to Christ as his slave. It is a denial of autonomy and self-sufficiency" (Strauss, 372).

b. To "take up one's cross" in a literal sense meant to begin a walk of rejection, shame, and humiliation that ended in the excruciating death of crucifixion. Jesus did that literally. He calls those who would be his disciples to do it metaphorically, as is clear from the statement in Lk. 9:23 that one is to take up one's cross *daily*. We are to recognize and accept that the decision to become his disciple is a decision to walk a path of rejection, shame, and humiliation in this Christ-hating world, a path that may well lead to oppression, violence, and even death. This is all over the New Testament. It is a decision of the utmost gravity that is not to be entered into lightly, which is why Jesus in Lk. 14:27-33 insists that one must count the cost before making the decision.

c. Following him as a disciple, as one who follows behind him, means imitating his example, where applicable, and obeying and spreading his teaching. We are learners, disciples, and he is our Master, the one from whom we learn.

2. A person must be willing to do that because (For) whoever opts instead to preserve his physical life, to avoid the risk of martyrdom that is inherent in following Jesus, will lose the eternal resurrection life that would be his as a disciple. But whoever loses his life, whoever said "Yes" to following Jesus (which includes a commitment to his kingdom message) and consequently was martyred, will save his life in that he will have the eternal resurrection life that is the promise of the disciple. That does not mean one must be a martyr to be saved; it means one must be willing to be a martyr if that is necessary.

3. The rhetorical questions of vv. 36-37 reinforce v. 35. It is no real benefit to gain all the world has to offer at the cost of forfeiting the eternal life that one would have as a disciple of Jesus. And once eternal life has been forfeited, once a person dies in a lost state, there is no price that can be paid to obtain that life. The opportunity for salvation is gone.

4. A person must be willing to become a disciple because (For) those who refuse to do so, who are ashamed of Jesus and his words, will miss the eternal life he provides. When he returns to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated, when he returns in his Father's glory with the holy angels, he will be ashamed of them, meaning he will provide no blessing for them.

5. Having spoken of his return to consummate the kingdom, his returning in his Father's glory with the holy angels, he promises that some of those standing before him will see the kingdom of God come in power before they die. A popular understanding in churches of

Christ is that Jesus was referring to the events of Pentecost, but with many commentators, I think he was referring to the upcoming transfiguration event in which three select individuals – Peter, James, and John – were given a preview of the Second Coming.

a. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all preface the transfiguration account with Christ's prediction and then link the transfiguration to the prediction by specifying the length of time between the two (Matthew and Mark – six days; Luke – about eight days). That suggests the Gospel writers saw them as connected.

b. This connection was recognized widely in the early church. Jerome Neyrey says in *2 Peter, Jude*, Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 173, "In the early church there was a widespread interpretation of the transfiguration as the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Jesus that 'those standing here would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God come in power' (Mark 9:1)."

c. People sometimes stumble needlessly over the restriction of the prediction to only some. Jesus is not saying that the event he is predicting will happen after most but not all have died, so that only "some" of the crowd will still be alive. If that were his meaning, Pentecost would hardly qualify because few if any of those standing before him would die that soon so as to warrant the restriction to only some. Pentecost was only months away. Rather, he is saying that only some of the group will be selected for a preview. Only they will receive it; the others will die without having had such an experience.

d. The clincher for me on this is what Peter says about the transfiguration in 2 Pet. 1:16-18.

(1) He says they did not follow clever myths when they made known to them the powerful coming ("power and coming" probably being a hendiadys) of our Lord Jesus Christ. The "vast majority" of scholars (Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], 215) understand that as a reference to the second coming of Christ. They do so because:

(a) The word Peter uses for coming, *parousia*, was in Christian circles in the first century almost a technical term for the second coming. Indeed, Peter uses it in 3:4 and 3:12 unambiguously in reference to Christ's return. Douglas Moo states in *2 Peter, Jude*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 71, "[T]he word 'coming' is used throughout the New Testament as almost a technical term for Christ's return in glory – so much so that the underlying Greek word, *parousia*, has passed into our theological vocabulary." Thomas Schreiner concurs in *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003, 312, "[I]n the New Testament [the word *parousia*] becomes virtually a technical term for the arrival or future coming of Jesus Christ (Matt 24:3,27,37,39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1,8; Jas 5:7-8; 2 Pet 3:4,12; 1 John 2:28)."

(b) Christ's return is associated with "power" in Mk. 13:26, Mat. 24:30, and Lk. 21:27 (see also, Mk. 9:1). So the combination of power and coming reinforces the conclusion that Peter is referring to Christ's return.

(c) The denial of the second coming by the false teachers (3:3-4) is central to the letter. It thus makes perfect sense that Peter is here defending that doctrine.

(2) In assuring his readers of the certainty of the apostolic claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to return in great power, which return will be an eschatological climax marked by the final judgment and the creation of the new heavens and new earth, Peter confronts directly the claims of the false teachers. They denied that Christ was returning (3:3-4), and apparently taught that the claim to the contrary was nothing more than a fable or myth, perhaps even alleging that it had been concocted as a tool for restraining behavior by the threat of a final judgment.

(3) Peter denies that the message of Christ's glorious return was a cleverly concocted fairy tale. He does so by asserting that he and some others (meaning James and John) were eyewitnesses of Christ's majesty when they were with him on the mountain of transfiguration. So he clearly is saying that what they personally experienced in the transfiguration event somehow disproves the false teachers' claim that the doctrine of the second coming is hogwash. But *how* that experience disproves their denial of Christ's consummating return is less clear.

(4) Perhaps Peter is saying, with the benefit of hindsight, that in seeing in the transfiguration Christ's glory and true identity they saw one who was too great to leave unfinished business, too great to leave creation in its current state of continuing corruption, and thus they saw one who necessarily would return powerfully to consummate the kingdom of God, return to fully "cash out" his victory by ushering in the eternal state in which there was no sin, suffering, death, mourning, crying, or pain.

(5) That Peter is saying the second coming was foreshadowed in the transfiguration is recognized by a large majority of commentators.

(a) For example, Richard Bauckham states (1983, 222): "On the mountain of the Transfiguration Jesus was appointed to this task [of subduing the rebellious world to divine rule] which he will exercise in the future when he comes in glory as the eschatological judge and ruler. The author is therefore pointing out to his readers that the Transfiguration, to which the apostles bore witness, is a basis for the expectation of the Parousia."

(b) Peter Davids states in *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 202: "2 Peter . . . says that the Transfiguration was a view into the future of the coming exaltation of Jesus, a view of his second coming with power and glory."

(c) Thomas Schreiner states (p. 312): "Peter defended the truth of the coming of Christ in a surprising manner. He appealed to the eyewitness testimony of what occurred at the transfiguration. Apparently he conceived of the transfiguration as a proleptic and prophetic indication of the glory and power of Christ that would be displayed at his future coming."

(d) Douglas Moo states (1996, 84): "Peter, James, and John *saw* – not in a vision or a dream, but at a specific time and place in history – Jesus' Parousia glory. And Peter wants us to believe that Christ will come again in glory because he did see this."

(e) Gene Green states in *Jude & 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 216: "The particular tenet of the heretics' teaching that Peter counters has to do with the eschatological parousia of Christ (v. 16; 3:3-4). He presents the transfiguration, with its revelation of Christ's kingship, as the guarantee of that final event."

C. Jesus is transfigured before some of the disciples in 9:2-13.

1. After six days, Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a high mountain where he is transformed (passive voice – by God) before them. Mark mentions that his clothes became dazzling, brilliantly white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them. In other words, this is a supernatural manifestation of his glory. Luke says (Lk. 9:29) that the appearance of his face changed, and Matthew says (17:2) that it shone like the sun.

2. This manifestation of Jesus' glory is an *unmistakable visual revelation* of his true identity as the Son of God. In seeing it, Peter, James, and John are given a preview of the kingdom of God coming in power because it is at Christ's second coming, when he returns in power and glory to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated at this first coming, that his true identity will be visually and unmistakably revealed to the world. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day (Lk. 17:24). At that time, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11).

3. Elijah and Moses appear and are speaking with Jesus. These two great figures of Jewish history were associated with the coming of the Messiah, the kingdom bringer. Moses said in Deut. 18:15 that the Lord would raise up a prophet like him, and Peter links that promise to Jesus in Acts 3:22. Based on Mal. 4:5, the Jews expected Elijah to return in advance of the final Day of the Lord, which implied he would come in advance of or in conjunction with the Messiah. So here you have these Messiah-affiliated Old Testament heroes, great deliverers of God's people, speaking with Jesus, which serves further to cement his identification.

4. There have been various ideas about what motivated Peter to offer to build three shelters or booths, but whatever it was, Mark indicates it was an offkey suggestion, something he just said because they were so afraid. So as readers we are not to see it as something significant, other than as an indication of their fright. We are not told how the disciples knew the people with Jesus were Moses and Elijah, whether by divine revelation or an unrecorded identification by Jesus, presumably because that is not considered important.

5. A cloud overshadows them, which in Scripture often symbolizes God's presence. Then God announces from the cloud, "This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!" As at his baptism, this identification as God's Son probably is an allusion to Ps. 2:7, a Messianic Psalm in which God speaks of the nations raging against his Davidic king. The command "listen to him" probably alludes to Moses' statement to the Israelites in Deut. 18:15 that they must listen to the prophet like him whom God was going to raise up. That includes accepting what Jesus tells them about his suffering and its implication for discipleship.

6. The fact Moses and Elijah suddenly disappear, leaving Jesus, confirms Jesus' preeminence. They serve only a supporting role in the revelation. The revelation is about Jesus, the Son of God, the one to whom they must listen. He fulfills and transcends all that was revealed through Moses and the prophets (represented by Elijah).

7. Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what they had seen until "the Son of Man had risen from the dead." As Strauss notes (p. 387):

[This probably] relates to popular expectations concerning a political Messiah. Jesus wants to prevent premature proclamation of his messiahship until he has fulfilled his messianic task. The glory of his messianic reign – proleptically seen in the transfiguration – will not be realized at his first entrance into Jerusalem, but after his suffering, death, resurrection, and, ultimately, at his return to judge and to save.

8. The disciples kept the matter to themselves but discussed what it meant "to rise from the dead." Whereas most first-century Jews believed that God would raise his people bodily from the dead at the last day, the day on which he judged and remade the world – Martha's statement in Jn. 11:24 being an example – they did *not* expect this end-time resurrection, this rising to immortal life, to happen to someone *in advance of God's remaking of the world*. That was not part of their theological landscape. They expected everyone to be resurrected to immortality together in conjunction with the final judgment and the beginning of the eternal state. As Strauss remarks (p. 387), "Jesus' discussion of the resurrection of the Son of Man within history was inconceivable to them."

9. Apparently their discussion about Jesus' reference to rising from the dead raised an issue regarding the teaching of the scribes (experts in the law) that Elijah would appear before the great Day of the Lord and thus before or in conjunction with the coming of the Messiah. Jesus says Elijah does come first to restore all things, and then asks in light of that, how it is written about the Son of Man that he must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? He presumably has in mind texts like Isa. 53:3 and Ps. 118:22. He seems to want them to understand that Elijah's "restoring role" will not be inconsistent with his predicted suffering; it will not be something that precludes that suffering.

10. Jesus then clarifies how the prophesied Elijah comes by informing them that he has already come, referring to John the Baptist. In other words, Elijah does not come in a literal, raised-from-the-dead sense, which is how most Jews understood the prophecy (Morris, *The Gospel*

According to John, rev. ed., 118-119). Rather, he comes figuratively in the person of one who reflects his spirit and power, as is said of John (Lk. 1:17).

11. John the Baptist's treatment, their doing to him whatever they wanted, was written about in Scripture in that Elijah, the one John represents, was treated by Jezebel, the king's wife, with no regard for his spiritual status or life. Indeed, she had him running for his life (1 Ki. 19:1-3). Though Elijah was not killed, the same lack of regard for his spiritual status and life that Jezebel expressed resulted in John's execution at the behest of Herodias, another ruler's wife. So their doing to John "whatever they wanted" was foreshadowed in the persecution and suffering of Elijah.

D. Jesus heals a boy with an evil spirit in 9:14-29.

1. When Jesus and the three disciples return to the other disciples, they see a large crowd around them and the scribes arguing with them. When the crowd sees Jesus, they are "greatly amazed." As Strauss notes (p. 396), the verb "suggests strong emotional distress or alarm (*ἐκθαμβέω*: 14:33; 16:5-6), something more than just excitement over Jesus' sudden appearance or his celebrity status." We are not told why they were astonished, what produced that reaction. One speculation is that he bore some residual effects of the transfiguration, a result similar to the fear Moses' appearance evoked when he returned from Mount Sinai with a radiant face (Ex. 34:29-30).

2. Jesus asks them (disciples, scribes, or crowd) what they are arguing about, and a man in the crowd answers that his son is possessed by a demon that prevents him from speaking and produces epileptic-like symptoms. He asked the disciples to cast it out, but they were unable to do so. This presumably brought an accusation from the disappointed father, with agreement from at least some in the crowd, that the disciples were not as advertised. The scribes then used that to press their argument that the disciples, and by extension their master, were phonies.

3. Jesus addresses them all with the emotional personal address, "O unbelieving generation," because the father, presumably some in the crowd, and the scribes were skeptics or outright opponents and the disciples had a faith that was inadequate to move them to rely on prayer for the task. Jesus' two rhetorical questions (How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?) reflect his disappointment and frustration over their persistent unbelief, but he forges ahead on his mission, calling for the boy to be brought to him.

4. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into convulsions. The direness of the boy's condition is indicated by the description of the seizure, the fact the spirit had possessed him for a longtime (from childhood), and the fact it posed a danger to his life by throwing him into fires and bodies of water. The seeming hopelessness of the boy's situation, fueled by the disciples' failure, caused the father's faith in Jesus to waver so that he couched his request for healing in uncertainty. He says, "But *if* you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

5. Jesus challenges the man's doubt about the sufficiency of his power for the task. He says, " "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." What is humanly impossible becomes possible (though not guaranteed) to those with faith in God because he has the power to do

anything and he exercises that power on behalf of those of faith (though not automatically or mechanically but within his sovereign purpose).

6. Desperate and fearing his lack of faith may be an obstacle to his son's healing, he cries out, "I believe." This is a conscious decision to make a public declaration of his belief in Jesus' power to do the seemingly impossible. But he then adds, "help my unbelief," which is a plea for Jesus to do whatever needs to be done to strengthen his faith that he might no longer waver as he just did in beseeching Jesus for the healing.

7. Seeing that the crowd was continuing to grow or was gathering around the area to which Jesus perhaps had led the man, Jesus acted quickly presumably as part of his management of his reputation for purpose of his mission. Jesus rebukes the spirit, that we now learn also causes deafness, and the spirit cries out, convulses the boy, and comes out, leaving the boy looking dead. Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up.

8. When they went inside, the disciples asked why they could not drive out the demon. After all, Jesus had given them authority to drive out demons (6:7), and they had done so previously (6:13). Jesus said, "This kind cannot be cast out except by prayer." This suggests that some demons are more powerful or more difficult to expel than others. It also suggests the disciples may have started to lose sight of the fact their abilities to drive out demons derived from God and started to think it had been vested in them in a more autonomous sense, a way that was not so dependent on an intimate faith relationship with God as is reflected in prayer. This possession was a reminder or a call back to their dependence on God.

E. Jesus gives his second passion prediction in 9:30-32.

1. After leaving the area of the transfiguration, possibly Mount Hermon near Caesarea Philippi (see 8:27), they were passing through Galilee in route to Capernaum, and Jesus did not want to people to know because he was teaching his disciples. The crowds obviously put other demands on him.

2. He was teaching the Twelve that he was going to be delivered into human hands and killed but would rise again three days after being killed. Most commentators understand this as a divine passive, "referring to God's purpose in 'delivering up' Jesus as a sacrifice for sins (cf. 10:33)" (Strauss, 407). Paul speaks of God "delivering" his own Son, using the same verb (Rom. 4:25, 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:23).

3. Jesus' statement about rising after being killed simply does not compute for the disciples. The notion that the Messiah, the one destined to establish an eternal kingdom, would die was incomprehensible. And again, they, like most first-century Jews, took it as a given that the resurrection would happen only at the last day, the day on which God judged and remade the world. They did not consider the possibility that this end-time resurrection could be split into two phases, that it could begin with an individual in advance of God's remaking of the world. So having not considered the plain import of his words, they were looking for some other meaning and coming up empty. They were afraid to ask Jesus what he meant because they did not want to appear dense.

F. Jesus addresses the disciples' argument about who is the greatest in 9:33-37.

1. On the heels of Jesus' second prediction of his passion, there is another failure to accept that teaching, or at least its implications for his followers. When they were in the house in Capernaum, probably Peter's, Jesus asked the disciples what they had been arguing about on the way. They did not answer because they did not want to admit they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. Their silence demonstrates they felt some guilt over having done so; they knew at some level it was something with which Jesus would not be pleased.

2. Whereas Peter rebuked Jesus when he first told of his coming suffering and death, the disciples here ignore its implications for discipleship. The fact is that one cannot follow Christ if one is enamored with rank or status because his call is to follow him down a road of shame and humiliation, to take up one's cross and follow him. As one cannot serve both God and money (Mat. 6:24; Lk. 16:13) – one must choose – so also one cannot serve both God and status.

3. This is illustrated in the life of Paul. He was educated at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), a teacher held in honor by all people (Acts 5:34), and was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age (Gal. 1:14). And then he became a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

a. After describing his pedigree and standing as Jew, Paul declared in Phil. 3:7-8: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.*

b. He says in 1 Cor. 4:10-13: *We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹ To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹² and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.*

4. Jesus calls the twelve to him, and in a world of strict social distinctions and hierarchy, teaches them a shockingly countercultural truth: greatness in the kingdom of God lies not in rank or status, the kind of greatness about which they were arguing, but in making oneself a servant of others, taking that lower role, the servant role, in relation to them.

5. Jesus then illustrates the point by taking a little child in the house (Peter's child?) into his arms. Unlike in modern Western culture, little children in the ancient world were not romanticized and fawned over. Strauss (p. 409) notes "they were viewed as insignificant and having no social status." David Garland comments (p. 367), "The child had no power, no status, and few rights." In receiving or welcoming the small child, Jesus lowered himself, he broke a barrier of social status, thereby demonstrating his point that these kinds of barriers are not to impede serving in the kingdom.

6 Having taken the child in his arms, Jesus says in v. 37, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

a. He seems to be saying that the child represents his disciples, those who are received "in his name" in the sense they are received as bearers of his name. Little children serve as ready representatives of disciples because those who follow Jesus embrace a path of no social status, a path of social rejection and scorn, which mirrors a child's lack of social standing.

b. That is why he says that receiving one such child is receiving him. Jesus is represented by his disciples, his followers. In receiving them, one receives Jesus, and in receiving Jesus, one receives the Father who sent him. As Strauss comments (p. 410), "The image here is that of an emissary sent by a king. To 'receive' that person is to offer one's service to the king himself." It is a call to receive fellow Christians, despite the risks and social pressures attendant to receiving such social outcasts.

