

Four-Week Study of the Gospel of Mark

This study spans the Gospel of Mark in chronological order, providing an overview of some of the gospel's major theological themes. It is divided into four sections. Each section includes a list of questions for discussion of the text, followed by notes that correspond numerically to the preceding questions, and may be consulted to enhance both individual study and group discussion. Each section also includes a chronological outline of the text. Two appendices are included as supplements to the study: a paper on the Christology of Mark and a brief Reflection on the Nicene Creed of 325 CE.

Week 1

Text: Mark 1:1-5:43

Questions for Discussion of the Text and Theological Issues Raised by the Text:

1. What is Mark's "good news" or Gospel? (1:1-15)
2. What is the significance of Jesus' claim that the "Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins?" (2:1-12)
3. What is "the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" and why did Jesus say it was the "unforgiveable sin?" Can we commit "the unforgiveable sin" today? (3:19-30)
4. Jesus seems to be redefining "family," or family relationships according to one's relationship to God. How might we understand and apply this concept of family today? (3:31-35)
5. What is the "mystery" or "secret" of the kingdom of God of which Jesus speaks, and how does this passage inform our understanding of the kingdom today? (4:11-12)
6. Compare and contrast the stories of the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus' daughter, within which the first story is "sandwiched." Why are these stories presented together, and how do they relate to one another? (5:21-43)

Exegetical Notes and Theological Reflections:

1. Mark's "Good News" or Gospel (Mark 1:1-15)

With his introduction, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1), Mark is ascribing divine authority to his gospel: this is not merely the evangelist's story *about* Jesus; this is Jesus' own word; it is *his* good news to his people. Mark then defines what the "good news" is by quoting the prophets Malachi and Isaiah. By identifying the fore-running "messenger" of Malachi 3:1,¹ and the "crying voice" of Isaiah 40:3² as John the Baptist (cf. 1:1-4), Mark is boldly proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah promised to Israel, which she knew according to her prophets would be God. Also from the context of Isaiah 40 it is further understood that Mark is announcing, "the glory (i.e., the salvation, cf. Isaiah 52:10; Luke 3:6) of God is about to be revealed" (cf. Isaiah 40:5).

So what is this good news? What is this promised salvation? At the conclusion of Mark's prologue, he defines the "good news" as follows: 1) the time is fulfilled, and 2) the kingdom of God has come near (1:14,15). We need look no further then to again, Isaiah 40, to see this promise about to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ defined as the comfort of God's people, through the forgiveness of their sins: "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1-2). At the conclusion of the gospel, included in the "shorter ending" following 16:8,³ the good news is equated with the proclamation of "eternal salvation," and this is indeed theologically consistent with Mark's opening quotation from Isaiah.

2. Jesus' Miracles of Healing as a Witness to His Authority to Forgive Sins (Mark 2:1-12)

Old Testament prophecies of salvation and the forgiveness of sins often include the language of physical healing, associating disease and sickness with sin, and health and wholeness with the forgiveness of sin. For example, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases (Psalm 103:2). And in this description by Isaiah of the New Jerusalem, wherein God dwells with his people, which we understand to be fulfilled in the church (cf. Hebrews

¹ Malachi 3:1 See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

² Isaiah 40:3 A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

³ The earliest manuscripts do not contain Mark 16:9-20. The scholarship community is divided over whether this "longer ending" was part of Mark's original gospel. Some manuscripts contain a "shorter ending" following verse 8, which reads: "And all that had been commanded they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." For more on the various perspectives on the ending of Mark, please see: Maurice Robinson et al., *Perspectives On the Ending of Mark: Four Views*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2008).

12:22-24; Revelation 21:2, 9-10), the eradication of “sickness” is accomplished by the forgiveness of sins:

Isaiah 33:24 And no inhabitant [of the New Jerusalem] will say, "I am sick"; the people who live there will be forgiven their iniquity.

In Mark’s gospel, Jesus comes on the scene healing, and specifically according to Isaiah’s prophecy,⁴ he heals the blind, deaf, lame and the mute, as well as many other diseases (cf. 1:29-34; 40-45; 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 5:21-41; 6:53-56; 7:31-36; 10:46-52). In addition to healing physical disease, Jesus casts out many “unclean” or “demonic” spirits (cf. 1:21-28; 32-34; 5:1-11; 7:24-30; 9:14-29).

When Jesus responds to the faith of the paralytic and his friends by saying to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven,” the scribes charge him with blasphemy, as only God can forgive sins. Jesus’ reply to them confirms that their understanding is indeed correct: only God can forgive sins. And just “so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” (in other words, so that you know that I, the Son of Man, am indeed God, “your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel”⁵), he says to the paralytic, “stand up” (cf. 2:1-12).

3. “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” and “the Unforgiveable Sin” (Mark 3:19-30)

First, spanning out and considering a larger context, this incident (3:19-30) is preceded by Jesus’ confirmation that He is indeed claiming to be God, who alone can forgive sins, in direct response to a charge of blasphemy from the Scribes—if only at this juncture in their unexpressed thoughts (2:1-12). Now we see him charging *them* with blasphemy for openly ascribing the works of God to the works of demons, or “Satan” (the prince of evil spirits, or the adversary). So in Mark’s chronology we see Jesus’ identity progressively revealed, and along with this revelation we see the Jewish leaders becoming increasingly bolder in their accusations against him, and in their denial of his deity—which is their rejection of God’s revelation of His salvation to humankind in Christ.⁶

Specifically to the question of why Jesus defines blasphemy as the “unforgiveable sin,” it is important to identify from the text what that “blasphemy” is. And we do have the definitive statement that Jesus is speaking against the “blasphemy” of those who had said,

⁴ Isaiah 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. (See also Luke 7:21-22.)

⁵ “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine... For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...I am the Lord and beside me there is no Savior...Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel... I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King... I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (cf. Isaiah 43:1,3,11,14,15,25).

⁶ First century Jews would have indeed understood from their prophets that Israel’s Savior would be none other than God. In fact, it is not possible to call Jesus “Savior” without also calling him “God” (cf. Isaiah 43:3; 45:21; Hosea 13:4).

“he has an unclean spirit” (3:30). In other words, this unforgivable blasphemy—committed in a specific time and place by a specific group of people--was the denial of Jesus’ deity, and not simply by suggesting he was a mere man rather than “the Son of Man,” but with the added force of claiming the works he performed to prove his identity were in fact works he performed by the power of “Satan.”

I have occasionally heard people wonder, “what if I have committed the unforgivable sin?” It is important that we remember the time and place context of this story. Again, Jesus was speaking to a specific group of people, who had committed a specific offense—that of denying that His works, done physically in their presence, were the works of God, and ascribing those works instead to the works of “Satan.” This is not a position any of us are in today, historically speaking. Beyond this, our theology, and specifically our soteriology,⁷ will dictate our response to someone who fears they may be “unforgivable.” When our faith in the power of the cross assures us that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ” (cf. Romans 8:1) we can comfort one another with this “good news.”

4. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” (Mark 3:31-35)

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (3:33-35).

That Jesus' biological mother and brothers, or at least some among them, were not yet believers could be reasonably inferred here. Regardless, Jesus is redefining “family” in the context of one’s relationship to God. He is also turning his attention, and presumably his affections, away from his biological family and toward his disciples.

St. Augustine once said, “Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ.”⁸ This speaks to the contrast Jesus makes between his biological family and what we might call his “spiritual” or true family. As Morna Hooker explains, “his true kinsmen are not those who are related to him by blood, but those who do the will of God.”⁹ This is a discussion that is also framed by our soteriology,¹⁰ and informed by the analogy of Scripture. For example, from the apostle John we learn that the children of God are those who receive Christ and believe in his name, “who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12,13).

