

**The Gospel
According
to Mark**

Geoffrey C. Bingham



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The Gospel According to Mark

by Geoffrey Bingham

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

to “*New Creation*” Commentary Series

The Commentaries which have been prepared, and which are in preparation for this series, are intended to be modest both in their material and format. There are reasons for this kind of production.

Although the first consideration is not that of cost, we will, nevertheless say that it is an important reason. Many books are made to be attractive, and welcome as this is, it adds to the cost. We have tried to keep the price within that range which makes it easy to purchase the volumes as they appear. Secondly, we make no claim to have produced a work of either great scholarship, or one for the meticulous exegete. It is for those whose time is limited in looking up many commentaries. We have done this work for them, and in that sense the commentaries are the result of the fruits of other men’s labours, with a modest addition by the writers, who themselves gather impressions by the way and often, even have helpful insights.

Those who use these commentaries will not find them inspirational, for that was not their intention. They simply present valuable material and insights on the books with which they deal. Is it too high a claim to say that the material presented is worthy of trust, and should prove valuable to those who teach classes, groups, and who preach from pulpits and other places? We think they can be valuable, if not, always, wholly sufficient.

The Editors.

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INTRODUCTION

ABBREVIATIONS

- Johnson *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, by S. E. Johnson,
(A. & C. Black, London 1960).
- Cole *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, by
R. A. Cole, (Tyndale Press, London, 1966).
- Lenski *The Interpretation of Mark's Gospel*, by R. C. H.
Lenski, (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis,
1946.)

I. REGARD FOR THE GOSPEL

From at least the fourth century until the 19th century Mark's Gospel was not highly regarded, as it seemed to scholars and commentators that it was simply an abstract of the longer Gospel of Matthew. For this reason it was partly neglected. The advent of Source Criticism (the sifting out of *sources*) and Form Criticism (the sifting out of materials with a view to their chronological origins and significance) have brought Mark into prominence. It is still debated as to which was the first Gospel, but whilst tradition leans slightly to Matthew on this score, modern scholarship comes down for Mark, and indeed credits Mark as having created the form or pattern of the Gospel. Thus regard for Mark is greatly heightened.

II. WHAT A GOSPEL IS

The word Gospel (Anglo-Saxon "Godspell") simply means "good tidings." Because we possess four Gospels we assume (i) That this was a contemporary form of biography copied by the writers of the Gospels, and (ii) that it was intended to cover the sayings and doings of Jesus. The evidences are that biography as such was not the order of the day. The recent discovery of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas indicates that documents existed which were simply a collection of sayings. Certain scholarship today indicates that the Gospels were themselves a form of "good news," and that they contain various sections of teaching that were used by the apostles and evangelists, and that such as Mark simply drew them together for a fuller account.

In order to understand what a Gospel constituted it is necessary to reconstruct the audience situation to which the early evangelists preached. If Jews they would want to see the relevancy of this message that seemed so strange – they would want to link it with the teaching and traditions of the past, including their Scriptures. It would have to be consistent with them. The Gospels were surely written with such a view. They would not simply be memoirs for people interested in one who had caused a stir, and who might even have the truth. The accounts were intended to be “proclamation” in some sense or another. It may well be that they took the form of contemporary preaching, but this would be so to an audience (Jewish) which generally was familiar with the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament. The Gospels were “Old Testament related.”

A gospel, then, in this understanding would be a relevant document making relevant the proclamation by that manner of account which would prove the thesis of the writer, and so confront the reader with the message of the good news, thus calling for a decision or judgement. This is why Mark’s Gospel in particular commences: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

III. HISTORICAL EVIDENCES OF AUTHORSHIP

The earliest evidence is that recorded in the 4th century by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical history, written by Papias of Hierapolis about the mid-second century. It is “Mark, since he was the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, but not in order, the things said or done by the Lord as much as he remembered. For he had neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterwards as I have said (heard and followed) Peter, who fitted his discourse to the needs (of his hearers) but not as if making a narrative of the Lord’s sayings; consequently, Mark, writing some things just as he remembered, erred in nothing; for he was careful of one thing – not to omit anything of the things he had heard

or to falsify anything in them.”