G. John reports to Jesus the disciples' encounter with an unknown exorcist in 9:38-40.

1. The desire for status or social elevation comes in a different guise in the disciples' encounter with an unknown exorcist, one who was casting out demons in Jesus' name. As John reports the situation to Jesus, they told the exorcist to stop his activity "because he was not following *us*." The stated rationale for stopping him was not that he was not following *Jesus*, that he was misrepresenting Jesus or the kingdom, but that he was not affiliated with *them*, the apostolic team. It seems likely this person was a follower of Jesus but outside the apostolic circle, perhaps one of the 72 whom Jesus sent out as reported in Lk. 10:1-17. As a "free agent," his work would not contribute to the reputation of the apostles and may even detract from it.

2. Jesus first gives a pragmatic reason for not stopping the exorcist. They should not stop him because his doing miracles in Jesus' name will preclude him from quickly turning around and speaking evil of him. He would be slow to do so because he would look like a fool for having previously identified with him. You see how reluctant people are to criticize politicians after they have come out publicly in support of them.

3. Jesus' second reason is expressed in a proverb: "Whoever is not against us is for us."

a. As you know, proverbs are not absolute truths but are situationally specific. For example, Prov. 26:4-5 states (ESV): ⁴*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.* ⁵*Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.* There are times and circumstances when it is wise to ignore a fool and times and circumstances when it is wise to engage him. Part of wisdom is being able to tell the difference.

b. This proverb applies to the situation at hand, where the disciples are more focused on protecting their status and authority than on Christ being glorified and his kingdom bringing being manifested through the work of this exorcist. That is a case of "Whoever is not against us is for us." In other cases, such as when people are hesitating to commit to Jesus, the

reverse proverb given in Mat. 12:30 would apply: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

c. This is reminiscent of Num. 11:26-30 where Joshua asked Moses to put a stop to Eldad and Medad prophesying inside the camp. Moses said (v. 29), "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

H. Jesus instructs about those who aid and who harm his disciples in 9:41-42.

1. Those who embrace Jesus, as reflected in their giving a cup of water to the disciples *because* they belong to the Christ, will certainly not lose their reward. They will enter into eternal life. This teaching is paralleled in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Mat. 25:31-46. He is not saying charity *per se* will be rewarded; he is saying Christian faith, which expresses itself in mercy toward fellow believers, will be rewarded.

2. But those who reject Jesus, as reflected in their causing those who believe in him to stumble, to experience a spiritual downfall, will face a divine judgment that is worse than being thrown into the sea with a large millstone around their neck. Again, this idea is expressed in the parable of the sheep and the goats.

I. Jesus urges radical measures against stumbling in 9:43-50.

1. Jesus says here that "stumbling," coming under God's judgment of hell, is so dreadful that one should cut off one's hand or foot or pluck out one's eye if those body parts are the cause of that stumbling. It is better to enter the eternal life of the kingdom of God maimed, crippled, or with one eye than to have both hands, feet, and eyes and not enter that life, that is, to be sentenced to hell.

2. In saying it is better to enter the eternal life of the kingdom of God maimed or one-eyed, Jesus seems to be implying, consistent with some rabbinic understandings, that the dead will initially be raised with whatever bodily defects they had at death. Joel Marcus states (p. 690), "These rabbinic traditions go on to affirm that immediately after their resurrection, the disabled will be healed of their disabilities, and the same assumption may underlie our passage: the lame or blind will *enter* eternal life maimed, but they will not *remain* in that condition."

3. "Hell" is literally "Gehenna," the valley on the southern side of Jerusalem that in the intertestamental period came to symbolize the place of divine punishment. To go there is described in v. 43 as going "into the unquenchable fire," and v. 48, referring to Isa. 66:24, describes it as a place "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." It is an eternal punishment (Mat. 25:46), a sharing in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:41). In one of the most sobering passages in all of Scripture, Rev. 14:11 says "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night."

4. Jesus is not advocating the literal mutilation of one's body but separating from what causes one to sin. This is evident from the fact the mentioned body parts are not the cause of

the damning sin. "A one-handed, one-footed, one-eyed person can still be tempted, sin, and thus stumble" (Stein, 449). As Stein states (p. 449), "The sayings are a hyperbolic attempt by Jesus (and Mark) to warn his audience that there is no sin worth going to hell for. Better to repent, no matter how painful that repentance may be, and follow Jesus, whatever the cost, than to perish in hell."

5. The statement in v. 49, "For everyone will be salted with fire" seems to indicate that everyone will undergo trials (fire) intended to purify or develop them, as salt could serve a purifying function (Ezek. 16:4, 43:24). In that journey, one needs to remember what is at stake when one is tempted to sell out for sin.

6. Salt in v. 50a refers to a different use. Salt is good in that it functions as a preservative and to add flavor to food; it has a powerful and positive effect on that to which it is applied. But if it becomes unsalty those benefits are lost because saltiness cannot be restored. Jesus is encouraging the disciples not to abandon the qualities of disciples, qualities that will bless the world.

7. The statement "Have salt among yourselves" in v. 50b may be a reference to sharing meals together, sharing salt, which is a symbol of fellowship and peace among friends and family. In that case, the final clause "and be at peace with one another" is a synonymous parallel that serves to explain the prior clause.

8. Depending on the English translation you are using, you may have noticed a blank for verses 44 and 46. They are not printed in most translations because it is very unlikely they were part of the original text of Mark.

J. Jesus teaches on divorce in 10:1-12.

1. Jesus leaves Capernaum (9:33) and goes to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Even here, away from Galilee, crowds gather, and Jesus teaches them. Some Pharisees come to him, and to test him they ask, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

a. The notable debate about divorce in the days of Jesus was between two schools of rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, over the meaning of the "indecent thing" that is specified in Deut. 24:1 as the grounds for divorce. Hillelites argued that divorce could be on the grounds of "any matter" *or* "indecenty," the latter being subsumed by the former so that divorce was permitted for any reason. The Shammaites argued that Deut. 24:1 permitted divorce only for "a matter *of* indecenty," which they took to mean some serious sexual offense. The permissive Hillelite view was culturally dominant.

b. Mark's report of the Pharisees' question is meant as shorthand for whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for the *debated reasons*, for reasons beyond a serious sexual offense, a matter on which all agreed. The parallel in Mat. 19:3 makes this clear.

2. The Pharisees were testing Jesus with this question in that they wanted to put him on the record regarding the controversy in the hope of alienating at least part of the audience. Jesus asks them what Moses commanded, intending to focus them on the desired permanence of marriage

implicit in what Moses said (in Genesis) about the male and female becoming one flesh in marriage. The inference from God having made them one flesh is that the union is not to be separated.

3. The Pharisees, however, perhaps knowing or anticipating where Jesus was going, answer that Moses permitted divorce, implying that God approved of it. Jesus tells them Moses *allowed* divorce as a concession to the hardness of their hearts not as something God desired. Rather, God's desire, his ideal, as he goes on to explain, is that there be no separation of the one-flesh union of marriage.

4. When the disciples afterward question him about the matter in the house, he says, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

a. Mark does not mention the exception of divorce for sexual immorality that Matthew includes in the parallel in Mat. 19:9 (also Mat. 5:32). Perhaps he considered the exception so obvious that it need not be mentioned. After all, it concerns sexual infidelity, the heart of the union according to Genesis. Both Roman and Jewish law compelled the husband to divorce his wife if she were found to be in adultery (Keener [1991], 31), and it was assumed in the Roman world that general rules or laws contained implicit exceptions (Keener [1991], 27). Matthew, on the other hand, may have spelled out the exception for his Jewish readers to make it more difficult for Jewish opponents to charge Jesus with contradicting Moses.

b. In teaching that divorce was not permissible except for sexual immorality, Jesus indicated that the Shammaites' understanding of Deut. 24:1 essentially was correct regarding the grounds for divorce. In doing so, he raised the marriage stakes for his disciples compared to the dominant Hillelite view. Marriage was a permanent relationship, in keeping with God's intention from creation, with a narrow exception as a continuing concession to human fallenness. Divorce always involves evil, but just as Moses permitted divorce because their hearts were hard, so Jesus permits it among those with new but not yet fully transformed hearts, but only for sexual sin, some significant sexual activity with a person other than the spouse.

c. Jesus went further than the Shammaites in disallowing remarriage after a divorce on impermissible grounds. As D. A. Carson notes ("Matthew" in EBC Revised, p. 466), the school of Shammai "permitted remarriage when the divorce was not in accordance with its own halakah (rules of conduct)." See also, Instone-Brewer, 166-167. In other words, the Shammaites permitted remarriage after a Hillelite "any-matter divorce" even though they would never have granted such a divorce.

d. Mark records that Jesus addressed the issue of women divorcing their husbands. Jewish women had no legal right to divorce their husbands, but early rabbinic material shows a woman could compel a divorce, require the husband to divorce her, where the marriage contract had been breached. Moreover, Jewish wives could engineer divorces less formally by acting so as to drive their husbands to divorce them. Jesus may be addressing these situations and perhaps speaking with an eye on the broader world into which the church would expand.

e. There are, of course, a number of questions and complexities surrounding the matter of divorce and remarriage. A key issue, with major pastoral implications, is whether the adultery of which Jesus speaks is literal or figurative. Another big issue is the church's duty toward those who have remarried sinfully. I have thoughts on these and other things, but rather than turn this into a seminar on divorce and remarriage, I refer you to my website, particularly the papers "Some Thoughts on Divorce and Remarriage" and "More Thoughts on Divorce and Remarriage."

f. Whatever the questions and complexities, clearly it is the Lord's will that kingdom participants stay married. The culture breached the church's walls decades ago with its cavalier attitude about the sanctity and permanence of marriage, leading us to wink at divorce and treat it as a private, personal matter. We must labor to offer our marriages to the Lord and stop rationalizing and tolerating our sin in this area.

K. Jesus blesses the children in 10:13-16.

1. Some people were bringing their children to Jesus to touch them, meaning to bless them in association with touching them. Luke 18:15 specifies they were babies. The disciples, apparently not having learned the lesson from Jesus' receiving the small child in Mk. 9:36-37, rebuke those bringing the children.

2. Jesus is indignant and tells them not to hinder the children from coming to him because the kingdom of God belongs to *such as* these. That is, little children serve as analogs of disciples in that their acceptance of their lack of entitlement to anything and their dependence on others reflects the kind of attitude necessary *to become* a disciple and their lack of social status and rank reflects that same lack in those who *have become* disciples. One comes to Jesus accepting that one has no claim on his grace, no bargaining power, or one does not receive the kingdom he brings. And one who will not *receive* the kingdom he presently offers will not *enter* the consummated kingdom in the future, at Christ's return. And one who receives the kingdom, who becomes a disciple, walks a road of social rejection which parallels a child's lack of social status.

3. Jesus illustrates the blessing in store for those who will imitate the lowly station of a child through their embrace of him by taking the children in his arms and blessing them. The blessings of the kingdom do not follow the wisdom of the world. Rather, the lowly will be exalted.

L. Jesus dialogues with the rich man and teaches about the danger of riches in 10:17-31.

1. As Jesus was setting out for another place, a man approached him, fell on his knees, and said, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He wants to know how he can ensure his place in God's eternal kingdom at the consummation. He is asking what is necessary for salvation. Mark indicates in v. 22 that the man is very wealthy but says nothing of his age (Mat. 19:22 states he was young) or his political position (Lk. 18:18 states he was a ruler of some sort).

2. Jesus says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." I think he is saying, "Given that you do not realize I am God, your calling me good shows that you mistakenly believe a mere man can be truly good. The truth is that only God is absolutely good."

3. He then tells the man, "You know the commandments" and cites from the Ten Commandments those associated with a person's relationship with others, those that give concrete expression to love for others: "Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother." Jesus is not advocating a works righteousness. He is saying that salvation requires heartfelt allegiance to God, an inner surrender to him as God, which inevitably will manifest in obedience to his will, a will that includes loving other people. As Jesus will say in Mk. 12:28-31, loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself are linked as the two greatest commandments.

4. The man declares that he has kept all these commandments since his youth, but motivated by his love for the man, Jesus puts his finger on the "one thing" the man lacked: undivided loyalty to God. He had allowed his wealth to become an idol, something he valued more than a relationship with God. To reveal that truth to the man, Jesus tells him to go, sell what he has, give to the poor, and follow him. In other words, he calls him to choose between his wealth and God – between retaining his wealth or giving it to the poor and following Jesus – to expose the state of his heart.

5. The man was disheartened by this word and went away sad, meaning without salvation, because he had great wealth. When push came to shove, he loved his money more than he loved God, and he was sad that God demanded of him more than he was willing to give.

6. Jesus uses the encounter to instruct his disciples. He tells them, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" This amazes the disciples, probably "because of the common Jewish perspective that riches were a sign of divine favor and blessing (Deut 28:1-14; Job 1:10; 42:10; Ps 128:1-2; Isa 3:10; Sir 11:17). Proverbs 10:22 says, 'The blessing of the Lord brings wealth'" (Strauss, 443). But the Old Testament also warns against the danger of riches, which is the theme Jesus is emphasizing. Jesus repeats that it is difficult to enter the kingdom of God, the reference to the rich being implied.

7. Jesus emphasizes the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom of heaven with a hyperbolic proverbial statement: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Literally, of course, it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, but I think Jesus is overstating the difficulty, painting it as impossible, to emphasize how hard it is. It is like we might say to someone, "It's easier to fly to the moon flapping your arms than to become CEO of Microsoft." It is a colorful way of stressing the low probability not a declaration of actual impossibility.

8. The disciples are stunned and ask, "Then who can be saved?" If it is that difficult for the rich to be saved, those who were thought to have God's favor and were in a position to be generous to the poor and pursue religious study, how can any of the rest of mankind be saved? In response, Jesus shifts from stressing the hindrance that wealth poses to salvation to focusing on the absolute *impossibility* of salvation for anyone apart from the working of God. Only God can awaken fallen man – rich or poor – to make responding to him possible. He opens our eyes and brings us to our senses that we then are able to choose whether to embrace him. Without his drawing us, we would be helpless and hopeless, prisoners in utter darkness.

(a) I am afraid we often do not appreciate how dire the situation was from which God rescued us. We tend to think that, though we were rightly under condemnation for sins we committed, sin had not corrupted our insight and judgment, our desire and will, or our moral disposition. We tend to think that, though we were guilty of sin, we were people who were fully capable in our own right of assessing and accepting divine truth. All we needed was to have the message of pardon presented properly, and we would embrace the correct conclusion.

(b). I think the truth is more like the illustration by Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell in their book, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (p. 68-69). In contrast to seeing the lost sinner merely as a convicted criminal who, at the front gate of the prison, is offered a pardon from inescapable eternal punishment, they "see the sinner as already imprisoned in the deepest corner of a terrorist camp." They write:

Bound, gagged, blindfolded, and drugged, the prisoner is weak and delusional. . . . The prisoner can't even begin to plead for help or plan an escape. In fact, the prisoner feels at home in the dank squalor of the cell; she has come to identify with her captors and will try to fight off any attempted rescue. Only a divine invasion will succeed. . . .

God steals into the prison and makes it to the bedside of the victim. God injects a serum that begins to clear the prisoner's mind of delusions and quell her hostile reactions. God removes the gag from the prisoner's mouth and shines a flashlight around the pitch-black room. The prisoner remains mute as the Rescuer's voice whispers, "Do you know where you are? Let me tell you! Do you know who you are? Let me show you!" And as the wooing begins, divine truth begins to dawn on the prisoner's heart and mind; the Savior holds up a small mirror to show the prisoner her sunken eyes and frail body. "Do you see what they've done to you, and do you see how you've given yourself to them?" Even in the dim light, the prisoner's weakened eyes are beginning to focus. The Rescuer continues, "Do you know who I am, and that I want you for myself?" Perhaps the prisoner makes no obvious advance but does not turn away. . . . [T]he Savior presses on: "I know that part of you suspects that I have come to harm you. But let me show you something -- my hands, they're a bit bloody. I crawled through an awful tangle of barbed wire to get to you." Now here in this newly created sacred space, in this moment of new possibility, the Savior whispers, "I want to carry you out of here right now! Give me your heart! Trust me!"

9. Peter says to Jesus that he and his fellow apostles, in contrast to the rich man, had "left everything" to follow him. Since Peter still had a home and a fishing boat (1:29; 3:9; 4:1, 36; cf. Jn. 21:3), it seems "leaving everything" need not mean actually divesting of everything as Jesus had called the rich man to do. It can mean being willing to walk away from things, to deny them a hold on one's life that prevents or hinders one's service to Christ. It is about keeping things in the proper perspective.

10. Jesus says that those, like the apostles, who will put him first, which in their situation meant leaving home and joining him in traveling to proclaim the gospel, will in the present age receive a hundredfold the family and provisions they left behind and in the age to come, eternal

life. They receive family and provisions in the present age through brothers and sisters in the faith, a new family that provides for one another's needs. When Jesus returns to consummate the kingdom, they will enter eternal resurrection life.

11. Jesus adds regarding the eschaton, the final state, that many who are first will be last and the last first. Taking my cue from the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Mat. 20:1-16, which follows the parallel to this section in Matthew 19, I think the point is that the disciples will be blessed with glorious eternal life at the eschaton, but the giving of special honors or privileges in that state (such as sitting at the Lord's right and left) often will not comport with human notions of entitlement (the first being first and the last being last). All labor will be rewarded, but God is free (meaning he is not unjust) to give as he chooses (the same or more) to one who did not labor as long or under as difficult conditions. He blesses based on his generosity not on human notions of entitlement, so the door is wide open for surprises, reversals of expectations, for which he cannot rightly be criticized.

M. Jesus gives this third passion prediction in 10:32-34.

1. Mark here explicitly identifies Jerusalem as Jesus' goal. It seems there are two groups identified: the Twelve and "those who followed," the latter presumably being other followers and perhaps pilgrims heading to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. The Twelve are "amazed," perhaps by Jesus' resoluteness in heading as the Messiah into Jerusalem. Given their concept of the Messiah's work, this would be the beginning of war and great upheaval. This is probably what those who followed feared.

2. Jesus again pulls the Twelve aside and tells them what is going to happen. The final phase of his inaugurating the kingdom is not going to be what they imagine. It will not be by glorious conquest but by suffering, humiliation, death, and resurrection. He will be turned over to the Jewish authorities who will condemn him, and then they will turn him over to the Gentiles, the Roman rulers, who will flog and kill him. But after three days (which is the same as Matthew and Luke's "on the third day"), he will rise!

N. James and John request chief seats and Jesus responds in 10:35-45.

1. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, ask Jesus to do for them whatever they ask, but Jesus asks them to specify their request. They say (through their mother, according to Mat. 20:20-21) they want to sit at his right and left, the two premier positions, in his glory. As Bock notes (p. 280), they seek "to trump the other disciples and gain rank over them." The human hunger for status, rank, power, and privilege is very stubborn.

2. James and John clearly have not grasped the lesson of 9:33-37, where Jesus taught that greatness in the kingdom of God lies not in rank or status but in making oneself a servant of others, taking that lower role, the servant role, in relation to them. Moreover, Jesus has just explained that he is going to face suffering, humiliation, and death, but they do not allow that to challenge or affect their understanding of the kingdom of God or the Messiah's role in ushering it in. They proceed as if he did not say it, as if he is going to triumph without the cross, and jump to the matter of their positions in the kingdom.