⁷ “Soteriology” refers to the doctrine of salvation, or our belief about how one becomes saved, and would also encompass whether we believe one could ever “lose salvation.”

⁸ Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2005), 46.

⁹ Morna D. Hooker, *Gospel According to Saint Mark, The (Black's New Testament Commentary)*, Reprint ed. (Hendrickson: Baker Academic, 2009), 118.

¹⁰ Again, “soteriology” refers to the doctrine of salvation, or our belief about how one becomes saved, or in this context, how one becomes a child of God and enters God’s family.

5. “The Mystery of the Kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11-12)

Mark 4: 11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; 12 in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.' "

A major key to identifying the “mystery” or “secret” of the kingdom referred to in verse 11 is found in verse 12 (a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10): *those who would not understand this mystery would not be forgiven*. Those who have been given understanding of the mystery of the kingdom respond with repentance that leads to forgiveness; whereas those who have not been given understanding do not repent, and remain “outside” and unforgiven.

Mark introduces this association of the “mystery of the kingdom” with the forgiveness of sins from the very beginning of his gospel, when he equates the “good news,” or the Gospel, with the coming of the “kingdom.” This naturally leads us to consider the way that Paul uses the same word for mystery (Gr. *Musterion*) to refer to the mystery of the Gospel (cf. Ephesians 3:8-11; 6:19) and the mystery of Christ and His church (cf. Ephesians 5:32). I suggest that the “mystery of the Kingdom” is indeed the “mystery of the Gospel,” or “the mystery of Christ,” which “in former generations was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise [Israel’s hope] in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (cf. Ephesians 3:5-6).¹¹

The terms “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are synonymous in Scripture. Therefore when we consider what it means to “enter” the “kingdom of God,” we should consider also what it means to enter “heaven,” or the presence of God, through faith in Christ. It is also helpful to consider the Scriptures upon which Jesus and the New Testament apostles were basing their understanding of the “kingdom.” For example, Psalm 145 associates God’s mercy (which he performed by the cross) with the power and glory of his kingdom. And Isaiah 52 connects the reign of God in “Zion” (which the writer of Hebrews equates with the church, cf. Hebrews 12:22-24) with Israel’s salvation and the proclamation of the Gospel.

If one enters this “kingdom” (which is “heaven”) through belief in the Gospel, then it is understandable that those who expected a kingdom inaugurated through political deliverance from Roman oppression in the first century were those who were blind to the mystery—to the kingdom’s true nature--and that this blindness prevented them from

¹¹ It is indeed appropriate, when reading and reflecting on the Scriptures theologically, to associate one writer’s teaching on the kingdom and the Gospel with another’s. Paul proclaims the Gospel that was the fulfillment of Israel’s hope, anticipated by her prophets. Mark states from the beginning that his Gospel (which he associates directly with the coming of God’s kingdom) is the fulfillment of those very same prophecies. Both Mark and Paul associate the “mystery” (of the kingdom, or the Gospel, respectively) with *the forgiveness of sins*. Mark and Paul both read the same Scriptures, and both saw Christ as fulfilling them.

“turning again and being forgiven.” And it is no different today, as there are those who are looking for a physical fulfillment of the kingdom of God, or “Heaven on earth,” and are blind to its true nature, and missing the joy of its present reality.

6. Healing, Resurrection and Salvation (Mark 5:21-43)

The story of the ceremonially unclean woman’s healing is “sandwiched” within the story of the raising of Jairus’ daughter. The first thing we might notice is the contrast between the woman and Jairus. Not only is the woman “unclean,” and therefore untouchable to any law abiding Jew; Jairus, as a leader of the synagogue, would have been one to enforce such laws. The unclean woman’s presence is an intrusion as Jesus is on his way to Jairus’ home, which most certainly would have been appalling to most of those looking on, and maybe most especially to Jairus. But it is an intrusion welcomed by Jesus, who recognizes and rewards her faith.

The woman’s belief that she would be “made well” could also be read “saved” (Gr. *Sozo*, and is the same word used by Jairus when he asks Jesus to heal his daughter). This theme of touching Jesus’ clothes and being “healed” or “saved” is repeated in 6:36; and Jesus’ statement, “your faith has made you well [i.e., saved you]” is repeated verbatim in 10:56. We have precedent in Mark for physical healing being associated with spiritual healing (i.e., salvation, or the forgiveness of sins) in 2:5-12; and also with the healing that Jesus performs being a response to faith.

Whereas the woman only wants to touch Jesus’ clothes, and hopes to remain unnoticed; Jairus boldly asks Jesus to come into his home and “lay His hands” on his daughter. It is interesting that when Jesus addresses the woman, he tenderly calls her “Daughter,” which enunciates the wholeness of her healing—she is no longer an outcast, but a cherished family member of Israel’s household. (This may remind us of Isaiah’s image of the restoration of Israel’s “daughters” which is prophetic of the New Jerusalem, cf. Isaiah 60:4). In both cases—the healing of the woman, and the raising of Jairus’ daughter—Jesus states that faith is required in order for healing and resurrection to take place. Whether you are an outcast of society, or a member of the religious and social elite, it is your faith that will “make you well,” a “wellness” that has significance beyond the present moment. As Morna Hooker states, “the child’s resurrection would be understood as a symbol of [Israel’s] own future resurrection. The story of the woman would have been of special interest to the Gentiles, since they too, had once been ‘outsiders’, excluded from the community of God’s people. Both stories would have brought reassurance of the new life and salvation which came to believers through the power of Jesus.”¹²

¹² Morna D. Hooker, *Gospel According to Saint Mark, The (Black's New Testament Commentary)*, Reprint ed. (Hendrickson: Baker Academic, 2009), 148.

Chronological Outline of the Gospel of Mark

Section 1 (Mark 1:1-5:43)

I. Prologue (1:1-15)

- A. The Beginning of the Good News (1:1-4)
 - 1. Foretold by the Prophets (1:1-3; cf. Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3)
 - 2. John the Baptist: the fulfillment of Isaiah's "Messenger" (1:4)
- B. The Message and Ministry of John the Baptist (1:4-11)
 - 1. Preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4)
 - 2. Proclaiming the One to come who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:7-8; cf. Isaiah 44:3)
 - 3. The baptism of Jesus and the revelation of Jesus as that One (1:9-11)
- C. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness (1:12-13)
- D. Jesus begins preaching the Good News/Gospel (1:14-15)
 - 1. The time is fulfilled
 - 2. The kingdom of God is at hand/has come near
 - 3. Repent and believe the Good News/Gospel

II. Jesus calls first disciples, begins teaching, and performs first signs (1:16-49)

- A. The calling of Simon, Andrew, James and John (1:16-19)
- B. Teaching in the synagogues
 - 1. On the Sabbath in Capernaum (1:21)
 - 2. Throughout Galilee (1:39)
 - a. Preparation: solitude and prayer in preparation (1:35-37)
 - b. Purpose: "This is what I came to do" (1:38; cf. Isaiah 61:1-2)
- C. Casting out demons/unclean spirits
 - 1. In the synagogue at Capernaum (1:23-28)
 - a. Jesus' identity and authority confirmed by the unclean spirits (1:24; cf. Psalm 16:10)
 - b. Jesus' identity and authority questioned by the masses (1:27)
 - c. Jesus' fame spreads throughout Galilee (1:28)
 - 2. In the evening, as the whole city gathers (1:32-34)
 - a. Jesus heals many sick and casts out many demons
 - b. Jesus does not allow demons to speak
- D. Healing the sick
 - 1. Simon's mother in law in Simon's house (1:29-31)
 - 2. Many who were brought to him in Capernaum (1:32-34)
 - 3. The leper kneeling before him (1:40-45)
 - a. Jesus urges secrecy
 - b. Jesus urges fulfillment of the law (cf. Leviticus 14:1-32)
 - c. Jesus' fame spreads