The least conclusion we can gather is that “the Lord’s sayings” almost certainly refers to collections of such as extant. Eusebius himself was not enamoured of Papias because of his millennial views and therefore his acceptance of Papias’ statement seems to confirm the view that the church generally held this view of Mark’s Gospel. Papias’ information is strengthened by the generation-later anti-Marcionite prologue to Mark when it says Mark reduced the preaching of Jesus to writing (in Italy) after the death of Peter. Irenaeus (“Against Heresies”) also confirms this general tradition, but is seemingly dependent upon Papias. Papias (“Frag.2:15) seems to suggest that John (“the Presbyter”) knew of Mark’s writings. Probably the early views concerning Mark’s Gospel were to a great degree dependent upon Papias. Commentators such as Nineham (“St. Mark” – Pelican, p.20ff) seem to cancel out the claims of Papias. Other confirmation of Papias’ view may be seen in the Muratorian Canon, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Jerome, although of a considerably later date.

IV. MARK THE AUTHOR

Is the Mark of the Gospel tradition the Mark of the Acts and Epistles? The Mark of Acts is mentioned in 12:12,25, 15:37,39. He is known particularly as John Mark. Mark is mentioned in Col. 4:10, II Tim. 4:11, Philemon 24, I Peter 5:13. Col. 4:10 identifies him as the nephew of Barnabas, i.e. the Mark of Acts. Acts 12:12 shows that Mark’s mother’s home is a centre for believers, and she possibly a woman of substance. Mark – at first rejected – is an acceptable companion of Paul, and also of Peter (Col. 4:10, I Pet. 5:13). These elements of Mark’s life indicate that he would be well in a position to be the Mark of the Gospel (writing) tradition.

For those who oppose the traditional view there are two elements which count against that view, (i)

Mark has a non-Palestinian background – an argument against the Mark of Jerusalem, and (ii) The non-Petrine nature of the Gospel, that is that the material cannot be counted as Peter's. Both of these arguments can by no means be said to be conclusive. For this reason a number of scholars favour the traditional view. S.E. Johnson ("The Gospel According to St. Mark" 1960 p.19) actually considers him a Gentile Christian of Rome "almost hostile to Judaism."

V. DATE OF AUTHORSHIP

If Papias' tradition is to be taken into account, then Mark must have written after the death of Peter. However Papias' account must be interpreted through other things written namely from Eusebius' account that Mark being asked to write out the things which Peter had said did so "and when he had done this, he gave the Gospel to those who asked him. When Peter learned of it later, he neither obstructed nor commended." (Eusebius, HE 6:14L6f). This could still allow it in Peter's time. Clement of Alexandria reports that it was during Peter's lifetime that the Gospel was produced. Irenaeus says it was following Peter's death. One reconciliation of the two seemingly opposed reports is that Mark may have commenced the writing of the Gospel before Peter's death, completing it after the death.

Some commentators suggest that Mark 13 ("The Little Apocalypse") was occasioned by some such event as Caligula's attempt to place his own statue in the Temple in AD 40 or the later event of Titus' decimation of Judaism in the destruction of Jerusalem. This view is taken on the grounds that Jesus could not have predicted such an event, but that Mark, or the editor of his sources could see in the trend of events the probability of the defilement of the Temple. Any view which links Mark with the fall of Jerusalem and the consequent suffering must to some degree be tenuous.

Other commentators, almost on the same grounds

(of the Fall of Jerusalem) suggest that Mark would not have dared to write in such vein. In any case it is a moot point as to whether Mark 13 is totally (or even partly) linked with the events of AD 70. The date agreed on by the majority of commentators is between AD 60 and 70 although some suggest as early as AD 50 or even AD 40 and this is not at all impossible.