3. Jesus tells them they do not know what they are asking precisely because they ignore that he will usher in the kingdom through his suffering, humiliation, death, and resurrection. The kingdom in which they seek exalted positions will not in its initial manifestation, in its inaugurated form, subjugate or eliminate its opposing forces. Rather, sin and evil will be allowed to coexist with the kingdom until Jesus returns. Asking to be exalted in that kingdom without being aware of that fact is asking in ignorance.

4. That is why Jesus calls them back to his coming suffering and death by asking, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" He wants them to realize the inaugurated kingdom will involve rejection, hostility, persecution, suffering, and even death in some cases. That is the front end, the initial state, of the kingdom in which they are requesting preeminence.

5. James and John assert that they *can* drink the cup Jesus drinks and be baptized with the baptism with which he is baptized, by which they probably mean they are willing to become martyrs in the messianic war they believe is at the door. (Recall Peter's declaration of his willingness to die in Mat. 26:35; Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37.) Jesus lets them know that they will in their own way experience his cup and baptism, meaning they will suffer (and in the case of James even be killed – Acts 12:2), but it will not be in the glorious messianic war they probably imagine, a war to establish an evil-free eternal state. Rather, it will be as participants in the kingdom of God that until the consummation coexists with weeds, with opposing forces.

6. Jesus adds, "But to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." As Jesus indicates elsewhere (Mat. 20:1-16; see also, Mat. 20:23), the giving of special honors or privileges in the consummated kingdom is something the Father will grant in his good pleasure. So granting the request of James and John is not his prerogative.

7. The ten other apostles are indignant when they hear of the attempt by James and John to secure a superior rank in the kingdom. Jesus calls them together and again teaches them that infatuation with status, rank, power, and privilege is a worldly perspective at odds with the spiritual perspective of the kingdom. Strauss remarks (p. 458), "The indication is of a leadership that is radically other-centered, focused on meeting the needs of others rather than controlling others to meet one's own ends. The values of the kingdom turn the world's system upside down."

8. And nowhere is this better seen than in Jesus himself. "The ultimate act of servant leadership is the Son of Man's sacrificial death as a ransom payment for the sins of the world" (Strauss, 458). His death will pay the necessary price to set people free. As Paul puts it in Rom. 5:19, "by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

[O. Jesus restores blind Bartimaeus's sight in 10:46-52.](#)

1. They come to Jericho, and as Jesus was leaving the town with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar, known in Aramaic as Bartimaeus, which Mark explains means son

of Timaeus, was sitting beside the road. (Luke 18:35 is commonly understood as reporting that the interaction occurred as Jesus was *nearing* Jericho rather than *leaving* Jericho, but Luke's text can be understood to mean "when he was *in the vicinity* of Jericho." See Stanley E. Porter, "'In the Vicinity of Jericho': Luke 18:35 in Light of Its Synoptic Parallels," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992) 91-104.)

2. When he heard that it was Jesus *of Nazareth* (Jesus being a common name) passing by, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The phrase "Son of David" was a designation for the Messiah. Many people in the crowd rebuked him, no doubt thinking he was too socially insignificant to be bothering Jesus, but the man just cried out all the more. He will not be put off. This blind beggar understands a truth which will escape many of the Jewish religious leaders.

3. Jesus stops, tells people to call the blind man over to him, so they change their tune. They go to the man and tell him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, jumps up, and comes to Jesus, and Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Does he just want money, seeing Jesus as a compassionate donor, or does he believe that Jesus has the power to do the impossible? He answers that he wants to receive his sight.

4. Jesus dismisses him with a declaration that his faith had saved him, and immediately his sight was restored. This man persisted in his pursuit of Jesus, despite the pressure not to do so, because he trusted in Jesus' power to bless. And having been healed, he followed Jesus along the road.

VI. Jesus confronts Jerusalem in 11:1-13:37.

A. Sunday: Jesus enters Jerusalem in 11:1-11.

1. Traveling from Jericho, Jesus and the disciples arrive at Jerusalem's doorstep, the vicinity of Bethpage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is a north-south ridge just east of Jerusalem that is about 100 feet higher than Jerusalem. Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha, is about two miles from Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. The location of Bethpage is not known, but it is believed to have been closer to Jerusalem.

2. We know from John 12 that Jesus arrived in Bethany on Friday evening, just as the Sabbath began. (The dinner in his honor that he attended in Jn. 12:2-8 may have been given a few days after his arrival. Indeed, it seems likely it was the meal on Wednesday at the home of Simon the leper reported in Mk. 14:3-9 [see comments there].) The preparation for Jesus' entry into the city was Jesus sending two of his disciples to a nearby village to procure a colt (in this case, a young donkey) on which no one had ever sat. Transporting the Lord into Jerusalem as the climax of his ministry was too great a mission for a donkey that had been shared by others. Jesus probably gave the instructions to do so when they arrived, it being understood that they were to wait until the passing of the imminent Sabbath to carry out the assignment.

3. In the morning hours of Sunday, the disciples go to the village, untie the colt, and as Jesus anticipated, some people ask them why they are doing that. They answer just as Jesus had instructed them, saying "The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately," and the people let them take it. It is possible that Jesus had prearranged to use the colt, but Mark's emphasis on Jesus authority and insight suggests he foresaw the situation and knew they would accept his request.

4. Jesus enters Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives riding on this young donkey, which was a deliberate fulfillment of Zech. 9:9 that Israel's future king would come riding on a young donkey. (Matthew 21:1-7 refers to the mature donkey that accompanied the colt, presumably the colt's mother.) The crowds understand the symbolism. The people throw their cloaks and branches they had cut (which, according to Jn. 12:13, at least included palm branches) in his path to create a kind of royal red carpet and celebrate him as the Davidic king, the Son of David.

5. This is where, in other Gospels, the Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke the crowds for their dangerous and inappropriate words. But Jesus quotes Ps. 8:2 from the LXX which refers to children praising God himself (Mat. 21:16) and declares that if they were silent the very stones would cry out (Lk. 19:40).

6. Jesus visits the temple complex and checks it all out. Because it was already late in the day, he then returns with the Twelve to Bethany.

B. Monday: Jesus curses the fig tree, cleanses the temple, and returns to Bethany in 11:12-19.

1. As Jesus and his disciples return to Jerusalem the next morning, Jesus is hungry, and he sees in the distance a fig tree with leaves. He goes to see if he could find something on it to eat, presumably hoping to find the edible buds that appeared prior to fig season and would be suggested by the presence of leaves. James Edwards writes (p. 339-340):

After the fig harvest from mid-August to mid-October, the branches of fig trees sprout buds that remain undeveloped throughout the winter. These buds swell into small green knops known in Hebrew as *paggim* in March-April, followed shortly by the sprouting of leaf buds on the same branches usually in April. The fig tree thus produces fig knops before it produces leaves. Once a fig tree is in leaf one therefore expects to find branches loaded with *paggim* in various stages of maturation. This is implied in 11:13, where Jesus, seeing a fig tree in full foliage, turns aside in hopes of finding something edible. In the spring of the year the *paggim* are of course not yet ripened into mature summer figs, but they can be eaten, and often are by natives (Hos 9:10; Cant 2:13).

2. Despite the fact the fig tree is in leaf, Jesus finds no *paggim*, only leaves. The final clause "for it was not the time of figs" is best understood as an explanation of why Jesus was looking for "something," edible buds, instead of for figs. In other words, it does not relate to the immediately preceding clause but back to the earlier statement (see, e.g., Gundry, 636;

Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 156-157; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:891-892). The "for clause" in Mk. 16:4 functions that way, relates back to an earlier statement (see also, Mk. 12:12), so it is not unreasonable to think it does so here.

3. Understood this way, "The tree in v. 13 . . . turns out to be deceptive, for it is green in foliage, but when Jesus inspects it he finds no *paggim*; it is a tree with signs of fruit but with no fruit" (Edwards, 340). Jesus curses the fig tree as a kind of acted out parable of judgment on Israel for its refusal to give him what he had a right to expect. A fig tree was often used in the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel. This symbolism is borne out by the fact the upcoming cleansing of the temple is sandwiched between the cursing of the tree and the subsequent discover of its withering (a technique called intercalation).

4. Inside the city, Jesus goes straight for the temple, knowing full well from his prior visit what he would find there. Consumed with holy zeal and righteous indignation, he overturns the tables of the moneychangers – those who for a fee were exchanging currency into the Tyrian shekels needed to pay the temple tax – and chasing out the merchants who were selling sacrificial animals in the court of the Gentiles and their customers.

5. This was a stunning rebuke to the Jewish religious leaders who had accepted this corruption of worship into a means of financial gain, no doubt at the expense of the poor. This only further seals his death sentence. When evening comes, Jesus and his disciples again leave the city and presumably return to Bethany.

C. Tuesday: The disciples discover the withered fig tree and Jesus teaches in 11:20-25.

1. Early the next morning, as they are returning to Jerusalem, they pass by the fig tree Jesus had cursed and see that it had withered away to its roots; it was dead. Peter points out that fact to Jesus, a degree of amazement being implied.

2. In reply, Jesus calls them to have faith *in God*, presumably because Israel's rejection, as symbolized by the cursed fig tree and cleansing of the temple and epitomized by the coming destruction of the temple, will expose the foolishness of a faith that is placed in the trappings of the Jewish cult, a faith that is unduly wed to old covenant shadows. "Most Jews regarded the temple as the place where prayer was particularly effective" (Garland, 441), so the temple's destruction could lead to doubts about the efficacy of prayer in its absence.

3. The truth is that *God* is the object of faith, and he will continue to grant prayers of faith without regard to the temple or Israel's national favor. That is why Jesus emphasizes the certainty of God granting prayers of faith and does not pause to add various understood qualifications. That would blunt the point that Israel's rejection will create no disadvantage regarding prayer. He does tell them, however, in v. 25 that they must forgive others as they stand praying so that their Father will forgive them. (Note that v. 26 – "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions" – is not part of Mark's original text, which is why it is omitted or bracketed by the vast majority of English versions.)

D. Tuesday: Jesus is confronted by Jewish leaders and responds in 11:27-33.

1. Jesus returned to the temple, and the chief priests, scribes, and elders immediately confronted him demanding to know by what authority he had ejected people from the temple the day before. They had authority over the temple and its activities, so how dare he do what he did. Jesus tells them he will answer their question if they will answer his: John's baptism – was it from heaven or from man? This is more related to their question to him than one might think. As John Nolland states in *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 863, "the leaders have questions about Jesus' authority precisely because they have never actually faced up to the challenge of John's message."

2. They refuse to answer because they see they will be in trouble however they respond. If they say from heaven, they will have no answer to the inevitable follow-up question, why didn't you believe him? If they say from men, they will face the wrath of the people who accepted that John was a prophet. Jesus then likewise refuses to answer their question to him.

E. Tuesday: Jesus tells them the parable of the wicked tenants in 12:1-12.

1. The vineyard was an Old Testament image for Israel, and the fact the language in the parable parallels Isa. 5:1-5 supports the conclusion it is being used that way here. Those tending the vineyard, Israel's leaders, had failed to produce from Israel the fruit of righteousness that God was due. God had repeatedly sent prophets to urge the people to be faithful to the covenant, to give him his due, but the leaders shamefully treated them.

2. Jesus was sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mat. 15:21-24; see also, Mat. 10:5-6). He was the son coming after many prophets calling Israel again to repent but this time in light of the kingdom's arrival (Mk. 1:15, 6:12; Mat. 4:17, 11:20; Lk. 13:2-5). He came bringing the blessings of the kingdom the receipt of which requires faith in him as the Messiah, which includes a genuine commitment to holy living. Rather than accept Jesus as the master's son, as one who came in the fullness of the master's authority, the religious leaders are challenging his authority and ultimately will kill him as the tenants in the parable kill the master's son.

3. After telling that the tenants kill the master's son, Jesus asks in v. 9, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" The answer is that "he will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others." David Wenham writes in *The Parables of Jesus* (p. 129):

The parable is thus an indictment of the political and religious leadership of 'the vineyard', but also a warning that the people whom they represent will come under divine judgment. The parable could be read as a warning to only the current leaders of the Jews that they would be displaced, rather than as a warning of judgment on the nation of Israel as a whole. But it is clear from Jesus' teaching elsewhere that Jerusalem and the Jewish nation as a whole face judgment, and that, although the opposition to Jesus in the nation is not universal (see the

disciples!), the whole nation is implicated in the actions of its leaders (e.g., Mt. 23-24).

4. Jesus then brings the point home by citing Ps. 118:22-23, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" The rejected one, Jesus, becomes the preeminent one by the will of God. Wenham remarks (p. 128-129):

The saying about the stone supplements the parable and in a sense completes it, since the one rejected and killed, as the parable describes, was in due course to be the risen Lord and the cornerstone in the saved people of God. We have commented before on the limitations of parables, and Jesus' parable of the vineyard is limited precisely in the fact that it leaves the son dead. To have had the son of the story rise from the dead would have altered the character of the parable as a picture taken from everyday life. . . . So, in using the stone saying, Jesus, who regularly spoke of his death and resurrection together, supplements the parable of the vineyard with another parable of resurrection, as we may regard it.

5. So ethnic Israel *as led and represented by* Christ-rejecters, which describes the nation proper at that time, forfeits the kingdom blessings it was to enjoy, but ethnic Israel as led and represented by the apostles of Christ receives the blessing of the kingdom along with the later Gentiles of like faith. It is this holy nation that will receive the glory of being God's vehicle for blessing the world (Mat. 28:19-20). The parable resonates with Jesus' lament in Mat. 23:37-38 (ESV): *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"*³⁸ *See, your house is left to you desolate."*

6. The religious leaders understood that Jesus was speaking about them, and for that reason were seeking a way to arrest him. But they were afraid of how the people might react, many of whom believed Jesus to be a prophet (e.g., Mat. 21:46; compare Mk. 11:32), so they just left.

F. Tuesday: Jesus is questioned about paying taxes to Caesar in 12:13-17.

1. Since the crowd's perception of Jesus was an obstacle to the leaders being able to kill him, they attempted to undermine that perception by sending some Pharisees and Herodians to trap him. As noted in the discussion of 3:1-6, the Herodians and Pharisees are strange bedfellows. The former were supporters of the Herodian dynasty, and as such were pro-Roman. The latter was anti-Roman, but the two groups found common cause in that both felt threatened by Jesus.

2. The Pharisees and Herodians pretend they are coming to Jesus because they respect his knowledge and integrity as a teacher; he is someone who will give them a straight answer, who will tell it like it is regardless of the consequences. The reality is that they are trying to damage him in the eyes of the people. They ask him, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"

3. The tax in mind probably is the Roman poll (or head) tax. When it was first instituted in A.D. 6, it sparked a revolt led by Judas the Galilean, which was violently crushed by the Romans. This is referred to in Acts 5:37. Judas claimed it was an act of unfaithfulness to God to pay taxes to Rome. Strauss remarks (p 524), "The dilemma is that if Jesus answers yes, he will anger the people, who despise Roman oppression and taxes; but if he says no, he will be guilty of sedition and liable to arrest and crucifixion."

4. Jesus knows they are hypocrites, that their true intent is to trap him, and he lets them know he knows by asking, "Why put me to the test?" He then tells them to bring him a denarius, which was the coin used to pay the poll tax. It bore the image of the emperor and an inscription identifying him, so when Jesus asks whose image and inscription is on the coin, they correctly answered, "Caesar's."

5. Jesus tells them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." He means it is proper to give Caesar back his coins, to pay taxes, but one must give God his due, meaning one's heart and ultimate allegiance. In other words, paying taxes is not inherently an act of disloyalty against God; one can pay a ruling power without surrendering allegiance to God as one can pay people for other services without doing so. In making that distinction, he split the dilemma; he undermined the religious objection to paying taxes without denying one's duty to God (see Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). His opponents marveled at him because they were certain they had him, and yet he escaped the trap.

G. Tuesday: Jesus is questioned by Sadducees about the resurrection in 12:18-27.

1. Sadducees were a pro-Roman sect of first-century Judaism that was associated with the priestly aristocracy, the high priesthood, and the temple leadership. They controlled the Sanhedrin and were the main competitors of the Pharisees. The Sadducees denied the dominant Jewish view that there was going to be a resurrection on the last day when God judged and remade the world, accepted only the Pentateuch as inspired Scripture, and denied the authority of oral traditions. This is the only time they are mentioned in Mark.⁴

2. They take their turn by giving Jesus a hypothetical designed to make belief in the resurrection look foolish. The hypothetical is a woman who, by virtue of six levirate marriages, had seven husbands during her lifetime. The punchline is (v. 23), "In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife." The contention is that belief in the resurrection is absurd because when it comes to renewing in the resurrection the earthly relationship of marriage (see Hurtado, 195) that had been terminated by death (Rom. 7:1-3), there is no principled way to distinguish between her seven legitimate husbands.

⁴ The statement in Acts 23:8, "The Sadducees say there is no resurrection – neither angel nor spirit – but the Pharisees confess both," seems to mean that the Sadducees denied both the resurrection and the intermediate state, a state that could be described as an angel or spirit. The Pharisees, on the other hand, accepted both the resurrection and an intermediate state of existence. See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 131-134.

3. Jesus tells them they have been led astray because they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. As for their not knowing the power of God, they do not realize that resurrection life is not going to be merely a continuation of present earthly life. Rather, it is going to be a new kind of immortal, glorified existence, life in a heavenized creation, the new heaven and new earth. In that state, there will be no marrying, no renewal of prior earthly marriages. There will be neither death nor procreation. Resurrected saints will be "like angels in heaven" in that they will not die and will not marry.

4. As for their not knowing the Scriptures, he points out that even within the Pentateuch, which they accept as authoritative, specifically in the episode of Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3, resurrection is implied. It is implied by the fact God continues in a covenant relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob after their deaths. He remains their God, which would not be the case if their death meant their nonexistence rather than their continuing existence in a different form.

5. The fact he remains their God implies their resurrection because he, in his faithfulness, will not let his people remain forever in death, a state that is a consequence of sin, a disembodied state that is less than the fullest possible life for them. Given they are still alive, still in a covenant relationship with God, as the episode of the burning bush demonstrates, it follows they will be raised from the dead. Jesus says they are badly mistaken to think otherwise.

H. Tuesday: Jesus discusses the greatest commandment with a scribe in 12:28-34.

1. One of the scribes who, we know from Mat. 22:34, was a Pharisee, saw that Jesus had rebuffed the Sadducees' attempt to deny the resurrection. As a Pharisee, he believed in the resurrection and thus believed Jesus had responded well to the Sadducees' claim. Mark does not specify the scribe's motivation for questioning Jesus, but we know from Mat. 22:35 that he intended his question as a test, something he thought might reveal some weakness in Jesus as a teacher or alienate some who currently were enthralled by him. He asked, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

2. Jesus answers by referring to Deut. 6:4-5, which is the first part of the "Shema" (Deut. 6:4-9), the statement that pious Jews recited twice each day. He says, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"

a. The first part – Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one – is not a command but affirms that the God of Israel is the one and only God. This was Israel's monotheistic creed. In 1 Cor. 8:6, Paul creatively christianizes this monotheistic confession by having the synonymous terms of the confession, Lord and God, refer respectively to Christ and the Father (see Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 375).

b. The command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is a command for undivided loyalty and devotion to God. As Strauss comments (p. 542), "these four [terms] do not represent separate components of human life, but function as a kind of hendiatetris meaning 'all you are and do.'" The greatest commandment is

that God be the central focus of your life, that everything in your life be ordered according to that reality.