III. Healing, Forgiveness, the Law and the Authority of the Son of Man (2:1-3:6)

- A. The healing of the paralytic: a sign of Jesus' authority to forgive sins (2:1-12)
 - 1. Jesus accused of blasphemy for claiming to forgive sins (2:6)

2. Jesus answers accusation by healing, demonstrating his authority and identity as God (2:8-12)
 - B. The Calling of Levi (2:13-17)
 1. Levi, the tax collector, follows Jesus (2:13-14)
 2. Pharisees accuse Jesus of eating with tax collectors and sinners (2:15-16)
 3. Jesus confirms his ministry to sinners, and his rejection of the [self] righteous (2:17)
 - C. Jesus proclaims himself “Lord of the Sabbath” (2:18-3:6)
 1. As the new wine, bursting the old wineskins, while filling the new (2:18-22)
 2. As the One whom the Sabbath was made for (2:23-27)
 - a. Jesus compares himself to David (2:25-26; cf. 1 Samuel 21:1-6)
 - b. Jesus claims authority to interpret the Law, and apply it in a new way (2:27)
 3. By healing on the Sabbath in the presence of his enemies (3:1-6)
- IV. Friends, Family and Foes (3:6-35)
- A. The Pharisees begin plotting to destroy Jesus (3:6)
 - B. Great multitudes follow Jesus (3:7-11)
 1. Both Jews and Gentiles, from many places (3:7-8)
 2. Because they had heard of his miracles (3:8-10)
 - C. Unclean spirits proclaim, “You are the Son of God” (3:11)
 - D. Jesus appoints twelve apostles (3:13-19)
 1. That they would be with him
 2. That they would be sent out to preach
 - E. Multitudes press in on Jesus (3:20-30)
 1. His disciples try to shield him (3:20-21)
 2. Scribes come from Jerusalem and accuse him of being demon-possessed (3:22)
 - a. Jesus tells his first parable recorded in Mark (“a house divided”), to refute their accusations (3:23-27)
 - b. In so doing, he accuses his enemies of blasphemy (3:28-30)
 - F. Jesus redefines “family” (3:31-35)
 1. His mother and brothers send for him
 2. “Who is my mother, or my brothers?”
- V. “With many such parables he spoke the word to them” (4:1-34)
- A. “A sower when out to sow” (4:1-20)
 1. Told to the multitudes (4:1-9)
 2. Explained to the twelve (4:10-20)
 - a. “To you has been given the secret”
 - b. So that prophecy will be fulfilled
(cf. Isaiah 6:9-10; 43:8; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2)
 - B. “A lamp under a basket” (4:21-24)
 1. Told to the twelve only
 2. “Everything secret will come to light”
 - C. “The seed that sprouts and grows” (4:26-29)
 1. First parable beginning “the kingdom of God is like”
 2. A prediction of the soon-coming “harvest”

- 3. Harkening back to Mark's prologue: "the time is fulfilled" (cf. 1:15)
 - D. "The Mustard Seed" (4:30-32)
 - 1. The smallest of seeds that grows into the greatest of shrubs
 - 2. So that the "birds" can make nests in its shade (cf. Isaiah 60:8)
- VI. Jesus calms the sea and heals a gentile on the other side (4:35-5:20)
- A. "Who is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" (4:41)
 - 1. Jesus' authority over nature confirms his identity (cf. Psalm 65:7; 89:9; 93:4)
 - 2. Jesus chides his disciples for having "little faith" (4:40)
 - B. Jesus heals a demon-possessed man in Gerasenes (5:1-20)
 - 1. Jesus casts demons into a herd of swine, which is drowned in the sea
 - 2. The formerly naked man is now clothed (cf. Isaiah 61:10)
 - 3. Jesus commands the man to go and tell his [gentile] friends "how much the Lord has done for you"
- VII. A Jewish ruler's daughter is raised to life, and a woman is healed (5:21-43)
- A. Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus (a ruler of the synagogue) from the dead (5:21-24; 35-43)
 - B. Jesus heals an unclean woman who touches him (5:25-32)
 - 1. The woman touches Jesus while "unclean" (i.e., untouchable) according to the law (cf. Leviticus 15:19,25)
 - 2. Jesus heals her in response to her faith

Preparation for Next Week:

Read the next section, Mark 6:1-9:13, answer the discussion questions on the study guide, and record any other observations or questions that come to mind.

Week 2

Text: Mark 6:1-9:13

Questions for Discussion of the Text and Theological Issues Raised by the Text:

1. Jesus had compassion on the crowds “because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” Some possible Old Testament allusions intended by Mark here are to Isaiah 48:17; 61:1-3 and Ezekiel 34:22-25. How do these prophetic texts speak to Jesus’ identity and mission in Mark’s gospel? (6:30-34)
2. Why was Jesus so hard on the Pharisees? In what way were they hypocritical? Is it possible for us to portray the Pharisees “unfairly” or irresponsibly and in such a way that contributes to anti-Semitism? (7:1-23)
3. How would the early Christians have understood Jesus’ command that his followers must “take up your cross and follow me?” Is there any application of this to us today? (8:34-35)
4. What is the historical context of Jesus’ statement to his disciples, “there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power?” What are the theological implications of understanding this passage in its first century context? (8:38-9:1)

Exegetical Notes and Theological Reflections:

1. “Sheep without a Shepherd” (Mark 6:30-34)

In this description of Jesus’ compassion for the crowd, “because they were like sheep without a shepherd; [he] began to teach them many things” (6:34); Mark is likely alluding to several Old Testament prophetic texts about the time of Messiah and the establishment of the New Covenant (cf. Isaiah 48:17; 61:1-3); but this passage in Ezekiel is especially significant in light of later references in Mark to Jesus as “Son of David” and the coming of David’s kingdom through him (cf. 10:47-48; 11:10):

Ezekiel 34: 22 I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. 25 I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely.

2. The Pharisees (Mark 7:1-23)

In Mark 7:6-8, Jesus identifies the Pharisees as 1) hypocrites, 2) those about whom Isaiah had prophesied rightly,¹³ and 3) those who had abandoned the commandment of God and were holding to human tradition (and it is appropriate to infer here that the human tradition they were holding to is being *contrasted* to the commandment of God, and is therefore opposed to it). Specifically, Isaiah’s prophecy names the Pharisees as those “who honor [God] with their lips, but [whose] hearts are far from [Him],” and as those whose worship of God is in vain. The Pharisees are specifically named five other times in the gospel of Mark (2:16-24; 3:3; 8:11-15; 10:2; 12:13). They are never presented in a positive light. In every encounter they have with Jesus and his disciples, they accuse Him of unrighteousness while exalting in their own righteousness. The Pharisees were those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt” (cf. Luke 18:9). They claimed to obey the law, but if they had truly known what it meant to obey it, they “would not have condemned the guiltless” (cf. Matthew 12:7).

Jesus said to the Pharisees that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them, and given to a nation bearing its fruits. And there was no doubt in their minds that he was speaking of them (cf. Matthew 21:43-45). Jesus addressed the Pharisees as descendants of those who had murdered the prophets, judged them guilty of “all the righteous blood shed on the earth,” and prophesied that judgment was about to come on their first century generation. Though they looked righteous on the outside, on the inside they were full of

¹³ Isaiah 29:13 The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote; so I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden. 15 Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for the Lord, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"

“all kinds of filth...hypocrisy and lawlessness” (cf. Matthew 23:1-38). The Pharisees were the “violent who sought to take the kingdom by force” (cf. Matthew 11:12); and Jesus accused them of hiding knowledge from the people: “You don’t enter the kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from entering” (cf. Luke 11:52).