VI. RELATIONSHIP TO THE OTHER SYNOPTICS

Since the mid-nineteenth century the view has been held that Matthew depends to a large degree upon Mark, and it is clear that Luke wrote his Gospel with dependence upon others (See Luke 1:1f). What is clear is that there is a block of material which is common to the three Gospels. The Synoptic problem, when faced seems to insist upon Mark and another source (known as "Q") as the basic material upon which Matthew and Luke work. *Source criticism* seeks to trace all the sources which make up the entire range of Synoptic materials. *Form criticism* however works on the nature of the material rather than its source. It seeks to see whether it was in the nature of a proclamation, or was intended to be of an apologetic or explanatory nature. By this certain strata could be said to be detected. Thus basic material could be discovered. Both these methods have their dangers. The intricate judgements of Form Criticism have resulted in calling the accounts of the Gospels in question. Exponents like Bultmann no longer look for historicity in the accounts, but debate the point that these accounts directly intend to convey historicity. The most we can say is that certain material is common to all Gospels and Matthew and Luke may have leaned upon Mark. When we recognise that the intention of each Gospel, was somewhat different, then we agree that the structures will also vary. This will account for some variations in accounts, none of which invalidates any particular account.

VII. THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL

If we accept the view that Mark was not written to be a biography of the life of Christ – eg. he is not concerned with the birth or childhood narratives and that its accounts are not consecutive, then we can more easily understand its structure. Some have suggested that it is the basic framework of the Synoptics, eg. an introduction, the Galilean ministry, the ministry outside Galilee, the journey to Jerusalem, and the final ministry climaxing on the events of the crucifixion and resurrection. Others have seen it as following the pattern outlined in Acts 10:37f – that is Peter’s “kerugma pattern.” Since the passion narrative takes a large portion of the Gospel it may be thought that it is for this Mark writes and all that precedes it is a background and foundation of what he is out to expound. For example this is the one Gospel which has three mentions, predicatively of the Cross (8:31, 9:31, 10:33). This would make the Gospel structured about the death and suffering. Certainly the passion and resurrection account is clearly chronological and so it is reasonable to assume the preceding material is somewhat of the same nature.

It cannot be denied that there is not a clear, concise chronological account as, say, in Luke. At the same time there is no need to go into various tortuous and strange theories of structure such as are expounded by Austin Farrer, Marxsen, Carrington and Nineham. Much may be solved when we remember that the oriental pattern of writing as well as teaching does not follow our modern Western prescriptions. It may well be that there are certain clusters of sayings and doings which were used according to preaching patterns. It is difficult, however, to determine.

VIII. THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

If Papias is to be taken as a guide, then Mark was anxious to preserve the elements of the Gospel as

Peter expounded them. These would constitute the important sayings (*logia*) and doings (*erga*) of Jesus. Peter’s sermons insist on such in the Book of the Acts. It is not doubted that Mark is concerned with (a) Action and (b) Some interpretation of the person of Jesus. Most clear is that he is giving a clear account of the suffering of Christ, with something of the purpose of the same. He sets out to show Jesus as Son of God, and Son of Man. We probably do not have to see anything of greater import. There may be some deep intention in the use of the Gospel, that is that it should be of a catechitical nature, even to the point where it may be easy to memorise, or at least some of its sections.

IX. CHARACTERISTICS OF MARK

It has been suggested that Mark, because of its simplicity represents the most primitive tradition of the Gospel. A. Cole (IVF Bible Dictionary p.784) suggests the opposite. His contention is that the most developed accounts are simple. Mark is certainly simple, even to the point of bluntness, and shows commendable economy in description. At the same time he notices many details, cf. 2:4, 4:37,38, 6:39, 7:33, 8:23f, 14:54. He is strongly descriptive. His Gospel is constantly moving in action. Many of the stories and sayings are linked by keywords or similarity of subject rather than mere chronological sequence.