3. Related to this is the second greatest commandment, which is to love your neighbor as yourself. "Those who truly love God will also love those who are created in his image" (Strauss, 542).

4. Whatever his initial motives, the scribe is impressed by Jesus' teaching and acknowledges its correctness. He repeats it approvingly, and whereas Jesus said there is no commandment greater than these two, the scribe expresses his agreement with that point by saying they are more important than the commandments relating to offerings and sacrifices, which would have been all around them in the temple. Heartfelt allegiance to God, inner devotion to him, is paramount. This is obvious from the Old Testament's repeated insistence that God despises the worship of hypocrites, the empty offering of rituals by the rebellious.

5. Because the scribe answered wisely, Jesus tells him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." He is moving in the right track and close to entering the kingdom of God because he is willing to recognize Jesus, the kingdom bringer, as a teacher of truth. He is not so fixed in his skepticism as to be blind but open to seeing Jesus for who he is. That is more than half the battle.

6. Having shown up the Sadducees and won over this Pharisee, no one dared ask him any more questions. They realized that was not helping to undermine him.

I. Tuesday: Jesus teaches about the Messiah as David's son in 12:35-37.

1. When teaching in the temple, Jesus challenges the scribes' assumption about the identity of the Messiah. They say the Christ is the son of David, meaning simply a physical descendant, whereas David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, referred to the Messiah in Ps. 110:1-2 as his *Lord*. Given that a physical father has greater status than his son, Jesus asks how the Messiah could be both David's son and David's Lord.

2. The implied answer is that, despite being David's descendant, Jesus has greater status than David because he is in a special or unique sense "the son of God" (1:1). The Messiah is no ordinary descendant of David, a fact the scribes apparently missed or downplayed.

3. The great throng in the temple was, for now, loving it. Here was this controversial outsider in the lion's den and doing more than holding his own against those who claimed to have all the spiritual answers.

J. Tuesday: Jesus warns about certain scribes in 12:38-40.

1. Jesus warns them about certain scribes, those who crave emblems of status as religious leaders. That indicates they have a spiritual screw loose, that they are prideful and inwardly corrupt.

2. He includes in the warning those scribes who "devour widows' houses," those who somehow were depleting the widows' assets, whether just sponging off them or taking advantage of them as guardians of their property. Scripture, of course, is full of commands to care for widows (and fatherless children) and not to exploit them. As religious leaders, they will receive even greater punishment for violating those duties.

K. Tuesday: Jesus teaches about the poor widow's offering in 12:41-44.

1. Jesus is sitting across from the offering receptacle in the Court of Women, the first inner court of the temple, inside the Court of the Gentiles. The receptacle was probably a trumpet-shaped item that in the Mishnah is called a "Shofar-chest."

2. He sees the wealthy placing large numbers of coins in the receptacle, which would be obvious from the sound they made. Then a poor widow puts in two lepta, two of the smallest copper coins that were in circulation in Palestine, which Mark explains were worth the Latin coin known as a *quadrans* (he transliterates the Latin *quadrans* into Greek as *kordantēs*). A *quadrans* was worth 1/64 of a denarius, which was a day's wage, so it was worth about eight minutes of work. So if one assumes a current minimum wage of \$10/hour, a *quadrans* is worth about \$1.33, not a penny or less than a penny (as often translated).

3. Jesus explains that the poor woman gave more than the wealthy because she gave all she had to live on whereas they gave only a small percentage of their wealth. God looks on the heart not the amount, and the widow's small amount reflected a faith and devotion that exceeded that of those who gave from their abundance.

L. Tuesday: Jesus teaches about the temple's destruction and the end in 13:1-37.

1. Prediction of temple's destruction raises question about the end (13:1-4)

a. As they are leaving the temple at the end of the day on Tuesday, the disciples are marveling at the temple structure and Jesus tells them that not one stone will be left upon another. David Garland comments (p. 491):

Jesus makes exactly the opposite observation [of the prophet Haggai]: God no longer blesses this temple, and stone upon stone will be cast down. What has been implicit in Jesus' actions in the temple now becomes explicit. He openly prophesies its complete destruction. The temple belongs to an old order, whose builders will reject the stone that will become central to God's new temple. This temple has become obsolete, and God will allow it to be utterly destroyed.

b. As they continue out of the city, they stop on the Mount of Olives, and Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"

(1) The disciples assume that the destruction of the temple that Jesus just mentioned is something that occurs at the end of the age, occurs in conjunction with

the ultimate makeover of creation into the eternal state. George Ladd, for example, states in *A Theology of the New Testament* (p. 197), "There can be little doubt but that the disciples thought of the destruction of the temple as one of the events accompanying the end of the age and the coming of the eschatological Kingdom of God." Indeed, Mat. 24:3 makes clear that the disciples' question relates to the destruction of the temple *and* the end of the age; the events are conflated in their minds.

(2) Because they understood the end to involve the destruction of the temple, Jesus' reference to that event prompts them to ask when the end, the complex of end-time events ("these things," plural) of which the temple's destruction was a part, will occur. That question of when is then clarified in terms of the sign(s) that will immediately precede the end. Their interest is not in the destruction of the temple per se but in the coming of the end as represented (in their minds) by the destruction of the temple.

2. Warning not to be led astray by false messiahs or alarmed by certain events (13:5-8)

a. Jesus in 13:5-6 addresses their question about the coming of the end by warning them not to be led astray *during the time until the end*. Before the end comes, many will come claiming to be him, claiming to be God's unique deliverer, and will deceive people into placing their trust in them.

b. He also tells them in 13:7-8 not to be alarmed when the end does not come in association with some particular war, famine, or earthquake that raises expectations of the end (I'll elaborate on that in a moment). All these things will occur without the arrival of the end. They are but the *beginning* of the "birth pains," the beginning of that period of distress of unspecified duration that precedes the consummation (the final eternal state) at the Lord's return.

(1) Michael Wilkins writes in his commentary on Matthew (p. 773-774):

[T]he metaphor in "birth pains" is used to highlight . . . that the onset of childbirth is not steady but is a repeated phenomenon, coming in waves over and over again. The baby does not come on the first pang, but once the pains begin, all know that the inexorable process has commenced. We do not know if the baby will come on the fifth, fifteenth, fiftieth, or five hundredth. Periods of wars and rumors of wars, tragic earthquakes, and famines wash over the landscape of history in repeated pains. Each reminds us that the end is coming, but no one knows when until the Son of Man appears. Throughout the labor we must be on guard.

(2) The disciples are thinking of the end arriving in conjunction with some kind of conflict that brings the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus tells them not to be alarmed when they hear of wars and rumors of wars *because* things like conflicts between nations and other upheavals like famines and earthquakes all will occur *without the end arriving*. As David Turner expresses the Lord's meaning (*Matthew*, 573), "But real and rumored warfare,

earthquakes, and famine should not frighten the disciples because these things do not signify the end." Those things are only the *beginning* of the birth pains, not the arrival of the end.

(3) This says to me that the alarm Jesus is forestalling is an alarm tied to the expectation that the end would arrive in conjunction with some particular conflict or upheaval. Otherwise, it would make no sense to give as a reason they should *not be alarmed* that these kinds of conflicts and upheavals will occur without the end arriving. For example, if the alarm in question was simply over the distress that war brings, the fact wars will happen without the coming of the end would be irrelevant to relieving that alarm. In fact, it would exacerbate it because the faithful could not comfort themselves with the fact their reward would arrive in conjunction with the conflict.

(4) Jesus says, "Don't be alarmed by wars, famines, or earthquakes *because* those things will happen without the coming of the end." But why would they be alarmed if they thought those things *would be* accompanied by the end? How would thinking that these things were bringing the end generate alarm?

[a] Certainly they would not be alarmed by the coming of the end – they are disciples and are to look forward to the redemption of that day (e.g. Lk. 21:27-28). Indeed, Christians pray for the Lord's coming (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20) and long for his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

[b] The expectation that certain upheavals would be accompanied by the end would create alarm if the end did not occur when those upheavals occurred because it would create fear that the end was not coming. Jesus is telling them not to be alarmed when contrary to their expectation the end does not come in conjunction with some conflict or upheaval – there will be many birth pains before the end arrives, so don't fret its failure to arrive after some particular episode.

3. Warning and exhortation about persecution during the time until the end (13:9-13)

a. Jesus tells them in 13:9-13 that during the time until the end disciples (as represented by the questioners) will be persecuted and brought before ruling authorities for his sake, to bear witness about him. He tells them not to be fret about what they will say in those situations, as the Holy Spirit will speak through them. He says they will be hated by all, hated throughout the world, because of their allegiance to him and will even be turned over for death by family members, by brothers, fathers, and children.

b. Only those who endure in the face of these trying circumstances will be saved, and despite these circumstances, the gospel will be preached throughout the whole world. Only at the end of this time of birth pains, *this period of undefined length*, will the end come. Regarding the distress of the interadvent period, the church age, the period between Christ's ascension to heaven and his return to consummate the kingdom, Blomberg says in his commentary on Matthew (p. 360), "All this does not mean that life for Christians in this world must remain unrelentingly evil but that in general, due to the opposition of a fallen world to the

priorities of God and even despite the powerful inauguration of his kingdom, people will continue to reject the exclusive message of that kingdom."

4. Application to their expectation about the temple's destruction and the end
(13:14-19)

a. Having told them that wars and all kinds of upheaval and distress will occur *without the arrival of the end*, Jesus in 13:14-19 applies that to their expectation that the destruction of the temple will be accompanied by the end. Given what he has told them (*de* better taken as "So," as in NKJV, corresponding to "Therefore" in Mat. 24:15), when they see "the abomination that causes desolation," which Lk. 21:20 indicates is Jerusalem coming under attack, they must not misunderstand and think it is time for their redemption.

b. Rather than straightening up and raising their heads as they are to do at the time of their redemption at the Second Coming (Lk. 21:27-28), in this instance they must *flee* immediately – not even take the time to retrieve personal items – because "the abomination that causes desolation" signals not the end, as their question(s) indicates they believed, but a very severe episode of distress within this age of distress, a particularly sharp pain within "the birth pains of the Messiah." It is a warning to them not to be fooled into thinking the attack on Jerusalem was the Lord's promised coming.

c. Fleeing the Roman assault on Jerusalem would be especially difficult on pregnant women and those with newborns, and it would be more difficult if it occurred in winter (or on a Sabbath – Mat. 24:20). Winter would make travel more difficult because it would be colder and rainier. (The Sabbath would make travel more difficult because Jews would be keeping the Sabbath which would make it difficult to buy provisions or to get help and would expose the fleeing Christians to hostility for traveling further than the prescribed Sabbath distance.)

d. In describing the distress of Jerusalem's fall as unequaled from the beginning of the world until now and not to be equaled again, Jesus probably was using a hyperbolic formula that emphasized the severity of the suffering, something like our "that was *the worst* _____ ever" (see Ex. 10:14, 11:6; Jub. 16:8; Ps. Philo. 19:16; also compare Josh. 10:14 with Ex. 8:13; Num. 14:20; 2 Ki. 6:18). It is just possible, however, that he was speaking literally.

(1) Carson says in his commentary on Matthew (p. 563), "There have been greater numbers of deaths – six million in the Nazi death camps, mostly Jews, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin – but never so high a percentage of a great city's population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem."

(2) Another NT scholar, John Nolland states in his commentary on Matthew (p. 975), "Despite the Holocaust, it may still be true that the first-century Jewish War was the greatest tragedy ever to befall the Jewish people . . ."

e. The statement that the great tribulation is never to be equaled implies that the tribulation referred to is *not* a tribulation at the end of history. Any tribulation at the end of history obviously cannot be equaled because there is no further history in which other tribulation can occur; there is only the consummated kingdom. In Carson's words (p. 563): "That Jesus in [Mat. 24:21] promises that such 'great distress' is never to be equaled again implies that it cannot refer to the Tribulation at the end of the age; for if what happens next is . . . the new heaven and the new earth, it seems inane to say that such 'great distress' will not take place again."

5. "Age of distress" will be cut short (13:20-23)

a. I think it is better to begin a new paragraph at v. 20. Though "the days" in v. 20 often is read as referring to the attack on Jerusalem in vv. 14-19, I agree with Carson's assessment of the situation in Matthew's parallel account (p. 564):

Many problems in interpreting the Olivet Discourse relate to the assumption that 'those days' [in v. 22] refers to the period described in vv. 15-21 and also to v. 29. But there are excellent reasons for concluding that vv. 22-28 refer to the general period of distress introduced by vv. 4-14 and that therefore 'those days' refers to the entire period of which vv. 15-21 are only one part – the 'great distress' (v. 21).

b. Jesus says in 13:20-23 that this *age of distress* – these days between his ascension and consummating return, these days of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, hatred, false christs, and false prophets – will become so bad that if it were allowed to continue, if God in his providence did not cut it short for the sake of the elect, no human being would survive. The world would degenerate to the point of human extinction.

c. Christians must continue to be on guard against false christs in this time of intensified birth pains. Not only will the distress be heightened, thus increasing the tendency to follow a false deliverer, but the false christ(s) and false prophet(s) will be performing miracles (see 2 Thess. 2:9-11; Rev. 13:13-14, 16:14, 19:20). Matthew adds (24:27) that when the Lord returns, it will be clear to all; it will be as obvious as lightning that lights up the entire sky.

d. It is difficult to see how the days being cut short for the sake of the elect can refer to the days of Jerusalem's fall.

(1) The days of distress associated with that fall were ended (cut short) by the city's destruction and slaughter of its inhabitants. How is bringing about that conquest sooner rather than later an act of mercy for the elect? For cutting short the days of distress to be an act of mercy for the elect it must be the elect who are suffering the hardship of those days and the act of cutting the days short must somehow spare the elect from the effects of those days.

(2) The elect are Christians (e.g. Mat. 24:31; Rom. 8:33, 11:7), and Christians were not suffering the hardship of the days of Jerusalem's fall. They had been

instructed to flee the city, and Eusebius reports that they did so. He says in his early fourth-century work *History of the Church* (3.5.3), the first such history ever written:

Meanwhile, before the war began, members of the Jerusalem church were ordered by an oracle given by revelation to those worthy of it to leave the city and settle in a city of Perea called Pella. Here they migrated from Jerusalem, as if, once holy men had deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judea, the judgment of God might finally fall on them for their crimes against Christ and his apostles, utterly blotting out all that wicked generation.

(3) But even if Christians were suffering the hardship of the days of Jerusalem's fall, accelerating the time of that fall is not sparing them from the effects of the days preceding the fall; it is having those days culminate in their deaths or enslavement, an outcome they were willing to suffer horribly to avoid.

(4) In addition, the term "all flesh" ("no human being," ESV) in v. 20 normally refers to all mankind and thus is broader than "no one in Jerusalem." And the unqualified term "elect" most naturally refers to all Christians and thus suggests that those for whose sake the days were cut short were not confined to Jerusalem.

(5) Note also that the deception of false christs and false prophets in vv. 21-22 occurs during "the days" of v. 20 ("then" in v. 21 meaning "at that time" rather than "thereafter," as NIV makes explicit.) This links "the days" of v. 20 back to the days of distress in v. 5-13 rather than to the specific distress of vv. 14-19 because that same concern about being deceived by false christs and false prophets is expressed in v. 6.

e. So it is by no means clear that v. 20 relates to "those days" of distress described in vv. 14-19, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding. The referent is ambiguous at best. The interpretive problems that are solved by understanding v. 20 as resuming the general subject of the days of distress in vv. 5-13, of which the fall of Jerusalem is a part, weigh in favor of that understanding.

6. After the "birth pains," the age of distress, there will be the final judgment (13:24-27)

a. Jesus says that after "that distress," after the age of "birth pains," there will be the final judgment. The language of heavenly upheaval in vv. 24-25 is drawn from Isa. 13:10 and 34:4. Most basically this language depicts what we might call "earth-shattering" events, those interventions by God that seem to "turn the world upside down." In Isa. 13:10 it refers to God's judgment against Babylon; in Isa. 34:4 it refers to God's judgment against "all the nations" but particularly Edom.

b. Similar language is used elsewhere of God's judgment within history on cities and nations (e.g., Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9), but as Donald Hagner states in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, "[t]here is, however, a tendency for this language to shade into a description of the eschatological Day of the Lord. This tendency

becomes more apparent in the utilization of the same language in the Pseudepigrapha (e.g., Ass. Mos. 10:5; Sib. 3:801 f.) and in the NT." In other words, this language became an image for the ultimate divine intervention, that which occurs at the end of the age and most radically alters this reality (age) by bringing it to a close and ushering in the final, eternal state, the consummated kingdom of God. This is easy to understand, especially if, as I think likely, the final judgment of God is a complex of events that begins with a judgment within history and culminates in the Lord's return (the Parousia), the resurrection, and the irrevocable assignment of beings to their eternal abodes.

c. The regular way of taking this kind of language about the coming of the Son of Man in v. 26 is as a reference to the Parousia. This is recognized overwhelmingly by commentators on Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For example, Carson writes regarding Matthew's account (p. 554):

[T]he "coming" (*parousia*) of Christ or of the Son of Man, along with related expressions, is so regularly associated with the coming of Jesus at the end of the age in connection with the resurrection from the dead (e.g., compare closely Mt 13:40-41; 16:27; 25:31; 1Co 11:26; 15:23, 52; 16:22; cf. 1Th 2:19; 3:13; 4:14-17; 5:23; 2 Th 1:7; 2:1, 8; Jas. 5:7-8; 2Pe 1:16; 3:4, 10-12; 1Jn 2:28; Rev 1:7) that it would take overwhelmingly convincing reasons to overturn this set of associations. Here are references to the Son of Man's coming, angels gathering the elect, trumpet call, clouds, glory, tribes of the earth mourning, celestial disturbances – all unambiguously related to the second advent.

Blomberg similarly states of Matthew's account (p. 363):

Attempts to take the "coming on the clouds of the sky" as Christ's coming spiritually in judgment against Israel at the time of the destruction of the temple, so that all of vv. 15-35 refer only to the first-century events, have to take *parousia* ("coming") in v. 27 in a way that is otherwise entirely unparalleled in the New Testament. It is much more natural, therefore, to understand Christ's coming here to earth, as in Rev 19:11-16, when Jesus brings with him all the company of the redeemed already in heaven to join his faithful people yet on earth and still alive to meet him (cf. Zech 2:6 and Deut 30:4). All this is heralded by an angelic trumpet blast (cf. 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16; and perhaps based originally on Isa 27:13).