While the Pharisees are sometimes presented by extra biblical sources as those who were concerned with returning Israel to a pure religion, through a stricter observance of the law, this characterization does not line up with the words of Jesus as recorded in the gospels. I believe in fact that as Jesus often quoted Isaiah to expose the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and self-righteousness, that they were those whom Isaiah accused of “trampling on the Sabbath, and pursuing their own interests on God’s holy day;” and who used the law to oppress God’s people (cf. Isaiah 58:1-5).

There are ways, however, in which irresponsible “Christian” portrayals of the Pharisees have contributed to anti-Jewish attitudes. It would never be responsible, or truthful, for example, to portray the self-righteousness of the Pharisees in the first century as attributable to their race. I am always perplexed when professing Christians do this, for it is completely antithetical to a theology of the cross, which understands Christ’s death as the atonement for the sins of “the whole world.” Indeed, those who crucified Christ did so because of “the definite plan and knowledge of God” (cf. Acts 2:23). “It was the will of the Lord to crush Him with pain.” “He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (cf. Isaiah 53:1-12). Therefore, any portrayal of the Pharisees with an anti-Semitic tone would be wholly incompatible with the Gospel. Instead, we should responsibly remind ourselves of Paul’s piercing question, “What then, are we better than they?” (cf. Romans 3:9) whenever we find ourselves pointing an accusing finger at others, including the Pharisees. It is true that the Pharisees (those of them who didn’t become believers) remained condemned for their self-righteousness; but it is also true that that same spirit of self-righteousness is bound up in each of us until we have been broken by the judgment of the Gospel, and have responded with repentance and faith.

3. “Take up your cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34-35)

Mark 8:34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

The earliest Christians were receiving these words in the context of persecution, and therefore they would have understood that to be a follower of Christ meant to participate in suffering for His name. We certainly see this demonstrated throughout the lives of the apostles in the book of Acts. “Losing one’s life” does not necessarily refer only to the loss of physical life, but also to the potential loss of one’s position in the hierarchy of the community. As most of the earliest Christians were Jewish, their community life would have revolved in large part around the synagogue, of which they would be outcasts upon becoming followers of Christ. It was their persecutors who had “the best seats in the

synagogues and places of honor at banquets” (cf. Mark 12:39). And just as Jesus warns them in another place in Mark, these early Christians (Jewish believers) would be “handed over to councils; and be beaten in synagogues; and would stand before governors and kings because of [Christ], as a testimony to them” (cf. Mark 13:9).

For us today, the “cross bearing” familiar to first century Christians may seem less relevant. However, as we reflect theologically on this passage, especially in light of New Testament admonitions regarding our communion with other believers, we will see that “cross bearing,” or the more accessible image of “burden bearing,” is the unique mark of a follower of Christ. Now, as we “bear one another’s burdens,” we “fulfill the law of Christ” (cf. Galatians 6:2). Christ’s commandment to us is that we “love one another as he has loved us” (cf. John 13:34; 15:12). And by this we know that we are his disciples: when we love one another (cf. John 13:35). And this love “covers a multitude of sins” (cf. 1 Peter 4:8) as we “confess our faults to one another” (cf. James 5:16)—in denial of ourselves and self-righteousness, silencing the voices of all accusers, either from within or from without—and “restore one another in a spirit of gentleness” (cf. Galatians 6:1), as those who are “holy and blameless in his sight” (cf. Colossians 1:22) because “he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that are now made the righteousness of God in him” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). We now bear the burdens for one another of sorrow, shame and guilt by comforting one another with the comfort of the Gospel (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2) and restoring one another to the joy of salvation in the New Creation, where all our judgments have been removed (cf. Zephaniah 3:15). This is the “cross” we now “take up” on one another’s behalf: “we love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19), when he “removed our transgressions as far as the east is from the west” (cf. Psalm 103:12) and now “remembers our sin no more” (cf. Isaiah 43:25).

4. “The Coming of the Kingdom of God with Power (in the lifetime of some who were standing there)” (Mark 8:38-9:1)

The historical context of “the kingdom of God coming with power” in the lifetime of “some who were standing there” is indeed past to us, and was fulfilled at the destruction of the temple in AD 70. This is not to say that the destruction of the temple *was* the coming of the kingdom, but rather that it was the visible *sign* that all that had been written had been fulfilled. In other words, these events were not the substance of the coming of the kingdom, but rather the visible sign of its coming. Of course, the sign itself was a display of God’s power, no doubt. In fulfillment of Christ’s words, “not one stone was left upon another” (cf. Mark 13:2). But it was the destruction not of the temple building itself, but of what it represented—the OT law and commandments being abolished, and the “rulers of that age being brought to nothing” (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6)—which ushered in the reign of Christ by the Gospel, and the establishment of “his government and peace which shall have no end” (Isaiah 9:6). The temple’s demise signified that the Old Covenant Age had passed away, and the New Covenant Age had begun. Jesus had indeed “made all things new” (cf. Revelation 21:5).

How one understands the nature of the kingdom will determine whether they believe it has fully come. For example, if one views kingdom promises as physical or geo-political

in nature, then they may see a yet future fulfillment. Whereas if one sees kingdom promises as spiritual in nature, and applying to a kingdom “not of this world” (cf. John 18:36), and which came “without observation” (cf. Luke 17:20), which exists within the hearts of God’s people (cf. Luke 17:21), and is experienced in their communion with God and with one another in His presence (cf. Psalm 16:11; Romans 14:17; Revelation 3:20; 21:3) then they will understand that God’s kingdom has fully come. However to say the kingdom has fully come is not to say it is not ever growing and expanding, as more and more enter (cf. Isaiah 60:11; Revelation 21:25); for “His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:7).

Chronological Outline of the Gospel of Mark

Section 2 (Mark 6:1-9:13)

VIII. “A Prophet without honor in his own country”: Jesus is rejected at Nazareth (6:1-4)

A. “Is this not the carpenter?”

IX. The sending out of the twelve (6:7-12)

A. Sent to preach repentance

B. Sent to cast out demons and heal the sick

X. Herod: “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised” (6:14-26)

A. Herod wonders who Jesus is

1. John the Baptist raised from the dead?

2. Elijah?

3. A prophet like one of old?

B. Mark inserts the story of John’s beheading at Herod’s birthday party in his narrative

XI. Jesus multiplies bread and walks on water (6:30-52)

A. “The feeding of the five thousand” (6:30-43)

1. “They were like sheep without a shepherd” (cf. Isaiah 48:17; 61:1-3; Ezekiel 34:22-25)

B. Jesus walks on water (6:45-52)

1. His disciples are amazed and marvel

2. Upon landing at Gennesaret, many recognize Jesus and flock to him for healing

XII. Pharisees use the law to condemn Jesus; He answers them with a parable, condemning them (7:1-23)

A. (See Acts 15:1f—The Council at Jerusalem)

B. Jesus to Pharisees: “You Hypocrites” (cf. Isaiah 29:13)

XIII. Jesus heals Gentiles (7:24-37)

A. Jesus gives “the children’s bread to dogs” (7:24-30)

B. Jesus heals the deaf mute in Decapolis (7:31-37; cf. Isaiah 35:5-6)

XIV. Jesus gives bread to the hungry, but warns of the “leaven” of the Pharisees (8:1-21)

A. Jesus miraculously feeds four thousand (8:1-10)

B. Pharisees demand a sign (8:11-12)

C. Jesus warns his disciples of the Pharisees’ “leaven” (8:13-21)

1. He chides them for their lack of understanding and faith

2. He reminds them of what they have seen him do

3. “Having eyes, do you not see?”