7. They will see the birth pains that are a prelude to the end (13:28-31)

a. Jesus says that just as there are signs of a fig tree that *precede* the coming of summer, when they see "all these things," meaning the "birth pains," the conflict and upheaval that will *precede* the Lord's coming, they can know they are in the penultimate stage of history. The Judgment/Parousia is the next major step in God's redemptive purpose.

b. They will live to see these birth pains, to see the general upheaval and the destruction of Jerusalem, but that does not mean they will see the Judgment/Parousia. In

other words, the birth pains, including the destruction of the temple, must *occur* within their generation, but they need not *end* within that time. Only the Father knows how long the birth pains will last (v. 32). As Carson puts it regarding Matthew's account (p. 569):

[A]ll that v. 34 demands is that the distress of vv. 4-28, including Jerusalem's fall, happen within the lifetime of the generation then living. This does *not* mean that the distress must end within that time but only that "all these things" must happen within it. Therefore v. 34 sets a terminus a quo for the Parousia: it cannot happen till the events in vv. 4-28 take place, all within a generation of A.D. 30. But there is no terminus ad quem to this distress other than the Parousia itself, and "only the Father" knows when it will happen (v. 36).

8. Only the Father knows the time of the end, which calls for steadfastness (13:32-37)

a. Jesus declares in v. 32 that only the Father knows how long the birth pains, this age of distress, will last. Only he knows when the Parousia will occur, when the end will arrive.

b. He explains in vv. 33-37 that this calls for steadfastness on the part of Christians. Carson states (p. 571): "Jesus expects ceaseless vigilance of his followers, for the final climax of human history will suddenly come on ordinary life. In the human condition massive distress and normal life patterns coexist. For the believer the former point to the end; the latter warn of its unexpectedness."

VII. Jesus endures suffering and death in 14:1-15:47.

A. Wednesday: Chief priests and scribes are pondering how to arrest and kill Jesus in 14:1-2.

1. Passover was on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nisan, which month corresponds to April/May in our calendar. That year, the 15th of Nisan was on a Friday, the day before the Sabbath. Jews reckoned a new day to begin at nightfall, so Friday, Passover, was from nightfall on Thursday to nightfall on Friday. The day before (Nisan 14) was from nightfall on Wednesday to nightfall on Thursday. That was the day of preparation for the Passover meal, the day on which the Passover lambs were sacrificed.

2. Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread often were identified together in the first century as "Passover." For example, Lk. 22:1 says, "Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover." There is also first-century evidence that preparation day of Passover proper (Nisan 14) was treated as the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Strauss states (p. 619), "Josephus refers to Nisan 14 as the first day of Unleavened Bread (*J.W.* 5.3.1 §§98-99; cf. Lev 23:5; Num 28:16-17) and speaks of the sacrifice that took place then as part of the festival (*J.W.* 2.1.3 §10; *Ant.* 17.9.3 §213)."

3. Mark says that two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, meaning two days before Friday (before Thursday nightfall), the chief priests and scribes were seeking a way to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. Since Friday began at nightfall on Thursday, two days before Friday was from nightfall on Tuesday to nightfall on Wednesday. They concluded they could not have Jesus arrested quietly and killed during the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread because the city was mobbed at that time with pilgrims which created a risk of a riot.

4. The statement in Jn. 19:14 that Jesus appeared before Pilate on "the day of preparation of the Passover" (cf. 19:31, 42) refers not to Thursday, the day on which the Passover lamb was sacrificed, but to Friday, the day of preparation *for the Sabbath* of Passover week. The day before the Sabbath was called the day of preparation (e.g., Mk. 15:42). The statement in Jn. 18:28 that the Jews did not enter Pilate's headquarters so as not to be defiled and thus be excluded from eating "the Passover" could carry the general sense of "celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread" (see Strauss, 618).

[B. Wednesday: Jesus attends a meal in his honor in Bethany and is anointed with perfume in 14:3-9.](#)

1. That same Wednesday, meaning after nightfall on Tuesday, Jesus is back in Bethany and attends a meal at the home of a man known as "Simon the leper." He presumably was a *former* leper who continued to be known for having had the disease; otherwise, his condition would render him unclean and unable to host such a dinner party. Perhaps he was someone Jesus had healed.

2. This is probably the same passion-week dinner party in Bethany that is reported in Jn. 12:1-8. John 12:1 says only that Jesus *arrived* in Bethany six days before the Passover; it does not specify the date of the meal described in vv. 2-8. The fact the unnamed woman in Mk. 14:3 (and Mat. 26:7) anointed Jesus' *head*, whereas Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointed his *feet* and wiped them with her hair in Jn. 12:3, does not require that they be separate incidents. She may have poured the perfume on both his head and feet, and the reports in the Gospels are incomplete.

3. The anointing of Jesus by the sinful woman in Lk. 7:36-50 is almost certainly a different event. Mark Strauss states (p. 604):

Luke's account is very different. It occurs in an entirely different setting in the gospel (in Galilee early in Jesus' ministry), concerns a notorious sinner (surely not Mary of Bethany), and is followed by a different objection and a different response by Jesus. The incidental agreement in the name Simon is not surprising, since this was a common Jewish name. Two separate anointings should not surprise us, since this was a common cultural sign of honor and hospitality. It is even possible that the story of the Galilean anointing was the impetus for Mary's actions.

4. Mark reports that, while Jesus was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and poured the contents over his head. Some who attended the meal were indignant and complained to each other that she had wasted such expensive perfume. They pointed out that the perfume could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, which was about a year's wages for a laborer, and given to the poor. They scolded the woman for not having done so.

5. Jesus tells them to leave her alone and asks why they are bothering her. They should not be criticizing her because she has done a beautiful or good thing for him. He explains that giving to the poor is an opportunity that is before them constantly, but his presence is unique and special, something for which extravagant expressions of appreciation are fitting. Strauss remarks (p. 608): "His coming, representing the inauguration of God's final salvation, should be a time of extravagant joy and celebration, not solemn mourning. Lavish acts like the pouring out of this expensive perfume signify the extravagance of God's grace at the dawn of eschatological salvation."

6. Jesus says, "She did what she could," meaning she gave all she had as an expression of her love and devotion. It was an extraordinary act of sacrifice, similar to the widow in 12:41-44 who gave all she had to live on. Though the woman (Mary) probably was not aware of his impending death, Jesus' mind is on that event, which is why he interprets her action as an anointing of his body in preparation for burial, as was customary for Jews. So here he predicts his death implicitly.

7. Jesus declares that when the gospel is preached in all the world, this woman's act of devotion, not her name, will be remembered. And, of course, that is the case as the event is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and probably John.

C. Wednesday: Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests to betray Jesus in 14:10-11.

1. Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests, those who were reported in 14:1-2 to be plotting to kill Jesus, and he offers his services in betraying him. Remember they were concerned about triggering a riot if they arrested him when the city was packed with pilgrims, but promise of inside help opened the possibility of arresting him discreetly. That is why they were glad to hear his offer and promised him money to go through with it. The comment that he was "one of the Twelve" magnifies the betrayal.

2. The last clause of v. 11 says, "So he began looking for an opportunity to betray him," meaning a time when he could tip them off about Jesus being in a situation where he could be seized without much notice. Mark does not say why Judas betrayed Jesus, but other Gospels make clear Satan was involved (Lk. 22:3; Jn. 13:2, 27) and that he was a greedy person (Mat. 26:15; Jn. 12:6).

3. Mark also does not mention Judas's fate. But we know from Mat. 27:3-5 and Acts 1:18-19 that he committed suicide. The fact Jesus has been predicting his coming death shows that God foresaw and incorporated Judas's evil betrayal into his eternal purpose and plan. He is "playing chess" in dimensions far beyond our understanding and capability.

D. Thursday and Friday: The disciples prepare for the Passover meal and share in it (Last Supper) with Jesus in 14:12-31.

1. As explained earlier, Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread often were identified together in the first century as "Passover," and the preparation day of Passover proper (Nisan 14) was treated as the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. That is why Mark refers in 14:12 to the first day of Unleavened Bread as the day on which they sacrifice the Passover lamb.

2. The Passover was to be celebrated inside Jerusalem (see Deut. 16:2 and later rabbinic understanding), so the disciples ask Jesus where he wants them to make the necessary preparations for him to eat the Passover meal.

a. Jesus tells two of the disciples (identified in Lk. 22:8 and Peter and John) to go into the city where they will be met by a man carrying a jar of water, an act that would make him conspicuous because that task normally was performed by women. He says this man will lead them to a house and when they enter they are to say to the owner, "The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" The owner will show them to a large, upstairs room that is furnished and ready, "meaning equipped with low tables and couches suitable for dining" (Strauss, 620). They are to make preparations there.

b. Jesus' detailed knowledge of the situation may have been the product of divine insight or prior arrangement with the people involved. Notice that the man is said to "meet them," which suggests anticipation and the guest room was already prepared (Jesus just has them ask where it is).

3. The disciples found everything as the Lord had said and made the necessary preparations for eating the Passover meal that night (Thursday night, which was the beginning of Friday, the day before the Sabbath). When evening came, Jesus and the Twelve arrived at the location. Perhaps Peter and John returned to Bethany after the preparations or simply met them within the city and accompanied them to the location.

4. While they were eating, Jesus tells them that one of them who was eating with him would betray him. As readers of the Gospel, we have known of Judas's betrayal since 3:19, but this is the first time that Jesus reveals to his disciples that the one who would deliver him into the hands of the religious leaders was one of them. He is going to be stabbed in the back by someone in a position of trust and friendship.

5. They become sorrowful and say to him, one after another, "Not I?" (The question expects a negative answer.) Jesus says only that it is one of the Twelve, one who is eating with him. In Mat. 26:25 Jesus informs Judas that he was the betrayer, and in Jn. 13:26 he indicates that to others by handing him the morsel of bread, but Mark does not report that specific identification.

6. Jesus has repeatedly predicted his suffering and death, and in 9:12 he indicated that the Son of Man's suffering was written in Scripture. Here he confirms that the Son of Man will go, meaning die, just as it has been written about him. As Jesus will say at his arrest in 14:49, "the Scriptures must be fulfilled." That is because they are the word of the all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely truthful God.

7. But despite the fact his suffering and death are part of God's purpose and plan, that he was delivered up according to God's plan and foreknowledge, as Peter explains in Acts 2:23, his betrayer is under severe condemnation. Judas remains responsible for his grave sin in betraying Jesus, but God in his omniscience and power is able to incorporate that sin into his plan so as to bring blessing out of it. As I say, he is "playing chess" on dimensions we cannot imagine.

8. Mark reports the institution of the Lord's Supper in 14:22-26.

a. Contrary to what one sometimes hears, we are not sure of the details of how a Passover meal was eaten at the time of Jesus. The Passover liturgy, the ritual of the meal, that is reported in the Mishnah, a collection of rabbinic oral traditions that was published around A.D. 210, is thought by many to reflect practices that became formalized and uniform only after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. See, e.g., Baruch M. Bokser, "Unleavened Bread and Passover, Feasts of" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 6:763-764; Joshua Klawans, "Was Jesus' Last Supper a Seder?" *Bible Review* (October 2001); Joshua Kulp, "The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah," *Currents in Biblical Research* 4.1 (2005), 109; Joshua Klawans, "Jesus' Last Supper Still Wasn't a Passover Seder Meal," *Bible History Daily* (3/28/17); for the opposing view see Joel Marcus, "Passover and Last Supper Revisited," *New Testament Studies* 59.3 (2013), 303–324.

b. Whatever those details, the Passover meal symbolized and celebrated God's deliverance of his people from Egyptian oppression and slavery. Jesus instituted a new symbolic meal by transcending the original meaning of the Passover meal. He transformed that ancient meal in light of his rescuing work. The bread represents *his* body and the fruit of the vine represents *his* blood of the covenant that is poured out for many. As Paul says plainly in 1 Cor. 5:7, Jesus is the Passover lamb. He is the innocent one, who was sacrificed that God's people might be spared from death and taken from the bondage of the devil to the glory of the kingdom of God.

c. The reference in v. 23 to Jesus' having given thanks in association with the cup and the reference in 1 Cor. 11:24 to his having done so in association with the bread is why this ritual Christian meal sometimes is called the Eucharist. The word "give thanks" in Greek is *eucharisteō*. "Other names derived from the Bible are the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11), the table of the Lord (1 Cor. 10:21), communion (1 Cor. 10:16), and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:21)" (Stein, 651).

d. When Jesus said, in vv. 22-24 in reference to the bread and wine, "This is my body" and "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (see, Mat.

26:26-29, Lk. 22:14-20, and 1 Cor. 11:23-26), he clearly was speaking metaphorically rather than literally.

(1) The description of the wine as his blood of the covenant which is poured out for many (Mat. 26:28 adds, "for the forgiveness of sins") is universally understood to be a reference to the blood that Christ shed on the cross (see, Heb. 9:11-28). Since the crucifixion had not yet happened, the "blood of the covenant" did not yet exist, so it could not literally be present in the cup to which Christ referred. This is confirmed by the fact Mat. 26:29 speaks of the wine as "fruit of the vine" *after* its "consecration" and 1 Cor. 11:26-28 refers to the elements as "bread" and "the cup" *after* their "consecration." Elsewhere Jesus spoke of himself as a vine, a door, and the good shepherd, and no one contends these metaphors must be taken literally.

(2) Moreover, if the wine of the Lord's Supper actually was changed into blood, there undoubtedly would have been some controversy or discussion about the propriety of drinking it. As Robert Stein points out (p. 210-211):

We must remember the context of the Last Supper. It involved Jews who were well acquainted with the Old Testament prohibition against drinking blood (for example, Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:14). If the disciples literally believed that they were being told to drink blood, one would have expected them to protest strongly. One need only recall Peter's protest in Acts 10:9-16 when he was commanded to eat nonkosher meat to see how difficult it would have been for the disciples to drink real blood. Yet they exhibited no qualms in drinking the cup Jesus gave them. The early church also encountered no problems from its Jewish members in this respect.

(3) Given that Jesus' intact body was in the presence of the disciples when he instituted the Lord's Supper, they never would have thought the bread and wine were Christ's literal body and blood. Jesus was hosting the symbolic meal known as the Passover, and his remarks would have been understood within that context.

(4) Without going into detail, Jn. 6:53-57 is not the institution of the Lord's Supper. Jesus did not institute that rite until shortly before his crucifixion. His comments about the need to "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood" are a metaphorical reference to the need to appropriate (through faith) his life-sustaining (as are food and drink) sacrifice (the giving of his body and blood). In other words, one must by faith partake of the benefits of his sacrifice to live.

e. Because Jesus gave thanks over and passed to the disciples a single cup, some in churches of Christ and elsewhere have concluded that drinking from a single cup is a requirement of the Lord's Supper. While I respect all who live in accordance with their understanding of the Lord's will, I do not believe that understanding is correct.

(1) Putting aside the fact "the cup" is a metonymy for its contents, fruit of the vine, as discussed below, the command in Mat. 26:27 that they "drink from it" does

not specify *how* they are do so. In other words, it does not demand that they each drink *directly* from the cup but that they each share the contents of the cup.

(a) If, for example, a host passed a bowl of salad to his guests and said, "Eat from it all of you," one cannot assume, without more information, that he was insisting they eat directly from the bowl rather than put some of the salad into their own bowls. If the apostles poured wine from the one cup into their separate cups before drinking, they all would have drunk *from the cup*, just as Jn. 4:12 indicates that everyone who drinks water distributed separately from a well still drinks from the well. And likewise, the report in Mk. 14:23 that they all "drank from it" does not specify how they did so, whether directly from the one cup or by dividing its contents into their own containers.

(b) And there is no reason to insist they did not divide the contents into their own cups. Indeed, though there is uncertainty about the specifics of the Passover liturgy, it is thought by many that the liturgy of Jesus' day used a separate cup for each person (Strauss, 625). This is supported by the fact Lk. 22:17 indicates they *divided* or *distributed* a cup of wine among themselves, suggesting they poured its contents into separate containers.

(2) But is there at least a requirement *to begin* with a single cup and then distribute from it into multiple cups after giving thanks? I don't think so. The reference to "the cup" in contexts of the Lord's Supper is a metonymy, a shorthand for the fruit of the vine contained in the cup.

(a) Support for this understanding is found in the fact Jesus in Mat. 27:28 identifies the cup as his blood of the covenant, referring to the cup's contents, the fruit of the vine that represents his blood, and in the fact he says in Lk. 22:20 that the cup is "poured out," indicating it stands for the liquid within the cup. Paul in 1 Cor. 10:21 and 11:26-28 refers to *drinking* the cup, again understanding "the cup" to mean its contents rather than the physical container (which cannot be drunk). The standard Greek lexicon (BDAG, 857) states regarding the use of "cup" (*potērion*) in the verses relating to the Lord's Supper, "The cup stands, by metonymy, for what it contains."

(b) In that light, the command to drink "from the cup" is not about the container but is simply a command that the gathered saints consume together fruit of the vine, the drink that represents Jesus' sacrificial blood. The way of doing so is not specified, and thus the authority to begin with multiple cups is implicit in the generality of the command. The fact Acts 2:41-42 indicates Christians shared in the Lord's Supper ("breaking of bread" – e.g., Acts 20:7) in gatherings too large to be supplied by a single drinking cup suggests the apostles understood that the Lord's command did not mandate use of a single cup in celebration of the Supper (or else one would expect some mention of an issue).

(3) As for the symbolism of oneness, that is ascribed in Scripture only to the one bread as a symbol of the one body (1 Cor. 10:17). If one nevertheless imputes a similar symbolism to the other element of the Supper, it would arise from all sharing in the same drink, from consuming together the fruit of the vine, rather than from using a single container.

Dividing the communion bread into separate pieces before consumption does not negate the oneness it symbolizes; we all partake of the "one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17) despite not all biting on a single loaf. So too we all partake of the one drink despite not all drinking from a single cup.

f. Jesus tells them solemnly in 14:25 that he will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when he drinks it new in the kingdom of God.

(1) He is referring to the fruit of the vine of the transformed Passover, the fruit of the vine of this new symbolic meal he is creating, the one that is to be eaten *in remembrance* of him (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25) and by which his *death is proclaimed until he comes* (1 Cor. 11:26). He will not again share in this symbolic meal *with them* (Mat. 26:29) until *that day* (Mat. 26:29; Mk. 14:25) when it is *fulfilled* in the kingdom of God (Lk. 22:16), when he drinks it *new* (Mat. 26:29; Mk. 14:25) when the kingdom of God *comes* (Lk. 22:18).

(2) I know some believe Jesus is here teaching that he will again drink the wine with his disciples when he *in some spiritual sense* shares in the church's observance of the Lord's Supper after the Day of Pentecost. The idea is that the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost is the last of the complex of events by which the kingdom of God was inaugurated (a complex including Christ's ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension) and thus represents the coming of the kingdom in its inaugurated sense. It is with the coming of that inaugurated kingdom that Jesus again shares in the Supper with his disciples.

(3) Without wanting to diminish the Lord's presence in the assembly through the Spirit, I do not believe that is the correct understanding of Jesus' words.

(a) The fact the Lord's Supper is eaten *in remembrance* of Jesus (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25) and *until he comes* (1 Cor. 11:26) suggests the perspective of that iteration or mutation of the Passover meal is the Lord's current absence not his presence, the time when he is away from us and awaiting his return. It is at his second coming, at the consummation of the kingdom, when the deliverance through Christ from sin and its consequences that is symbolized by the Supper is *fulfilled*, comes to completion. And it is at that time that he will again share in the meal *with them*, in their physical presence, and *drink* the wine. He will drink it *new* with them in that the meal will again take on a new connotation, will again be transformed, this time into an expression of the eschaton, the divine utopia.