D. Jesus restores the [physical] sight of a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-25)

XV. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ (8:27-30)

XVI. The way of the cross (8:31-9:1)

- A. Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection (8:31-33)
- B. “Take up your cross and follow me” (8:34-37)
- C. Jesus predicts his coming in the glory of his father before some of his disciples die (8:38-9:1)

XVII. The Transfiguration (9:2-13)

- A. “This is my beloved Son” (reminiscent of Jesus’ baptism, cf. 1:11)
- B. Jesus predicts he will rise from the dead (and commands his disciples to tell no one what they have seen until this occurs)
- C. Jesus confirms that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy (cf. Malachi 4:5)

Preparation for Next Week:

Read the next section, Mark 9:14-12:44, answer the discussion questions on the study guide, and record any other observations or questions that come to mind. In addition, watch the video clip of N.T. Wright’s commentary on Jesus cleansing the temple at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1rTG9MMWN4> .

Week 3

Text: Mark 9:14-12:44

Questions for Discussion of the Text and Theological Issues Raised by the Text:

1. What did Jesus mean when he promised that his followers would “receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life?” Why is it that some Christians today who have “left everything” to “follow Christ” are not receiving “a hundredfold?” (10:28-30)
2. What is the significance of Bartimaeus addressing Jesus as “Son of David?” What do we learn from Jesus’ response? (10:46-52)
3. Is there a relationship between Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree and his cleansing of the temple? What might the fig tree represent? What Old Testament Scriptures does Jesus draw from, and what is their significance to his actions in the temple? (11:11-33)
4. What (or whom) is the parable of the “wicked tenants” about? How would the Pharisees have understood this parable? (12:1-12)

Exegetical Notes and Theological Reflections:

1. Riches in Christ (Mark 10:28-30)

*Mark 10: 28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."
29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters
or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,
30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters,
mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.
31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."*

As a point of historical context, it is first important to note the distinction of “this age,” and “the age to come” to which Jesus refers. “This age” is the age in which he and his disciples were still living—the Old Covenant Age, which had not yet come to an end as the [first, and physical] temple was still standing (cf. Hebrews 9:8-10). And the “age to come” refers to the New Covenant Age, which was still future, and in the process of becoming, to the apostles writing in the first century, but is now a present reality for us, who have received the “eternal life” of which Jesus speaks in this passage. So the *primary* application of “receiving a hundred fold in *this* age” is not for us, but rather for those who were in the process of entering the kingdom “through much tribulation” and persecution (cf. Acts 14:22). But as they were enduring this process, their “houses” and “family” and “fields” were indeed increasing—through the building of the church.

But as we are part of the same church, built upon the same “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (cf. Ephesians 2:20), our “houses” and “family” and “fields” are theirs, as theirs are ours, by inheritance of the “riches of Christ” (cf. Ephesians 2:7; Philippians 4:19; Colossians 1:27; 2:2). These are the “riches” of which the Bible speaks.

Jesus’ association of “receiving a hundredfold” with a familial inheritance (“brothers and sisters, mothers and children”) is elucidated by his earlier redefinition of his “family” (cf. 3:32-35) as those who do the will of God. And those who do the will of God are those who believe the Gospel, and thereby become the true children of Abraham, to whom all the promises of God belong (cf. John 6:29; Galatians 3:26-29; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

Unlike the televangelists or “prosperity gospel” preachers in our day, the Bible does not equate any aspect of the “riches of Christ” or the promises of God of “health” and “wealth” to his children with material goods or physical comfort. As Paul wrote in Romans, “the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (cf. Romans 14:17).

2. “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:46-52)

The blind beggar Bartimaeus’ recognition of Jesus as “Son of David” (10:46-52) is significant for several reasons. First, Jews would have understood this as a reference to

God's promise through the prophet Jeremiah, and associated it with the gathering of Israel into her "land," and her day of salvation:

Jeremiah 23:3 Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. 5 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Furthermore, Jesus does not rebuke Bartimaeus for addressing him this way, but rather rewards his utterance by asking, "What do you want me to do for you?" And after Jesus has healed him he confirms, "Your faith has made you well."¹⁴ Certainly this man had faith that Jesus could heal his physical blindness; but we see also in his initial request, "have mercy on me," together with his recognition that the man "Jesus of Nazareth" is also the "Son of David" who would restore Israel through a new covenant of peace (see again, Ezekiel 34:22-25), that his faith is in Jesus as his Savior.

3. The Cursing of the Fig Tree and the Cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:11-33)

It is no insignificant detail that immediately preceding Mark's account of Jesus cursing the fig tree, he has him going into the temple and looking around at everything (11:11). Then the next day, Jesus goes looking for fruit on the fig tree, and finds only leaves, "for it was not the season for figs" (11:13).¹⁵ And then he pronounces the curse, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again."¹⁶ The disciples hear it, and then [immediately after this] they enter Jerusalem, and Jesus enters the temple (11:14-15). This is Mark's story telling at its best! The association between the fruitless fig tree and the temple the Jews had turned into a "den of thieves" was not lost even on the perpetually slow-to-understand disciples. For after they left the temple and the city, they passed by the now withered-to-the-roots fig tree, and "Peter remembered" (11:17-21).

The Old Testament Scriptures Jesus is drawing from in this scene of his "cleansing of the temple" indeed shed light on the theological significance of Jesus' actions. Isaiah 56 looks forward to a time when the outcasts of Israel would be gathered back, into God's "holy mountain" (i.e., "Mt. Zion," or the church, cf. Hebrews 12:22-24). This then is

¹⁴ The phrase, "your faith has made you well" (i.e. "saved you," Gr. *Sozo*) is also Jesus' response to the unclean woman who touches his garment (5:34). We have precedent in Mark for the association of physical healing with spiritual healing (i.e., salvation, or the forgiveness of sins) in 2:5-12, the former serving as a sign or symbol of the latter, and the greater.

¹⁵ Contrast this fig tree, which was fruitless, and "out of season," with the Tree of Life in the center of the New Jerusalem (i.e. the church) which bears fruit *every* month (cf. Revelation 22:2).

¹⁶ Compare this curse to Jesus' statement to the chief priests and Pharisees, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom" (cf. Matthew 21:43).

likely a prophecy of the New Covenant and the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. By quoting it here, Jesus is signifying that the reality to which the temple pointed would be replacing the type or shadow that was the temple building, which was about to be destroyed. The second passage he is drawing from directly is Jeremiah 7, which contains within it a prophecy of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem; and by using the words, “you have made it a den of robbers” (Mark 11:17), he is identifying those presently in power within that system with those against whom Jeremiah’s prophecy is spoken.

In the video clip of an interview with N.T. Wright entitled “What is the significance of Jesus cleansing the temple?”¹⁷ Wright explains that Jesus was already doing things, like forgiving sins, “right there in the street,” which were “upstaging the temple.” He was “embodying a radical alternative to the temple,” which presents a dilemma: Whom/What do we now follow--Jesus, or the temple? The temple and its system was “an oppressive structure which the priests ran to their own advantage” (cf. Isaiah 58; Zephaniah 3). And now Jesus is saying, “God is now doing something which is making this system redundant.” So as Wright points out, it isn’t the commercialism, or even the monetary “thievery” with which Jesus is primarily concerned. “By overturning the tables, he stops the animal sacrifices. By stopping the sacrificial system, he is symbolically saying, ‘This whole system is under judgment, and before too long it will stop completely, because the temple will be destroyed.’” This makes so much sense within the context and chronological sequence of Mark. Just before this Jesus “curses the fig tree” for not being “fruitful.” Then he drives those from the temple who had turned it into a “den of robbers,” by using the sacrificial system to oppress God’s people, and to exclude the very outcasts and outsiders that God was about to gather to himself, into His “house of prayer for all nations.” Then immediately after, Jesus passes by the withered fig tree, within which is a lesson that the “mountain” [of prideful, pharisaical Israel] is about to be cast into the “sea” (cf. Revelation 8:8). Shortly after this, Jesus speaks a parable against the Pharisees, the “builders” who had rejected the Lord’s “cornerstone,” who were about to be cut off completely (cf. Mark 12:1-12). All of this becomes the backdrop for Jesus’ foretelling of the destruction of the temple, and “the end of the age,” which are to be simultaneous events.

Because the Jews in the first century had rejected the reality to which the temple pointed, effectually “worshiping the creature rather than the Creator” (cf. Romans 1:25); they were guilty of turning the temple of God, and the law which was given to them as a tutor to lead them to Christ (cf. Galatians 3:24), into an idol. And for this reason they would be about to be destroyed along with it.

It is important that we remember that the temple and its practices were part of the Old Covenant that was about to come to an end. The Old Covenant was never to be

¹⁷ N.T. Wright, *What Is the Significance of Jesus Cleansing the Temple?* (2001), The John Ankerberg Show (johnanderberg.org), Video Clip file, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1rTG9MMWN4> (accessed June 1, 2012).

permanent, nor was the temple (cf. Hebrews 8:6-12). The destruction of the temple was a sign of the end of the Old Covenant age, and insured the ending forever of the temple practices—animal sacrifices and such—which were part of a law that was “added because of transgressions” (cf. Galatians 3:19), and functioned to give the “knowledge of sin” (cf. Romans 3:20). In fact, in those very sacrifices, was “a reminder of sins every year” (cf. Hebrews 10:3). Now, through Christ, “a new and living way” into the “sanctuary” or the “holy place” (i.e., the presence of God—this room in the temple was not the “true” but rather a “copy” of it) was being opened, “through the veil” (remember the symbolism of the veil being torn in two), that is, “through his flesh” (cf. Hebrews 9:6-24; 10:15-21). Now, there would be no more yearly reminder of sins, and no “consciousness of sins” (cf. Hebrews 10:1-7) as in the New Covenant, God “remembers our sins no more” (cf. Hebrews 8:12). God’s people would no longer come to Jerusalem to worship, but “true worshipers would worship in Spirit and in Truth” (cf. John 4:23-24). The judgment that was coming upon the Pharisees, and those Jews who did not receive Christ as Israel’s Messiah, and did not heed Christ’s words to his disciples to “flee to the mountains” when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies (cf. Luke 21:20), and “the desolating sacrilege” (cf. Mark 13:14; Daniel 9:26-27), was indeed coming upon them for their idolatry. In seeking righteousness by works, they rejected the righteousness of God in Christ, and as Paul says, they “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (cf. Romans 1:25).

4. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-12)

Right after the scene of the cleansing of the temple in Mark, Jesus speaks this parable against the Pharisees, and concludes, “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others” (cf. 12:1-12). In Matthew’s account of this same parable, Jesus concludes, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom” (cf. Matthew 21:33-46). In light of this context, it would seem a stretch to *not* see Jesus’ actions in the temple as symbolic of its impending destruction—a destruction that was in itself symbolic of the end of the Old Covenant age, and the opening of the “gates of righteousness”:

Psalm 118:19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. 21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. 22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. 23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Chronological Outline of the Gospel of Mark

Section 3 (Mark 9:14-12:44)

- XVIII. Jesus heals a boy of a deaf and dumb spirit (9:14-29)
- A. "All things can be done for the one who believes." (9:23-24)
 - 1. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"
 - B. "This kind can come out only through prayer." (9:29)
- XIX. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, the second time (9:30-32)
- A. "The Son of Man is to be betrayed...and they will kill him."
 - B. His disciples did not understand.
- XX. Jesus instructs his disciples (9:33-50)
- A. "The first will be last" (9:33-37)
 - B. "Whoever is not against us is for us" (9:38-41)
 - C. "Everyone will be salted with fire" (9:42-49)
- XXI. Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce and adultery (10:1-12)
- A. Pharisees test Jesus: "Is it lawful?" (10:2)
 - B. "From the beginning of creation...For this reason": Jesus' authority pre-dates Moses (10:5-9)
- XXII. "Let the little children come to me" (10:13-16)
- A. "It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (10:14)
- XXIII. Jesus' conversation with the rich man, and a lesson for his disciples (10:17-31)
- A. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (10:17)
 - B. "Sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (10:21)
 - C. Jesus to his disciples: "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (10:24)
 - D. "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." (10:31)
- XXIV. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, the third time (10:32-34)
- A. Jesus travels with intention toward Jerusalem
- XXV. The Character of the Kingdom: Service to All (10:35-45)
- A. "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (10:45)
- XXVI. Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52)
- A. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (cf. Jeremiah 23:5)
 - B. "What do you want me to do for you?" (10:51)
 - C. "Your faith has made you well." (10:52)

XXVII. Jesus enters Jerusalem on a colt

- A. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (cf. Psalm 118: 24-26)
- B. In fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy (cf. Zechariah 9:9)

XXVIII. Jesus curses the fig tree and cleanses the temple (11:11-33)

- A. Jesus curses the fig tree (11:11-14)
 - 1. (After he had visited the temple)
 - 2. "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." (11:14; cf. Matthew 21:43)
- B. Jesus cleanses the temple (11:15-19)
 - 1. "As it is written" (cf. Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11)
 - 2. The Jewish leaders consider how they might destroy him
- C. The lesson of the withered fig tree: the power of prayer (11:20-26)
- D. The Jews question Jesus' authority in the temple (11:27-33)

XXIX. The Parable of the wicked tenants (12:1-12)

- A. "Have you not read the Scripture?" (cf. Psalm 118:22-23)
- B. The Pharisees know he has spoken against them

XXX. The Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes interrogate Jesus (12:13-34)

- A. The Pharisees: on paying taxes to Caesar (12:13-17)
- B. The Sadducees: on the resurrection (12:18-24)
- C. The Scribes: on the greatest commandment (12:28-34)

XXXI. Jesus claims to be David's Lord (12:35-37; cf. Psalm 110:1)

XXXII. Jesus condemns the pretense of the Scribes; praises the sacrificial gift of the poor widow (12:38-44)

Preparation for Next Week:

Read the next section, Mark 13:1-16:20, answer the discussion questions on the study guide, and record any other observations or questions that come to mind. In addition, watch parts 1 and 2 of Jim Cantelon's interview with Dr. Craig Evans about his book, *Jesus the Final Days* at these links: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPa6Wg1YNv4> and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_vLR-D9Lc0&feature=relmfu

Week 4

Text: Mark 13:1-16:20

Questions for Discussion of the Text and Theological Issues Raised by the Text

1. What is Jesus' "Olivet Discourse" in Mark 13 about? Is there anything in the context which suggests it applies to current events or events yet in our future? Are there details in this context that witness Jesus' divinity? Are there details in this context that witness his humanity? (13:1-27)
2. What is the significance of Jesus' anointing by the unnamed woman at Bethany? Compare and contrast her response and attitude toward Jesus with the Jews' who are plotting to kill him, with Judas' as he decides to betray him. (14:1-11)
3. According to Mark's gospel, why was Jesus crucified? (Our focus is on chapters 14 and 15 but you may wish to consider the larger context of Mark as well.)
4. Using the chronological outline with accompanying references as a guide, consider the Old Testament allusions found in Mark's account of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. How do these passages enhance your appreciation of the significance of Jesus' suffering and death? (14:32-15:41)