(b) The Passover meal symbolized God's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. At the Last Supper, Jesus transformed that meal into the Lord's Supper, which symbolizes God's deliverance from sin and all its consequences through Christ's sacrifice. At Christ's return, the symbolism of the Lord's Supper is fulfilled in that the deliverance is consummated or finalized, so the meal is transformed into the eschatological feast, the full realization of all that has been promised. Each stage transcends the significance of the former.

(4) Most scholars understand the Lord's words as a reference to the eschaton. To cite just a few scholars:

(a) Darrell Bock writes (p. 343), "This drinking to come is not an allusion to anything in the era of the church, but at the return and consummation of the kingdom. Jesus foresees a full vindication (Heb 12:2). This may allude to the messianic banquet (Isa 25:6; 2 Bar 29:5-8; 4 Ezra 6:52; Matt 8:11; Luke 14:15; Rev 19:9; also at Qumran, 1QSa 2; 1 QS 6)."

(b) Mark Strauss writes (p. 626):

"When I drink it new in the kingdom of God" recalls OT imagery related to the "messianic banquet," God's eschatological salvation portrayed as a great end-time feast, with "the best of meats and the finest of wines" (Isa 25:6-8; cf. Isa 65:13; Matt 8:11; Luke 13:29; 14:15; 22:29-30; Rev 19:9; 1 *En.* 62:14; 2 *Bar.* 29:5-8; 1QSa 2:11-22). . . . Jesus does not mean that he will not eat or drink at all before the consummation of the kingdom. He is seen eating (and presumably drinking) after the resurrection (Luke 24:30, 41-43; John 21:9-13; though wine is not mentioned). Rather, Jesus means what he says explicitly in Luke, that he will not celebrate the Passover again (Luke 22:16) until it is fulfilled at the consummation of the kingdom.

(c) Robert Stein writes (p. 652-653):

In Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:16, Jesus refers to a future eating of the Passover at the messianic banquet in the kingdom of God. . . . Each NT account of the Last Supper involves a positive statement concerning the future (Mark 14:25; Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:16; 1 Cor. 11:26). Thus the celebration of the Lord's Supper should not be simply a sorrowful, backward recollection of Jesus's suffering and death but should also conclude with a hopeful looking forward to and joyous anticipation of that glorious day when believers will share with Jesus the "new" wine/food of the messianic banquet.

g. The Last Supper narrative ends in 14:26 with Jesus and the disciples singing a hymn and heading out to the Mount of Olives. This is the location of the Garden of Gethsemane.

9. Jesus predicts Peter's denial in 14:27-31.

a. Jesus earlier predicted that one of the apostles would betray him. He now warns that all of them will abandon him. He refers to Zech. 13:7 as establishing the prophesied consequence of *God* striking the shepherd. (Mark's "I will strike the shepherd" is a paraphrase of the Hebrew and LXX of Zech. 13:7 in which God commands his sword to strike the shepherd.) Though born of human rebellion, this culpable striking of Christ has been incorporated by God into his plan of redemption. He has made this intent to thwart his plan the means of its achievement. As David Garland notes (p. 530), this striking of the Shepherd "lays on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6b) and initially has a devastating effect on the flock. . . . Jesus will reverse the breakup and regather them."

b. In v. 28 Jesus for the fifth time in the Gospel predicts his resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34). He tells them he will precede them to Galilee (see 16:7), indicating a reunion and restoration.

c. Peter insists that, even if all the others abandon Jesus, he will not. But the Lord tells him solemnly that before the rooster crows twice he will deny him three times. Peter doubles down and declares emphatically that he will not deny him even if it means his life, and all the others said the same thing.

E. Friday: Jesus agonizes in Gethsemane in 14:32-42.

1. Jesus and the Eleven, Judas having already left to betray him (Jn. 13:30), go to Gethsemane. Gethsemane means "oil press" which suggests that the garden was actually a profit-making olive grove. Such property would include an oil press and some farm buildings. It may also have been surrounded by a high wall to protect it from Jerusalem's hungry populace, a supposition that is supported by the fact Jesus and his disciples could find privacy there even during the great festivals. Since Jesus had "often met there with his disciples" (Lk. 22:13; Jn. 18:2), the owner had apparently placed this garden at his disposal for some time. See John Wenham's *Easter Enigma*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 17, 48-49, 58.

2. Jesus tells the disciples to sit at a certain location while he prays. He then moves to a place some distance from them and takes with him Peter, James, and John. Jesus begins to be greatly distressed and troubled and says to the three, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."

a. Jesus describes his sorrow as being so deep it feels like he is dying. The point is that this sorrow is a "10" on the sorrow scale. Yes, he knows, as the Hebrew writer states (Heb. 12:2), that there is joy on the other side, but he still must walk the path of the cross and bear in himself the wrath of God for mankind's sins. Robert Stein writes in *Jesus the Messiah* (p. 216-217):

Jesus feared the agony of experiencing the wrath of a righteous God against sin. Whereas believers go through the experience of death with a real sense of God's presence, Jesus was about to experience abandonment by God. Believers who walk through the valley of the shadow of death have God's assurance and promise: "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Jesus knew, however, that he "would become accursed" during the very hour he needed God most. Nowhere do the horror and tragedy of sin become more evident than in Jesus' anguished cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34).

b. He tells the three to "remain here," as he intends to move some distance away from them. He also tells them to "keep watch," meaning to stay alert to his situation and struggle, to remain tuned into his experience, to share in it with him emotionally and spiritually.

3. Jesus goes a bit deeper into the garden, seeking solitude with the Father, and falls down, either in reverent submission or because of his overwhelming sorrow. Jesus prays that if it is possible he be allowed to escape his impending ordeal, that the hour might pass from him, that the "cup" of God's wrath against sin somehow be removed from him. But he immediately asserts his unswerving commitment to obeying the Father's will, declaring, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." As D. A. Carson notes (*The Gospel According to John*, p. 440), quoting Bengel, "That is why Jesus is so troubled. 'The horror of death, and the ardour of His obedience, were meeting together' (Bengel, 2.408)." This prayer raises a number of questions.

a. Does Jesus indicate in Jn. 12:27 that he will *not* ask to be saved from his ordeal? I do not think so. Several Johannine scholars (e.g., Bernard, Hendrickson, Barclay, Bruce, Beasley-Murray, Carson, Borchert, Mounce) have criticized the translations that make Jn. 12:27 a question. (The original Greek text had no punctuation to indicate a question. Whether one is dealing with a question or a statement in this case can only be made from the context.) John 12:27-28a can be translated so that it reflects the same two aspects as in the Synoptics – his personal desire to avoid the horror he is facing and his overriding commitment to doing the Father's will – *Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from the hour! But for this I came to this hour: Father, glorify your name!*

b. Does the fact Jesus is accepting of the cross in Mat. 26:54 and Jn. 18:11 conflict with his earlier desire for that cup to pass from him? It does not. They are after the Lord's agony in the Garden. Jesus, in reverent submission, has laid his anguish before his Father, for whom all things are possible (Mk. 14:36, 10:27), expressing his desire for the seemingly impossible -- his desire to avoid the cup set before him. It would have been faithless for one in this depth of agony to fail to bring his pain to the Father. The key is that Jesus was committed fully to the Father's will, regardless of whether it was within that will to do the impossible in this instance. The arrest provides God's answer. It is not within God's will for Jesus to avoid the sin-bearing suffering of the cross. As always, the obedient Son embraces his Father's will.

c. How could Jesus, being divine, have desired to avoid the sin-bearing suffering of the cross when it was the will of the Father that he endure that suffering? Jesus is indeed God, but he is also a man. In Mat. 4:2, for example, Jesus was hungry, meaning he desired food (as does anyone during a fast). But at that time, it was not the will of God for him have food. So Jesus subjected his desire for food to the will of God. No one asks in that instance, "How could Jesus desire food when God did not want him to have it?" He desired food because hunger is part of the human experience. Jesus is not a pretend man; he is a real man (though also God). Why not ask how Jesus could be tempted in every way (Heb. 2:17-18, 4:15) when God cannot be tempted (Jas. 1:13)? Just as the God-man could desire food when it was the Father's will that he not have any, so he could desire to avoid the sin-bearing suffering of the cross when it was the Father's will that he endure it. The key is that Jesus never asserted any of his desires against the will of the Father. Rather, he subjected his desires to that will. (And in doing so, he modeled the way for mankind.)

d. Based on Mk. 8:33, where Jesus rebuked Peter as satanic for trying to dissuade him from the cross, would Jesus' desire to avoid the cross be satanic? Not at all. Peter, in his ignorance, was trying to talk Jesus out of accepting God's will. Jesus, on the other hand,

expressed in the Garden the agony brought on by his uncompromising commitment to that will. He was not trying in the least to reject God's will. He simply was laying his sorrow before the Father, saying that if another way were within the Father's will he would prefer it.

e. Does Jesus' statement in Mk. 10:38-39 that the disciples will drink the cup he drinks mean that his cup cannot refer to his sin-bearing suffering (since the disciples did not experience sin-bearing suffering)? It does not. The disciples need not experience every aspect of the Lord's cup for him to say they would drink of it. As Christ suffered for the redemption of mankind by bearing in his body the judgment merited by humanity's sins, so the disciples would suffer for the redemption of mankind as the Lord's body on earth. They suffer for the gospel (regarding James and John specifically, see, e.g., Acts 12:1-2 and Rev. 1:9) and thus participate in *the Lord's* sufferings (1 Pet. 4:12-13; Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:24; 2 Cor. 4:8-10).

4. Jesus returns from praying and finds the three sleeping. He says to Peter in v.37, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?" He may have singled out Peter because of his insistence in vv. 29-31 that he would never deny him. He then tells all three of them to watch and pray, to remain alert and tuned into the battle and to pray for divine enablement, so that they not succumb to temptation. It is a war, and one cannot afford to be casual about it. And part of the reality of that battle is the weakness and limitation of the present human body ("the flesh" in that sense – e.g., Isa. 31:3; Jer. 17:5). One's spirit, one's desire or will, may be for one thing, but the weakness of the body can work against implementation of that desire, as their physical and emotional exhaustion worked against their keeping watch with the Lord.

5. In vv. 39-40, Jesus again goes and prays the same thing. When he returns, he again finds Peter, James, and John asleep. They were ashamed or embarrassed, as indicated by the fact they did not know what to say to him. They had no excuses.

6. In vv. 41-42 the scene plays out a third time. Jesus returns only to find them still sleeping. He declares "Enough of that" (note translation issue), meaning the situation is now changing where sleeping is no longer an option. The time of his (the Son of Man's) betrayal has arrived; he tells them to rise and go as his betrayer was now present.

F. Friday: Jesus is arrested in 14:43-52.

1. As he was speaking, Judas appears with an armed mob from the Jewish leadership, from the chief priests, scribes, and elders. John suggests in his Gospel that Roman soldiers also were present.

a. John says in Jn. 18:3 that Judas brought "the *speiran*" (accusative form of *speira*) and officers/servants of the chief priest and Pharisees and says in 18:12 that "the *speira* and the *chiliarchos*" and the officers/servants of the Jews took Jesus. *Speira* is a technical term for a part of a Roman legion. It has that meaning in each of its other N.T. occurrences: Mat. 27:27, Mk. 15:16, Acts 10:1, 21:31, 27:1. When the term was applied (rarely) to Jews in other literature it was, as Andrew Lincoln states in *The Gospel According to John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005) 443, "with reference to the troops of

a local sovereign or a leader of a revolt and never has in view the retinue at the disposal of the Sanhedrin or chief priests, from which it is in any case clearly distinguished here (cf. also v. 12)." That John is referring to Roman troops is reinforced by the use of *chiliarchos* in conjunction with it. A *chiliarchos* was a Roman commander of a *speira*.

b. Leon Morris writes in *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 656 (fn. 5):

A cohort was the tenth part of a legion and thus normally comprised [sic] 600 men (though in practice the number varied a good deal). It was commanded by a *chiliarchos* (cf. v. 12). John will not, of course, mean that 600 or so soldiers took part in the arrest but that the "cohort" performed the task; in other words, a detachment was sent. Some point out that *speira* was used on occasion of a maniple, which was one third of a cohort, that is, 200 men. But even this is rather large. John is surely not saying that the whole *speira* was present, but rather using a form of speech like our "the police came to arrest the man." Yet we must bear in mind that the Romans could use surprisingly large numbers of soldiers where one prisoner was in question (Acts 23:23), and that here they may well have feared a riot.

c. Morris states on pp. 656-657:

Some commentators hold that there could not have been Romans in the posse, but Newbigin finds it "not very surprising in view of the evidence of good relations between Caiaphas and Pilate . . . and in view of constant Roman anxiety about outbreaks of violence at the great festivals." It is likely that the Jewish authorities would have brought in the Romans as soon as possible in view of their ultimate aim (and, we might add, in view of the fact that on a previous occasion the Temple guards had failed to arrest Jesus, 7:44ff.). With passions running high at the festival period, the Romans would be unlikely to refuse a request for help from the high priest. They would always have to reckon with the possibility that Jesus and the eleven would resist arrest and that a host of excited Galileans might join them.

d. Morris adds in fn. 7 on p. 657:

Robinson points out that all the Synopsists say that Jesus asked "Do you take me for a bandit (*lestes*) . . .?" and proceeds, "Now if we ask whom we should expect to arrest such a terrorist or freedom fighter, there can only be one answer," and he proceeds to ask who arrested Barabbas whom John calls a *lestes* (*Priority*, p. 241). It is no marvel that the Jews were able to enlist the aid of the Romans in arresting Jesus.

2. Judas had told the authorities with him that he would point Jesus out by greeting him with a kiss so they would know whom they were to arrest. John includes a fuller description of the encounter that has Jesus identifying himself twice and includes at least the

Jewish authorities shrinking back and falling when he first does so. I assume Jesus' assertiveness in the situation caused some confusion in the plan. Judas may initially have felt his identifying Jesus with a kiss was no longer necessary given Jesus' self-identification, but when the authorities hesitated, Judas may have concluded the kiss was needed as confirmation. So he went straight to the Lord and kissed him, at which time they seized him.

3. All four Gospels report that at that time one of the disciples cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Luke specifies it was the right ear and reports that the Lord healed it; John also notes it was the right ear, and he identifies the disciple as Peter and the high priest's servant as Malchus. One is left to speculate about how the situation was contained after that violent assault. Presumably the Lord's immediate intervention and healing (Jn. 18:11; Lk. 22:51) and apprehension among the Jews about the Lord's power were sufficient to defuse it.

4. Jesus challenges their action, their coming to arrest him with swords and clubs, like he was an outlaw or insurrectionist, and doing so at night when they could have arrested him at any time when he was teaching in the temple courts. The implication is that they are doing it secretly because he is *not* an outlaw or insurrectionist, not someone deserving of this kind of treatment. But he notes this is all happening in fulfillment of Scripture; God is striking the shepherd through the culpable conduct of rebels; he is incorporating their rebellion into his larger purpose.

5. And as Jesus predicted, all the disciples flee when he is taken. Only Mark notes the presence of a young man who had only a linen garment wrapped around his body. In the ensuing chaos, the young man was grabbed, but he fled naked leaving the garment in his would-be captor's hands. It is possible this young man was John Mark, the author of the Gospel.

G. Friday: Jesus appears before the Sanhedrin in 14:53-65.

1. Mark reports that Jesus is taken before the high priest, who at the time was Caiaphas (Mat. 26:3, 57; Jn. 11:49). He was the son-in-law of Annas (Jn. 18:3), who had served as the high priest until being deposed by the Romans in A.D. 15. Annas, who had five sons and a son-in-law serve as high priest, was still very influential, as indicated by the fact Luke refers to him in Lk. 3:2 as a kind of de facto co-high priest with Caiaphas and the fact John reports that Jesus initially appeared before Annas before being taken to Caiaphas (Jn. 18:13-24, 28). He seems to have been a godfather kind of figure.

2. In 1994 archaeologists Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer made a strong case that the first-century burial tombs just south of the Temple Mount near the juncture of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys, in the area popularly known as Akeldama, include the tomb of Annas the high priest. Rather than being a poor person's burial ground, this is an area of elegant and elegantly decorated burial tombs. There are no identifying inscriptions, but three lines of evidence link the tomb with Annas. As summarized by the Ritmeyers, "The tombs of Akeldama are too elaborate to have been anything but burial places for Jerusalem's prominent citizens; their decoration

echoes that of the Temple Mount, where the priests served; and Josephus places the tomb of Annas in the area of Akeldama."⁵

3. In 1990 an ornate ossuary (burial bone box) was discovered in Peace Forest south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by workers who were building a water park. It dates to the first century and has two inscriptions, one in Aramaic and one in Hebrew, which may be translated "Caiaphas" and "Joseph, son of Caiaphas." Josephus gives Caiaphas's full name as "Joseph, who is called Caiaphas of the high priesthood." Inside the ossuary were the bones of six people, including one 60-year-old man. Many scholars are convinced this is indeed the ossuary of Caiaphas the high priest. Jonathan Reed and John Dominic Crossan declare, "There should be no doubt that the chamber was the resting place of the family of the high priest Caiaphas named in the gospels for his role in the crucifixion, and it's very likely that the elderly man's bones were those of Caiaphas himself."⁶ Others, however, are not convinced that "Caiaphas" is the correct translation of the inscriptions.⁷

4. The members of the governing body known as the Sanhedrin (see v. 55), who came from the ruling priests, the scribes, and the elders, gathered at Caiaphas's residence. After having abandoned Jesus, Peter doubled back and followed the crowd at a distance. He ended up in the high priest's courtyard sitting with officials of some kind and warming himself by the fire. Jesus was taken to an upper room (implied by "the courtyard below" in 14:66).

5. The high priest and the Sanhedrin are trying to frame Jesus for a capital offense, but they did not have the evidence. The people they had arranged to testify against him – it was the middle of the night – did so falsely, and as often happens when that is the case, contradicted one another. The only specific charge Mark mentions is that Jesus said he would destroy the temple, but as Mark notes, that was false. Jesus never claimed that *he* would destroy the temple; he only predicted its destruction (13:2), which presumably is the source of disagreement in the testimony (14:59).

6. Caiaphas jumps in to salvage the operation and asks Jesus to defend himself against the charges, but Jesus remained silent (see Isa. 53:7). He then asks him directly if he is the Messiah and then adds "the Son of the Blessed One" because it was understood from texts like Ps. 2:7 and 89:26 that the Messiah, this ultimate Davidic king, would be the son of God in a special or ultimate sense (as Solomon had been in a lesser sense – 2 Sam. 7:14). Of course, Mark's readers would see in the phrase its fuller significance.