Exegetical Notes and Theological Reflections

1. The Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:1-27)

With reference this passage in Mark, Thomas A. Hatina cites the following definition of apocalyptic literature:

“ 'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an other worldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world... intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.”¹⁸

He then goes on to explain, “in light of *this* definition, Mark 13 should *not* be viewed as an apocalyptic discourse.” Why? Because it “does not contain a revelation from an other worldly being, nor does it make mention in the same way of a transcendental reality or a supernatural world.”¹⁹ Because Hatina has already stated that his primary hermeneutical approach is to read Mark as an isolated piece of literature, and that he considers its relationship to the Gospel (and thereby its salvific significance) to be secondary, it is understandable that he would take this view. It is also understandable that anyone who separates the time of the destruction of the temple circa AD 70 from the time of “end of the age” would need to distinguish any reference to the destruction of the temple from prophecies Christians have traditionally associated with a literal cosmological “apocalypse.” However, Jesus’ entire discourse in Mark 13 is indeed *all* about the destruction of the temple (this is confirmed by the immediate context: “when will this be?”); and it is *also* apocalyptic. Why? Because it does in fact “envisage eschatological salvation.” The destruction of the temple was the event that signaled the end of an old age/world, the old “heaven and earth,” or “Old Covenant,” and the beginning of a new age/world, the “new heaven and earth,” or “New Covenant”—The New Creation in Christ. In other words, Mark is *apocalyptically* speaking of the end of the Old Covenant age, the end signified by the destruction of the temple. And it was indeed the end of the “world” as they knew it. Unfortunately the word “age” (Gr. *Aeon*, cf. Matthew 24:3) is sometimes mistranslated as “world” and modern day Christians have taken the “end” to refer to a cosmological end, rather than a covenantal one.

Regarding the image of “birth pangs” (cf. 13:8), these could also be seen in relation to the birth of the church. While the specific context of “birth pangs” in Mark 13 refers to events prior to and leading up to the destruction of the temple, there is certainly imagery in the New Testament that suggests the church was in the process of being “born” during

¹⁸ Thomas A. Hatina, “The Focus of Mark 13:24-27: The Parousia, or the Destruction of the Temple?” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 46-47.

¹⁹ Hatina, “The Parousia,” 47.

this time. For example, when Paul writes to the Galatians, “My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). Especially if the “you” there is plural, and a corporate reference to the building of the church as “each one turned of the Lord” and entered the liberty of the New Covenant (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:16), these birth pangs were in process prior to the temple’s destruction and perhaps could be understood to have begun at Pentecost.

Both Jesus’ humanity and divinity are present in Mark 13. In verse Jesus refers to many who would come to falsely say “I am he,” which begs the question, “Who is he?” And Jesus answers it later by equating “he” with himself: the “Messiah,” and the “Son of Man.” In other places in Mark the “Son of Man” is identified as being equal to God (for example, God who alone can forgive sins, cf. 2:1-12). Jesus also states in this section that “the Son of Man would come in clouds with power and glory” (13:26), which is the same event described in 8:28 and 14:60-63 (and in the latter case especially, is presented as a claim by Jesus to his deity). Jesus also equates his own words with God’s words when he quotes Isaiah 40:8²⁰ (cf. 13:31). Then immediately after this, we have his statement of his own limited knowledge as to the day or the hour when his own coming in the clouds (an event to occur simultaneously to the temple’s destruction) would take place (cf. 13:32).²¹ So we do see both Jesus’ humanity and his divinity witnessed in this account.

2. Jesus’ Anointing at Bethany (Mark 14:1-11)

In Dr. Evans’ video interview,²² he presents an interesting perspective highlighting the contrast between the woman’s anointing of Jesus and Judas’ decision to betray him. It is certainly notable that in Mark’s account, Judas’ decision to betray Jesus immediately follows the scene that takes place at Simon the Leper’s home in Bethany. As Dr. Evans explains, when Jesus told his disciples that the woman was anointing his body for burial—something she herself had certainly not even considered—he was suggesting that he would die as a criminal, and not even be cared for at his death according to custom. Not only would he not be anointed as their political deliverer and king—and bring the “salvation” they expected when they had shouted “Hosanna [save now]” (cf. 11:8-10), the devotion this *woman* was showing him was the *only* anointing he was going to receive. Furthermore, his death as a criminal would be an embarrassment and

²⁰ Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

²¹ While this statement is problematic for interpreters, I do not, as some have suggested, believe that the Son of God set aside his divinity during his incarnation. I affirm the hypostatic union (as suggested by the Nicene Creed in 325 CE and further clarified by Chalcedon in 451 CE), but I affirm it by faith. It is beyond my comprehension. An admittedly insufficient, albeit faithful explanation is simply that when Jesus said even the Son didn’t know, it was his human nature speaking. (And yet he didn’t cease to at the same time divine—and therefore all-knowing: a fact so wonderful it surpasses our understanding.)

²² Dr. Craig Evans, *Jesus’ Final Days, parts 1 and 2* (2009), Interview by Jim Cantelon, Video Clip files, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPa6Wg1YNv4> and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_vLR-D9Lc0&feature=relmfu (accessed June 1, 2012)

disappointment to his followers, and it was this disappointment—and Jesus’ betrayal of their expectations and hopes—that causes Judas to “throw in the towel” at this very moment and make the decision to betray him.

This scene in Bethany also presents a powerful picture of the role-reversal that marks Christ’s kingdom in contrast to society’s expectations. Jesus is king, and yet his “anointing” is not at all what Israel would have expected of one of her kings. In contrast to the Old Testament kings and their kingdoms, Jesus’ kingdom is “not of this world” (cf. John 18:33,36), and there are probably two levels of meaning there. Certainly, his kingdom is not of a geo-political nature, but rather, he “slays the nations” by the Gospel (cf. Revelation 19:15) and rules in the hearts of his people through the conquering of sin and death. But “not of this world” could also refer to the “new thing” (cf. Isaiah 43:19) God was doing through the “new and living way” (cf. Hebrews 10:20) or New Covenant. In Christ there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile (cf. Galatians 3:28). True worshipers worship in “Spirit and Truth” (John 4:23), and no longer in a “temple made with hands” (cf. Acts 7:48; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 9:24). In order for Christ’s kingdom to be established, “the power of the holy people” (cf. Daniel 12:7) had to be destroyed, and “the rulers of that age brought to nothing” (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6). Therefore, the turning upside down of Old Covenant Israel’s power structure could be seen in this rather startling scene of a woman anointing Israel’s self-proclaimed “king” outside of the temple, in the house of a leper.

3. The Purpose of Jesus’ Death in Mark (Mark 14:12-15:41)

Our theology of the cross and what it accomplished for us is appropriately informed by *all* of Scripture, not just by Mark in isolation, and in many ways by a “hind-sight” that Jesus’ contemporaries didn’t have. They were in fact looking for a Messiah, but they were not looking for Jesus, as the “salvation” he was offering was not according to their expectations of political deliverance. But Mark does record statements by Jesus in chapters 14 and 15 that speak to his intent to bring salvation—of another kind—by his death. At the Passover celebration he states, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (14:24). He has already predicted his death and resurrection several times, and already stated that he “came to give his life as a ransom [theologically understood as a substitutionary sacrifice informed by Old Testament allusions and also Paul’s exposition]” (cf. 10:45). Yes, Jesus was crucified at the hands of the Romans *in Mark*, and according to Mark, because he was a threat to the peace of Rome. Because the chief priests were jealous of him (15:10), and because he committed blasphemy in the eyes of the high priest (14:63), they turned him over to Rome to be killed, for perceived acts of sedition. He was betrayed by one of his disciples because he failed to meet his expectations of political grandeur, and abandoned by all the others because they were disappointed and disillusioned. This was not the Messiah they had read about in their prophets (the way they understood them), and yet he claimed to be the One that was promised. Of his disciples’ abandonment, he tells them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”” (cf. 14:27; Zechariah 13:7). And regarding the way he was taken in the garden, he states, “let the Scriptures be fulfilled” (14:49). These are the same Scriptures, which Jesus claims to be

fulfilling, that inform much of our theological understanding of his death and what it accomplished. Are we imposing these Scriptures onto the gospel narratives of this event after the fact, or did Jesus in fact *intentionally* fulfill them--by dying, at the hands of the Romans for disturbing their peace, *and* on purpose: to “give his life a ransom for many,” by his “blood of the [new] covenant?”

4. Reflecting on the Cross from the Perspective of the Prophets (Mark 14:24-15:41)

As Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples, just prior to his betrayal, he proclaims to them what is surely the fulfillment of “good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” that Mark announces at the beginning of his gospel: “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many” (cf. 14:24). Jesus is identifying himself as the righteous Servant who would justify many, by bearing their sins (cf. Isaiah 53:11; Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus then goes on to quote Zechariah (cf. 14:27; Zechariah 13:7), placing himself squarely in the middle of that eschatological context, and very likely hearkening back to his words recorded at the beginning of Mark’s gospel: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (1:15).

Again, speaking of the way he is taken in the garden, Jesus states “let the Scriptures be fulfilled” (cf. 14:49).²³ Before his accusers he keeps silent (cf. 14:61; 15:5).²⁴ And on the cross he cries, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34; cf. Psalm 22:1), thus fulfilling the purpose for which he, the Son Man, came: “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (10:45).

Mark’s narration of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion in chapter 15 contains obvious allusions to three Messianic psalms (22, 69 and 109), as well as to Isaiah 53, which Christians commonly understand to be prophetic of Christ. While some scholars question this latter connection with the “Servant Song,” a close study of the larger context of Isaiah 53, beginning with chapter 52,²⁵ will confirm that the entire passage is speaking of Christ and his satisfying sacrifice, and the subsequent victory of the Gospel over the nations. The association between Mark’s passion narrative and “the Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 53 is indeed confirmed by the context of Isaiah, even without Mark 15:28 (“So the Scripture was fulfilled...”), which some manuscripts and translations, including the academically acclaimed NRSV, omit.

²³ Possible referents include Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 53:7.

²⁴ Again, Isaiah 53:7 is very likely in view here.

²⁵ For just one of many examples, it is doubtful that anyone would deny that the “servant” of Isaiah 52 is the subject of Isaiah 53 as well. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15 in Romans 15:20-21, and confirms that the prophecy is fulfilled by Christ, and by the Gospel going to the Gentiles.

Chronological Outline of the Gospel of Mark

Section 4 (Mark 13:1-16:20)

- XXXIII. Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple and the end of the age (13:1-27)
- A. “Not one stone shall be left upon another” (13:1-2)
 - B. Peter, James, John and Andrew ask Jesus a two-part question in reference to the temple’s destruction (13:3-4):
 - 1. When will these things be?
 - 2. What will be the sign when all will be fulfilled?
 - C. Signs the end is near (13:5-13)
 - 1. Deceivers claiming to be Christ (“antichrist” fulfilled in first century, cf. 1 John 2:18)
 - 2. Wars and rumors of wars (cf. Zechariah 14:2-3)
 - 3. Disciples (“you”) delivered to councils and beaten in the synagogues
 - 4. Gospel preached to all nations (fulfilled in the first century, cf. Romans 16:25-26)
 - 5. Brother will betray brother (cf. Micah 7:5-6)
 - 6. Disciples (“you”) hated by all
 - D. Abomination of desolation, tribulation and the Coming of the Son of Man (13:14-37)
 - 1. Daniels’ abomination of desolation (13:14-18; cf. Daniel 9:26-27; 11:31; 12:11)
 - a. Flee to the mountains (cf. Zechariah 2:6-8)
 - b. Don’t look back
 - 2. Great tribulation in those days, shortened for the sake of the elect (13:19-20; cf. Isaiah 65:8)
 - 3. Beware of false christs and false prophets (13:21-23)
 - 4. Sun and moon darkened (13:24-25; cf. Isaiah 13:9-11; 14:4,12-15; Isaiah 34:3-4; Ezekiel 32:5-8; Joel 2:10-11; 2:30-32; 3:14-15; Amos 1:9; Zephaniah 1:15)
 - 5. Son of Man coming in the clouds (13:26; cf. Daniel 7:13-14)
 - 6. The gathering of the elect (13:27; cf. Isaiah 11:11; Ezekiel 39:28; Zechariah 10:9-10)
- XXXIV. The parable of the fig tree (13:28-31)
- A. “This generation will not pass away” (13:30)
 - B. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will never pass away” (13:31; cf. Isaiah 40:8)
- XXXV. “Watch and Pray” (13:32-36)
- XXXVI. Jesus’ last days (14:1-11)
- A. Jews plot to capture and kill Jesus (14:1-2)
 - B. Jesus anointed by woman at Bethany (14:3-9)
 - C. Judas plots to betray Jesus (14:10-11)
- XXXVII. “The Last Supper” (14:12-31)
- A. Jesus announces a New Covenant (14:22-25)

- B. Jesus predicts Peter's betrayal (14:26-31)
- C. It is written: "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered" (14:27; cf. Zechariah 13:7)

XXXVIII. Jesus' prayer, betrayal and arrest at Gethsemane (14:32-52)

- A. "Not what I want, but what you want" (14:36; cf. Isaiah 50:5)
- B. "Let the scriptures be fulfilled" (14:49; cf. Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 53:7)

XXXIX. Jesus before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65)

- A. "Many gave false testimony against him, but their testimony did not agree" (14:56; cf. Psalm 27:12; 35:11)
- B. Jesus keeps silent before his accusers (14:61; cf. Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32)
- C. "Are you the Christ?" "I am." (14:61-64)

XL. Peter denies Jesus (14:66-72)

XLI. Jesus before Pilate (15:1-15)

- A. "The whole council" hand Jesus over to Pilate (15:1; cf. Psalm 2:2; Acts 3:13)
- B. Jesus takes the place of Barabbas (15:6-15; cf. Leviticus 16:1-34)

XLII. Jesus is crucified (15:16-41)

- A. "They divided his clothes...and cast lots" (15:24; cf. Psalm 22:18)
- B. "So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'he was numbered with the transgressors (15:28—this verse is omitted by oldest manuscripts, not included in NRSV—cf. Isaiah 53:12)
- C. "Aha!" (15:29-30; cf. Psalm 22:6-7; 69:7; 109:25)
- D. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34; cf. Psalm 22:1)

XLIII. Jesus is buried (15:42-47)

XLIV. Jesus' resurrection and post-resurrection appearances (16:1-18)

- A. Women discover the empty tomb (16:1-8)
(*The "shorter ending" follows verse 8; verses 9-20 are not included in the oldest manuscripts.*)
- B. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (16:9-11)
- C. Jesus appears to two disciples on the road (16:12-13)
- D. Jesus appears to the eleven (16:14-18)
 1. Jesus commissions them to preach the good news (16:15)
 2. Promises signs and wonders will accompany faith (16:17-18)
- E. Jesus ascends to heaven and disciples proclaim the Good News (16:19-20)

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Appendices

A: *The Christology of Mark*

B: *A Case for the Worship of the Son of God* (a brief reflection on the Nicene Creed of 325)