7. Jesus answers directly that he is the Messiah. Matthew reports the response (Mat. 26:64) as "You have said so," which serves as an affirmative answer, a "yes," while at the same time carrying a nuance there of "in a sense that is beyond or not exactly what you envision by your question." In other words, it means "Yes, I am the Messiah, but you have some

⁵ Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, "Akeldama: Potter's Field or High Priest's Tomb?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20 (Nov-Dec 1994), 34. Perhaps Akeldama initially referred to a small field for burying foreigners (Mat. 27:7) but came to be applied to a larger area that included the region of fine tombs.

⁶ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 241.

⁷ See the summary of objections in Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 107-108.

misconceptions about what that means." The Spirit did not deem that nuance relevant for Mark's initial readers, so he just gave the "take home" point of the answer (v. 62): "I am."

8. Jesus tells the Sanhedrin ("you" is plural) "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."

a. Though they are about to condemn him they soon will see him in a different light. As the present turning point plays out in his crucifixion and resurrection, they will see him exalted to God's right hand in that they will see things indicative of that exaltation, even if they do not fully grasp what they are seeing. They will see the three-hour darkness over all the land, the tearing of the temple curtain, the earthquake, the empty tomb, and dead saints raised to life, which events were sufficient to draw a confession from the centurion and his troops (Mat. 27:45-54), and will see the preaching, powerful works, and changed lives of the disciples.

b. Beyond that, and tied to his exalted status, they also will see the Parousia, the Son of Man returning to judge those who had unjustly judged him.

(1) Darrell Bock states (p. 355), "[His coming with the clouds of heaven] is an allusion to Dan. 7:13-14 and the judging authority that figure receives from the Ancient of Days. It looks to his return to judge (Mark 13:26)." See also, Cranfield, Lane, Gundry, Evans, Stein, Boring, Marcus, and Strauss.

(2) The fact they will long have been dead when that occurs does not mean they will not see it. All mankind, living and dead, will bear witness to that event in that all mankind will stand before his judgment throne (Mat. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:10; 2 Tim. 4:1). At his return, every being shall kneel in honor of his name and every tongue shall openly declare that he is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). Moreover, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31) suggests the possibility that even before they are resurrected the dead will be able to see what is transpiring beyond their lot in Hades. Strauss writes (p. 657):

Brown is no doubt right that here we have a representative role for the Sanhedrin. All who oppose (or affirm) Jesus will one day see his vindication. Revelation 1:7, which combines Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10, sums it up: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him" (cf. Phil 2:10-11).

9. Caiaphas, in outrage and/or as a formal judicial act (prescribed in the later Mishnah for a judgment of blasphemy), rips his garment and calls for a verdict of blasphemy based on Jesus' words, which he perceived as sufficiently disrespectful of God and insulting to God's chosen leaders to qualify. The Sanhedrin judged him guilty and deserving of death ("all" may be hyperbolic indicative of a consensus and not including every member), and as he had prophesied in 10:33-34, some of them began spitting on and beating him and mocking him by calling on him to prophesy. The temple police who took him also beat him, which could refer to beating him with an object like a club or whip.

H. Friday: Peter denies Jesus in 14:66-72.

1. While Jesus is upstairs being subjected to a charade trial, Peter was in the courtyard below warming himself by the fire, and a servant girl recognized him as one of Jesus' followers. Peter tells her he has no idea what she's talking about and goes out into the entryway just inside the gate, perhaps to be closer to the gate in the event he needs to escape. (The statement at the end of v. 68 – and the rooster crowed – is textually suspect and is omitted from the text of a number of English translations.)

2. The servant girl sees him relocate and gets loud to those standing around declaring that Peter was one of the Lord's followers. Peter again denied it, and before long the bystanders were insisting he was one of Jesus' followers based on the fact he was Galilean, which they would have known by his accent.

3. At that point, Peter begins to invoke curses and to declare with an oath "I do not know this man of whom you speak!" It is not clear against whom the curses are invoked. Peter may be invoking a curse on himself, as the RSV and ESV render it, the meaning of which would be something like "May I be cursed if I am lying." But if that was the meaning you would expect Mark to include the reflexive pronoun "himself" (*heautous*). The fact he does not has led a number of scholars to conclude Mark means Peter was cursing someone or something other than himself, and some of them are persuaded he was cursing Jesus in order to confirm he was not a follower. But even if Peter was not cursing himself, I think it more likely that he was cursing his accusers saying in essence, "Go to hell for making such accusations against me! I swear to you I do not know the man" (Strauss, 665).

4. Right then the rooster crowed for the second time, fulfilling the Lord's prediction in 14:30, and Peter burst into tears. David Garland states (p. 567-568):

It is ironic that a rooster, renowned for its foolish pride, reminds Peter of Jesus' prediction that he would deny him three times (14:30). The king of the chicken coop rules the roost and struts around, thinking that he is king of the world. The rooster fits perfectly Peter's cocky boastfulness in 14:29, but it is the crowing of the rooster that snaps him to awareness of what he has just done.

I. Friday: Jesus stands trial before Pilate in 15:1-15.

1. Though the Sanhedrin had judged Jesus guilty of blasphemy and deserving of death, Israel at the time was occupied and under the control of the Romans who prohibited them from administering the death penalty (Jn. 18:31). (Josephus indicates there was an exception for executing Gentiles who entered the inner court of the temple. The Romans sometimes would look the other way regarding certain mob actions, like the stoning of Stephen [Acts 7:58-60], but that was different from a legal execution.) That means they needed to have the Roman governor sentence Jesus to death. So the Sanhedrin discussed the matter before transferring Jesus to Pilate.

2. At the time, Judea was an imperial province that was administered by governors appointed by the Roman Emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from A.D. 26-36, his official title being "prefect."

a. He normally resided in Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast, which was the seat of the Roman government of Judea, but during major festivals he would take up temporary residence in Jerusalem to keep an eye on the crowds. He probably stayed during those times in Herod's palace in the southwestern part of the city.

b. In 1961 Antonio Frova discovered in Caesarea Maritima an inscription in Latin mentioning Pontius Pilate. The left-hand side of the inscription was chipped away, presumably to make the stone fit better in its secondary usage, but restoration of the second and third lines is clear: "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea." The entire inscription may have read, "To the people of Caesarea Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea, has given the Tiberieum" (perhaps a temple dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius).

3. Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews, and Jesus answers, "You have said so." As I said before, this response means something like, "Yes, but in a sense that is beyond or not exactly what you envision by your question." In other words, he is indeed king of the Jews, but there is much in that affirmation that Pilate does not understand.

4. The ruling priests, who were viewed by the Romans as the official leadership of the Jewish nation, begin accusing Jesus of many things, which Mark does not specify. As reported in Lk. 23:2, these included that he opposed paying taxes to Caesar and claimed to be Messiah, a king. Jesus did not respond, despite Pilate's inviting him to do so. Pilate was amazed in the sense he was baffled by why someone would not put up a defense when his life was at stake, but Pilate, like the disciples, did not understand that Jesus had chosen this path in fulfillment of God's purpose to deliver him over for suffering and death as a ransom for sins (Strauss, 676).

5. At the Passover festival, Pilate normally would release one prisoner at the request of the people, presumably as a means of managing the anti-Roman sentiment of the crowd. At that time, there was a group of prisoners who were awaiting trial for having participated in a rebellion in which one or more people had been murdered. Among them was a high-profile figure named Barabbas. Strauss comments (p. 677-678):

There were many opposition movements and violent demonstrations against the Romans in first-century Palestine. These included both insurrectionist movements – those seeking to violently overthrow the government – and social banditry – disenfranchised peasants who turned to robbery out of poverty and exploitation by the upper classes. Like first-century Robin Hoods, these bandits tended to be popular with the common people, who despised the Roman rulers and their wealthy countrymen who profited from their rule.

Whether rebel or robber (or both), Barabbas was likely part of the broad movement(s) of opposition to Roman authorities. The two "robbers" or "bandits"

(λησταί) crucified with Jesus were probably part of this same rebellion and had been arrested with him.

6. The crowd asks Pilate to release a prisoner as he normally did, and Pilate asks if they want him to release the king of the Jews, meaning Jesus. He knew the ruling priests had handed Jesus over out of envy, because they were threatened by his popularity, so he figured the crowd would want Jesus to be released, thus giving him political cover with the Jews for releasing someone he did not want to execute. But the ruling priests swayed them to request Barabbas's release, feeling more threatened by Jesus than by a violent opponent of the prevailing social order.

7. But if he releases Barabbas, Pilate asks what he is to do with Jesus, the one they call the king of the Jews. And the crowd shouts back, "Crucify him!" Pilate protests, asking, "Why? What evil has he done?" But the crowd was not interested in debating the matter. They shouted even more "Crucify him!"

8. So Pilate, being a ruthless pragmatist who did not want to rile the crowd, released Barabbas to them, and after having Jesus scourged, a whipping that caused severe lacerations, delivered him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. Strauss remarks (p. 679), "It is politically a double win, to release Barabbas for the people and to crucify Jesus for the religious leaders."

J. Friday: Jesus is mocked in 15:16-20.

1. Having just scourged Jesus, the soldiers lead him to the courtyard of Pilate's residence and call together the "whole cohort." A cohort was technically 600 men, but the term also was used to refer to a smaller group of around 200. Strauss suggests (p. 686) that Mark "likely is using the term loosely to refer to the portion of the garrison on duty at the time."

2. The soldiers threw a cloth or cloak on Jesus that probably was a faded scarlet military cloak (note that Mat. 27:28 refers to a "scarlet robe") that "looked purple enough to mimic royalty" (Strauss, 687). They also twisted together some thorns into a wreath and addressed him mockingly with, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They kept hitting him in the head with the reed or staff they had used as a mock scepter and spitting on him, and they knelt before him in mocking homage, all in unknowing fulfillment of Isa. 50:6.

3. When they had mocked the Lord long enough, they removed the purple cloak, put his own clothes back on him, and led him away to crucify him. Roman sources indicate that those being crucified typically were led to the cross naked, so it is odd that they put his clothes back on him for that journey. Perhaps it was in deference to Jewish sensibilities about nudity.

K. Friday: Jesus is crucified in 15:21-32.

1. Victims of crucifixion commonly were required to carry the crossbeam to the crucifixion site (called the *patibulum* in Latin) where it was then connected to the upright beam that remained at the site. The crossbeam would have weighed 30 to 40 pounds. At some point,

the soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry Jesus' cross, but since Jn. 19:17 states that Jesus was bearing his own cross when he headed out for the crucifixion site, he presumably collapsed on the way and then Simon was conscripted to complete the job.

a. As I mentioned in the introduction, the identification of Simon of Cyrene in Mk. 15:21 as the father of Alexander and Rufus suggests his readers were familiar with Alexander and Rufus. It just so happens that a man named Rufus is mentioned in Rom. 16:13 as being a member of the church in Rome, which supports the idea that Mark wrote his Gospel initially for the Christians in Rome.

b. In 1941 Eleazar Sukenik and Nahman Avigad found a first-century ossuary in the Kidron Valley. Its lid had the name "Alexander" inscribed in Greek and "Alexander" inscribed in Hebrew, but the Hebrew name was followed by a word that probably is an adjective form of Cyrene, i.e., Cyrenite. "Alexander (son) of Simon" also was written in Greek in a green chalky substance on the front and scratched on the back (after an initial incorrect start). Another ossuary in the tomb is inscribed "Sara (daughter) of Simon of Ptolemais," probably referring to Ptolemais in Cyrenica. Jack Finegan states in *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 362:

Thus we have here a family burial at least to the extent of two children of a certain Simon, and their place of origin was probably Cyrene. From Ac 6:9 we know that there was a synagogue of Cyrenians in Jerusalem, and in Mk 15:21 it was Simon of Cyrene . . . the father of Alexander and Rufus, who was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. It is surely a real possibility that this unostentatious tomb was the last resting place of the bones of at least two members of the family of this very Simon.

2. They brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which is a modified version of the Aramaic word for "skull." As Mark explains, it means "place of a skull." (The term "Calvary" used in Lk. 23:33 in the KJV came from *calvariae locus*, the Latin rendering in the Vulgate of "place of the skull.") We do not know why it was called that. It may have been because that is where people were put to death, "skull" functioning as a representation of death. It was outside the city walls, and probably near major roads, as the Romans liked to send a message to the populace with their crucifixions. Golgotha probably was located within what is known today as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

3. The soldiers tried to give Jesus wine mixed with myrrh, but he would not take it. It is sometimes suggested that myrrh would help numb the pain of the crucifixion, but there is little evidence that myrrh had any such effect, and besides, the psychotic Roman soldiers certainly were not concerned with easing the Lord's pain. Their offering him flavored wine was a continuation of their mocking of him, as fine wines sometimes were spiced with myrrh. It is along the lines of "only the finest for you O king." Jesus' refusal to drink it is probably because he refused to play along with their mockery.

4. They crucified Jesus, which was the cruelest and most humiliating form of execution in the ancient world.

a. The Roman orator Cicero called it "the most cruel and disgusting penalty." The Jewish historian Josephus, who witnessed crucifixions during Titus's siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, called it "the most wretched of deaths." It was reserved for the lower classes, slaves, and the worst of criminals. In 63 B.C. Rabirius, a Roman nobleman and senator, was threatened with the penalty of crucifixion. In defending him, Cicero said:

How grievous a thing it is to be disgraced by a public court; how grievous to suffer a fine, how grievous to suffer banishment; and yet in the midst of any such disaster we retain some degree of liberty. Even if we are threatened with death, we may die free men. But . . . *the very word "cross"* should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not the actual occurrence of these things but *the very mention of them*, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man. (ABD, I:1208).

b. It is this shame and humiliation of crucifixion that is in mind in Heb. 12:2, where the writer says Jesus "endured the cross, scorning its shame," and in 13:3 where he speaks of "the disgrace [Jesus] bore."

5. The Romans had different ways of crucifying people, but most often a crossbeam was used, either on top of the upright stake or in the traditional cross shape. They would fasten the victim with ropes or nails, and we know in Jesus' case that they used nails. Death would result from bleeding, trauma, and asphyxiation.

6. The soldiers divided up Jesus' clothing, casting lots to see who would get what. John specifies in his Gospel (Jn. 19:24) that this was in fulfillment of Ps. 22:18. The Romans normally crucified people naked, and they may have done so with Jesus, but given their seeming deference to Jewish sensibilities in reclothing Jesus for the trip to Golgotha, it is possible they left a loincloth on him.

7. Mark 15:25 states that Jesus was crucified at the "third hour," whereas Jn. 19:14 identifies the time of his crucifixion as the "*about* the sixth hour." Some claim this is a contradiction, but that is unduly skeptical. One needs to understand that first-century Jews were not nearly as time conscious as people in the modern Western world, and sundials were not in common use. The time from sunrise to sunset was divided into 12 hours (Jn. 11:9), but that span had three main reference points: the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour (Mat. 20:1-9). These were general references to midmorning, midday, and midafternoon. If Jesus was crucified near the transition between midmorning and midday (say 10:30), it fairly could be described both as midmorning (the third hour) and *about* midday (about the sixth hour). John may have opted for the latter to highlight the length of the proceedings. See Justin Taylor, ["You Asked: What Time Did Jesus Die?"](#)

8. The written notice of the charge against Jesus read: the king of the Jews. We learn from other Gospels that it was fastened to the cross (Jn. 19:19) above his head (Mat. 27:37;

Lk. 23:38). The full notice seems to have been "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." John (19:20-21) notes that it was written in three languages (Hebrew/Aramaic, Latin, and Greek) and that Pilate posted it over the protests of the Jews. The various Gospels omit all or different parts of the first clause: Matthew omits "of Nazareth"; Mark omits it all; Luke omits "Jesus of Nazareth"; and John omits "This is."

9. The two outlaws crucified with Jesus were probably insurrectionists who had been arrested for rebellion and murder with Barabbas. Mark 15:28, which cites Isa. 53:12 in a fulfillment formula (And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors"), is omitted by most modern versions because it almost certainly was not part of the original text but a later scribal addition based on Lk. 22:37.

10. Those passing by the public site of Jesus' crucifixion verbally abused him and shook their heads as a sign of derision and contempt, just as indicated in Ps. 22:7. The people of Jerusalem have now turned against him. Some mock him for allegedly claiming he was going to destroy and rebuild the temple in three days and yet not being able to get himself down from the cross.

11. The chief priests and scribes likewise mocked him among themselves. They deride him for what they perceive is an inability to save himself and refer sarcastically to him as "the Messiah, the king of Israel" suggesting that if he really was that figure he would come down from the cross so they could see and believe in him. The truth is that their hearts are hard and their eyes are blind. No such sign will be given.

12. Even the outlaws crucified with him insulted him (see Lk. 23:40-43 for the one outlaw's repentance). The sinless and holy Jesus faces rejection and abandonment by people in his final hour.

L. Friday: Jesus dies in 15:33-41.

1. Darkness fell on the land from midday (sixth hour) to mid-afternoon (ninth hour). As elsewhere in Scripture, it is indicative of divine judgment (Ex. 10:21-23; Isa. 13:9-13; Joel 2:10, 3:14-15; Amos 5:18-20, 8:9).

a. Mark does not explain the darkness, but it could not be a solar eclipse because the Jews used a lunar calendar and the 15th day of Nisan, the day of Passover, was the time of a full moon. That means, of course, that the earth was between the sun and moon rather than the moon being between the sun and earth as is required for a solar eclipse.

b. Thallus was a Roman historian who apparently wrote a three-volume chronicle of world history in the mid-50s. That work is lost, but we know of Thallus's work from the early fourth-century church historian Eusebius and from a reference to it by a third-century Christian historian named Julius Africanus. In the course of discussing the darkness that fell on the land during Jesus' crucifixion, Africanus writes: "In the third book of his history Thallus calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun – wrongly in my opinion." So Thallus here seems to

acknowledge the odd, prolonged darkness during Jesus' crucifixion through his attempt to explain it away.

2. At the ninth hour, the midafternoon, Jesus lets out a loud cry in Aramaic based on Ps. 22:1, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani*?" Mark translates the meaning into Greek for his readers: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In reporting the Lord's words, Matthew (27:46) gives the opening address, "My God, my God" in Hebrew from Ps. 22:1 (Eli, Eli) and then provides the remainder in Aramaic. There are two main possibilities for what Jesus means in uttering these words.

a. It was common in ancient Judaism to invoke an entire psalm simply by quoting the first line of it. If that is what Jesus is doing here, then rather than a cry of despair evoked by a sense of abandonment he is expressing hope and confidence in ultimate delivery. Brant Pitre states in *The Case for Jesus* (New York: Image, 2016), 166, "When the whole psalm is taken into account, Jesus's words make crystal clear that although he *appears* to be forsaken in his suffering and death, in the end God will hear him and save him."

b. It also is possible that Jesus quoted Ps. 22:1 not as a shorthand reference to the ultimate vindication expressed in the overall psalm but because he was experiencing the agony and pain of forsakenness that David expressed in that particular verse. As Jesus receives the full weight of God's judgment against all the sins of the world, as he becomes a curse for us (Gal. 3:13) and is made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), he experiences a painful alienation from the Father and cries out. Andreas Köstenberger and Justin Taylor state in *The Final Days of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 160:

In some mysterious way beyond our human understanding, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is cut off and separated from God because he is bearing the sin of humanity and enduring God's wrath as a substitute for and in place of sinful humans. Of course, Jesus knows how Psalm 22 ends – in vindication – and may be reminding us that forsakenness is not the end of the story.

3. Some standing by misunderstand Jesus to be calling for the prophet Elijah to rescue him. Someone runs over and fills a sponge with sour wine (Jn. 19:29 says a jar of sour wine was there), puts it on a reed to be able to reach Jesus on the cross, and gives it to him to drink.

a. According to Jn. 19:28-29, the offer of sour wine, a cheap vinegar-wine diluted heavily with water, was precipitated by Jesus' statement "I thirst," and Jn. 19:30 states that Jesus received it. Given how passersby, the religious rulers, and even the outlaws reviled him in Mk. 15:29-32, the offer of sour wine is probably more of the same rather than an act of compassion. They give it to him to ridicule the hope of rescue by Elijah which they mistakenly attribute to him. In other words, they offer it laughingly in the sense of "Let's see if Elijah might rescue him if his life is prolonged just a moment longer by this wine."

b. Whereas Jesus refused to participate in prior acts of mockery against him, perhaps he accepted this drink, immediately before his death, to symbolize his taking on

himself in his death all the sin, rejection, hatred, and hostility of mankind toward God. He was dying for the forgiveness of mankind's abuse of God, expressed toward him to the bitter end. Others think his receiving the wine suggests it was an act of mercy instead of mockery.

4. Jesus lets out a loud cry and then dies. Crucifixion victims normally did not have strength to speak by the time they were at the point of death, so the fact Jesus cries out loudly points to his still being in control of his faculties and giving himself up to die. According to Lk. 23:46 and Jn. 19:30, the content of the Lord's final cry was "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. It is finished."

5. As Jesus dies, "the curtain" in the temple is torn top to bottom (rather than bottom to top), meaning it was torn miraculously by God. This tearing is noted in all the Synoptics (Mat. 27:51; Lk. 23:45), but none explains its significance or specifies whether it was the outer curtain that separated the Holy Place from the surrounding courtyard or the inner curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Tearing of the inner curtain in conjunction with Jesus' death would symbolize that his death resulted in a new kind of access to God for mankind, an access that was not tied to the sacrificial system of the Jewish temple. The tearing of either curtain may have foreshadowed the later fulfillment of Jesus' words that the temple would be destroyed (Mat. 24:2; Mk. 13:2; Lk. 21:6).

6. When the centurion who stood in front of him saw *how* he died, saw the way he conducted himself and all the events surrounding his death, he exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" This Gentile, this hated Roman soldier, is able to grasp to a significant degree the truth of Jesus' identity, a truth the Jewish religious leaders refused to see. The indications were there, but those with hard hearts found reasons not to believe.

7. Mark identifies three women who at the time were watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus and ministered to him when he was in Galilee, and now, with many other women, had come with him to Jerusalem. John 19:25-26 indicates that at some point during the crucifixion four women were *near* the cross. Perhaps three of these women moved back to observe the Lord's suffering at a distance after Jesus committed his mother to John's care (who may then have taken her away from the scene and then returned).

a. Mary "the Magdalene" probably means she was from Magdala, a fishing village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. She is the most prominent of Jesus' female followers. According to Lk. 8:2, she was a woman from whom seven demons had come out, presumably by the power of the Lord. There is no reason to think she had been a prostitute or especially immoral; that notion arose through her being confused with other women in the Gospels.

b. Mary the mother of James the lesser/younger and Joses appears to be the woman John identifies in Jn. 19:25 as Mary the wife of Clopas. It is possible that Mary's son James the lesser/younger was the less prominent apostle James, the one identified in Mk. 3:18 as James the son of Alphaeus. There are two possibilities for how Mary could be the wife of Clopas and the mother of James the son of Alphaeus. First, Clopas and Alphaeus could be two different Greek versions of the same Aramaic name the difference deriving from whether the guttural

consonant at the beginning of the Aramaic name was transliterated with either a kappa (hard sound) or a rough breathing mark (soft sound) (see John Wenham, *Easter Enigma*, 37). Second, Clopas could be the stepfather of James.

c. Salome may be identified in Mat. 27:56 as the mother of the sons of Zebedee (i.e., James and John) and is possibly the sister of the Virgin Mary who is referred to in Jn. 19:25 (e.g., Ridderbos, Carson, Beasley-Murray, Burge). But as noted, many other women had come up with Jesus to Jerusalem (Mk. 15:41), so one cannot be certain about the reference.

M. Friday: Jesus is buried in 15:42-47.

1. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 requires the body of an executed criminal to be buried on the day of his death and indicates that a failure to do so defiles the land. The desire to avoid that consequence would be elevated during the Passover week. Because nightfall was approaching, and thus the beginning of the next day, the Sabbath of Passover week, Joseph of Arimathea courageously went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body for burial. Köstenberger and Taylor (*The Final Days of Jesus*, 166) offer this portrait of Joseph of Arimathea drawn from the four Gospels (Mat. 27:57; Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50-51; Jn. 19:38):

Joseph was a rich man who was a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret disciple of Jesus. While being a high-standing member of the Jewish community, he had not consented to the ruling Council's decision. Joseph was a good and righteous man who was actively looking for the kingdom of God. His request to bury Jesus required a good deal of courage, since it makes his sympathy for Jesus public at a time when such sympathy could be dangerous.

2. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had already died, crucifixion normally being a long-drawn-out agony, so he summoned the centurion to confirm it, which he did. Pilate then granted Joseph the right to Jesus' corpse. His willingness to do so may be related to his view that Jesus was an innocent victim of the Jewish leadership.

3. Mark reports that Joseph placed Jesus in a rock tomb wrapped in a linen cloth. Being wealthy (Mat. 27:57), he no doubt had assistance from servants. After doing so, a stone was rolled against the entrance of the tomb to secure it.

a. Matthew notes that the tomb was new (Mat. 27:60), and Luke mentions that no one had yet been laid in it (Lk. 23:53). John mentions both of those things and adds that it was near the place of the crucifixion (Jn. 19:42) (Strauss, 710). Matthew also reports the appointment of a Roman guard at the tomb (Mat. 27:62-66; 28:4, 11-13).

b. John adds that Joseph was aided in the burial by Nicodemus (Jn. 19:38-42), who in Jn. 3:1 is described as a ruler of the Jews, meaning that he too was a member of the Sanhedrin. He contributed a large mixture of myrrh and aloes which was designed to cover the stench of decomposition. This was wrapped in the linen in accordance with Jewish burial customs (Jn. 19:40).

4. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses [and James the lesser/younger] observed where Jesus' body was laid, the location of the tomb, and they (or perhaps other women like Joanna and Susanna) also saw where in the tomb it was positioned (Lk. 23:55). They will return to the tomb to anoint the body when the Sabbath is over and will serve as key witnesses of the resurrection.

VIII. Jesus rises from the dead in 16:1-8.

A. Sunday: Women prepare for and journey to the tomb in 16:1-4.

1. After the Sabbath ended, which was sunset on Saturday, the beginning of Sunday, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James [and Joses], and Salome purchased spices from a shop so they could go and anoint Jesus at daybreak. Perhaps they wanted to add their own anointing as an expression of love and devotion despite the prior application of the spices by Joseph and Nicodemus (by their servants), or perhaps when they left on Friday after confirming where Jesus was laid they were under the impression the anointing was not going to be done that day.

2. It seems their trip to the tomb began just before sunrise on Sunday, the first day of the week, when it was still rather dark (Jn. 20:1) but light enough to navigate, and the sun broke the horizon during their travel. In their grief, they had not thought about who would move away the very large stone sealing the tomb, but that problem dawned on them as they grew closer to the tomb. They clearly were not expecting a resurrection. But when they looked up, they saw the stone had already been rolled back!

3. Matthew 28:2-4 informs us that an awesome-appearing angel had rolled back the stone, presumably while the women were on their way, and sat on it. Whether the resurrected Lord exited the tomb through that opening is nowhere indicated. The angel's presence terrified the Roman guards (not mentioned in Mark), who one can assume fled as soon as they regained the strength to do so. It seems the angel then withdrew into the tomb so as not to frighten the women when they arrived.

B. Sunday: The resurrection is announced by the angel and the women react in 16:5-8.

1. The women enter the open tomb and at some point thereafter they see sitting on the right side an angel who appears as a young man dressed in a white robe. (Luke 24:4 reports that two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.) As you can imagine, the women were alarmed.

2. Without getting into a full-blown harmony of the accounts, let me just note that it seems from John's account that when Mary Magdalene saw the open tomb she jumped to the conclusion that the body had been stolen and ran off to tell Peter and John. So it would be the other women, including possibly some others who joined them there (possibly Joanna and Susanna), who ventured into the tomb. But Mark is silent about that.

3. The angel said to the women in the tomb, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. *He has risen; he is not here.* See the place where they laid him." He thus explains how the tomb became empty. It was not by grave robbery but by resurrection!

4. He adds, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

a. Strauss remarks (p. 720):

Peter is likely singled out not only because of his key leadership role among the disciples (3:16; 5:37; 8:29; 9:2; 10:28; 14:29, 33, 37, 54), but especially in light of his need for restoration after denying Jesus (14:66-72). Both Luke (Luke 24:34) and Paul (1 Cor 15:5) report unique resurrection appearances to Peter apart from the other disciples, probably for this purpose (cf. John 21:15-19).

b. Jesus had told them in Mk. 14:28 that after he was raised up he would meet with them in Galilee, his "home turf." This does not mean they would see him only in Galilee. Rather, this is where he would regather and recommission his scattered army for their post-resurrection witness, which would begin back in Jerusalem.

5. The women went out and ran from the tomb because trembling and astonishment had seized them, a common reaction to an encounter with an angel to say nothing of the announcement of the Lord's resurrection. Verse 8b says, "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

a. "Virtually all scholars agree" (Strauss, 714) that the verses that follow in standard English versions, verses 9-20, are not part of the original Gospel of Mark. See Strauss, 727-729 and Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 2008), 157-163; for a fuller discussion of the issues, see David Alan Black, ed., *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008).

(1) That longer ending existed by the second century, as indicated by Irenaeus, but it is absent in the earliest existing manuscripts of Mark that have that portion of the book, the fourth-century codices Sinaiticus (X) and Vaticanus (B), and in early translations of Mark into Syriac, Coptic, Latin, Armenian, and Georgian. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, and Cyril of Jerusalem show no awareness of it, and Eusebius and Jerome note that vv. 9-20 were missing from almost all Greek manuscripts.

(2) The internal evidence is overwhelmingly against vv. 9-20 being original. There is no plausible explanation for the entire section being omitted, but one can readily imagine how the abrupt ending at v. 8 would give rise to a longer ending. The fact there are variations on the ending points to scribal sense of incompleteness. In addition, the connection of v. 9 with v. 8 is awkward, and the vocabulary and style of vv. 9-20 are distinctly non-Markan, "with fifteen words that do not appear elsewhere in Mark and a number of others used in a different sense than typical Markan usage" (Strauss, 729). Strauss states (p. 714), "[The longer

ending] represents a compendium of resurrection appearances from other gospels and was likely composed by a second-century copyist disturbed by the abrupt ending of Mark."

(3) That is why the text is often bracketed in English versions and/or footnoted as being absent from the earliest manuscripts. It is printed rather than omitted because of the influence of early English versions, particularly the KJV, which were prepared before the modern manuscript discoveries.

b. Given the high likelihood that vv. 9-20 was a later scribal addition, the question is how the Gospel of Mark ended originally. Did it end at v. 8, and if so was that by design or interruption? Or was there an ending beyond v. 8 that somehow was lost before it was first copied (given that the known longer endings do not qualify as original)? There are reasonable arguments on both sides, and scholars are divided over the question, but a majority of commentators conclude that Mark intended to end his Gospel at v. 8 (Strauss, 722).

c. I agree that the Gospel probably ended originally at v. 8, or else there would be some manuscript evidence for a more plausible original longer ending. Whether that was by Mark's design or interruption, it ultimately was because God wanted it to end there. If that is correct, what is the message of such an abrupt ending and why are the resurrection appearances not included? The difficulty in answering those questions drives the idea that the Gospel must not have ended at v. 8.

(1) It is important to note that Mark does not omit the resurrection. The angel announces expressly that Jesus is risen and will meet with his disciples in Galilee just as he told them. Perhaps the stories of the resurrection appearances were such a staple of the Christian community in Rome that Mark deemed the angel's announcement a sufficient allusion to those accounts. This becomes more likely if Mark was completing the Gospel under any kind of time or space constraints. Remember that Mark probably is the first Gospel, so there was no norm for including the appearance accounts.

(2) As I understand Mk. 16:5-8a, the women enter the tomb and are deeply troubled or distressed (ἐκθαμβέω) by the sight of the angel. This is one of the words used to describe the Lord's deep distress in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mk. 14:33. The angel tells them not to be ἐκθαμβέω, and that word is not used again. After being shown the empty tomb, told of the Lord's resurrection, and instructed to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus would meet them in Galilee, they exit the tomb and flee because trembling (τρόμος – the aftereffect of an adrenaline rush) and astonishment (ἐκστασις) gripped them, suggesting they were emotionally overwhelmed and disoriented by the interaction and news, as one would expect. They sought distance from the scene. We might say they were "freaked out."

(3) The statement in v. 8b that they did not say *anything to anyone* would be understood by the Roman Christians, who were aware the women reported the event to the disciples (as reflected in the later Gospels – Mat. 28:8; Lk. 24:9), to mean they did not say anything to anyone *on the way to the disciples*. Some may have wondered, with decades of hindsight about the resurrection and its significance, how the women could have had such an experience and not broadcast it to those they no doubt saw on the way to the disciples. Mark

explains that they did not do so because they were awestruck (φοβέω) (see usage in Mk. 5:33 and Mat. 9:8), temporarily dumbfounded by the event. Perhaps the subtext is that what matters is how one finishes rather than how one starts, which is an encouraging message in any context but especially where some may be faltering under pressure.

d. The fact women are the first witnesses mentioned regarding the empty tomb, in Mark and the other Gospels, is significant because the testimony of women was regarded as untrustworthy in both Jewish and Roman cultures. You see this in Celsus's second-century attack on Christianity when he dismisses the report of the resurrection as having come from "a hysterical female" (Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 66). This is powerful evidence that the Gospel writers did not make up the story of the empty tomb because if they had they would not have had women be the ones to find it. They would have written the story to be more culturally credible so as to be of greater use in advancing the Christian faith. N. T. Wright comments in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 607-608:

Even if we suppose that Mark made up most of his material, and did so some time in the late 60s at the earliest, it will not do to have him, or anyone else at that stage, making up a would-be apologetic legend about an empty tomb *and having women be the ones who find it*. The point has been repeated over and over in scholarship, but its full impact has not always been felt; women were simply not acceptable as legal witnesses. We may regret it, but that is how the Jewish world (and most others) worked. The debate between Origen and Celsus shows that critics of Christianity could seize on the story of the women in order to scoff at the whole tale; were the legend-writers really so ignorant of the likely reaction? If they could have invented stories of fine, upstanding, reliable male witnesses being first at the tomb, they would have done it. That they did not tells us either that everyone in the early church knew that the women, led by Mary Magdalene, were in fact the first on the scene, or that the early church was not so inventive as critics have routinely imagined, or both. Would the other evangelists have been so slavishly foolish as to copy the story unless they were convinced that, despite being an apologetic liability, it was historically trustworthy?

IX. Postscript: Post-resurrection appearances and ascension reported in 16:9-20.

A. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in 16:9-11.

1. The Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances are not contradictory, but just how they fit together is a matter of speculation. John Wenham's *Easter Enigma*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) is a reasonable assessment, a summary of which is available at www.theoutlet.us. As I indicated, Mk. 16:9-20 almost certainly is a later addition to the Gospel. Strauss states (p. 714), "It represents a compendium of resurrection appearances from other gospels and was likely composed by a second-century copyist disturbed by the abrupt ending of Mark." James Edwards labels it "an early Christian resurrection mosaic."

2. The transition between v. 8 and 9 is awkward in that the subject shifts from the women to Jesus, and yet Jesus is not named in the verse; it simply says that having arisen *he* appeared. The reference to Mary Magdalene as the one from whom he had cast out seven demons (see Lk. 8:2) seems out of place given that she was introduced and reported about earlier (15:40, 15:47, 16:1).

3. After she saw Jesus alive, she went to the disciples who are said uniquely to be mourning and weeping. John 20:18 reports Mary announcing to the disciples that she had seen Jesus. The disciples' rejection of her testimony echoes Lk. 24:11 where the women's report is said to have seemed like nonsense to them.

B. Jesus appears to two travelers in 16:12-13.

1. This seems to be a summary account of the Lord's appearance to the two travelers on the road to Emmaus in Lk. 24:13-35. The statement that he "appeared in a different form" is designed to explain how they were kept from recognizing him as stated in Lk. 24:16.

2. They returned and reported the experience to the other disciples as in Lk. 24:33-35. The statement that the disciples did not believe them is perhaps drawn from Lk. 24:38 or 24:41.

C. Jesus appears to the Eleven in 16:14-18.

1. Jesus later appears to the Eleven as they recline for a meal. This may be drawn from Lk. 24:41 where their eating a meal may be inferred from Jesus' request for food. The rebuke for their unbelief may be rooted in Lk. 24:38.

2. Verse 15 seems to recall the Great Commission of Mat. 28:19. They are to preach the gospel to all creation, meaning to all inhabitants of the earth.

3. As they do so, Jesus says in v. 16 that whoever believes *and* is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. Though not part of the original Gospel of Mark, this verse reveals a very early understanding of Jesus' teaching about the need for baptism. Some say this verse does not say anything about the fate of one who *believes* and is *not baptized*; it only says that one who believes *and* is baptized will be saved and one who does *not* believe will be condemned. But the clear implication of saying AND is baptized is that both are conditions of salvation; otherwise, why say AND is baptized? The logic is the same as in the statement: Whoever has a ticket AND boards the bus will be given a ride, but whoever does not have a ticket will be left.

4. Jesus then lists signs that will accompany those who believe, that will occur within the Christian community: they will exorcise demons in his name, speak in new tongues (meaning new to them, languages they did not know), pick up snakes with their hands, be protected from harm should they drink poison, and heal the sick by the laying on of their hands.

a. According to v. 20, these signs did indeed accompany the disciples' preaching. Such things are noted in the New Testament. For example, Paul cast out the demon

from the fortune-telling slave girl (Acts 16:18; see Acts 19:15), spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18, as did others), was bitten by a viper without harm (Acts 28:3-5), and did extraordinary miracles through his hands (Acts 19:11-12), including the healing of Publius's father and others (Acts 28:8-9). The fact there is no report in the New Testament of a disciple being unharmed after drinking poison does not mean it did not occur.

b. Note that Jesus does not say how long these signs will occur among Christians. And v. 20 specifies that the purpose of these signs was to confirm the word they preached, to indicate that their message was indeed the message of God. Once that confirming function was accomplished through the signs accompanying the gospel message, and their occurrence was recording inerrantly by inspiration for all posterity, God may well have chosen to cease providing those signs. In other words, the fact such signs were once given does not establish that they must forever continue to be given.

D. Jesus ascends to heaven and the disciples preach with confirming signs in 16:19-20.