Mark does not lack candour, being quite critical of the disciples where it is valid. The criticisms of Jesus, and even his inability to do works at Nazareth are recorded (see 4:13, 6:52, 8:17,21, 3:2, 1:27, 10:24, 32, 6:5,6). He also records the range of emotions involved, i.e. love, compassion, severity, anger etc. (1:41,43, 3:5, 8:12,33, 10:14,15,21).

His Gospel is undoubtedly of immense value to Jewish groups. At the same time various explanations of Jewish customs and places makes it clear that he is

making it understood to Gentile readers. (See Guthrie “New Testament Introduction” p.50 Vol. 1).

Finally we see in Mark three aspects or offices of Jesus – Son of God, Son of Man and (Servant) – Redeemer. Mark 1:1,11, 3:11, 5:7, 15:39 are some of the references directly to this, but it is the *action* which demonstrates this Sonship, such as the miracles, the exorcisms. Whilst no direct doctrinal claims are expounded yet his being Christ, albeit partly concealed is evident. His being Son of Man has certainly to do with His being truly man – i.e. with weaknesses, human frailty etc. At the same time it is also linked with a deeper significance. The phrase “Son of Man” is more than just his humanity as is seen by 2:10,28, 8:31, 9:9,12,31,33, 14:41,62. The Redeemer of Mark 10:45 is also Servant. It is not too much to link this with the Servant of Isaiah, and the Servant who suffers. This is “Petrine” teaching, without a doubt.

X. THE MARKAN ENDING

The ending of Mark 16 is in doubt. In fact there are two endings – one which is the section vs. 9–20 (as in the AV) and another ending “But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” An overruling majority of manuscripts contain the full twenty verses and the earliest Christian writings show an acquaintance with them, assuming their genuineness.

For all this it seems that many important manuscripts show that the original Gospel ended at v.8 (See Guthrie op.cit.p.72). Certain internal elements of vs.9–20 raise doubt as to whether this was the author’s creation eg. the fuller description of Mary Magdalene after her first mention in v. 1. Verses 9–20 seem to be gathered elements from the other three Gospels. Stylistic differences are also present.

On the other hand such an abrupt ending at v.8 is also inconsistent with the nature of the Gospel, and the intention of its writing. This has led to the belief that the end (a scroll end?) has been lost and another substituted. A further idea was that Mark had intended to go on into an account such as is the Acts of the Apostles. The matter is indeterminate, but it is sufficient to say that the early Church accepted its substance, and to a great degree it must reflect their mind, and therefore have value.

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COMMENTARY

CHAPTER ONE

This Is The Gospel – Of The Son Of God.’

1:1 A dramatic opening. *beginning* (cf. Gen. 1:1, Hos. 1:2, John 1:1). Mark means “here the good news (recounted) begins.” *good news* = gospel, that is God’s activity through Jesus. It does not refer to the book, but to the news concerning Jesus. This is exactly what the gospel Mark has written tells us. It is the news about Jesus – his person, teaching, works, resurrection. The *beginning* (Acts 10:37) is the clear commencement of a period and action by God in His Son. This is the good news. *Jesus Christ*. cf. Matt. 1:21. Hellenised form of Joshua (Hebrew) or Jeshua (Aramaic) = “God is salvation.” *Christ* is Messiah – “anointed one.” This is not a usual name for him in the Gospels – more Pauline. *Son of God*. This phrase not in some MSS but overwhelming evidence that it is authentic. As we have seen in the introduction it is Markan in flavour. This first verse is a fine kerugmatic statement, and as such makes the writing immediately relevant.

The Prophetic Word Authenticates

1:2–3 *As it is written* – this relates the good news to what has (stands) written in the past. It is not new and novel. It is the actual fulfilment of the Old. Quotation (Best MSS have “Isaiah the prophet” not “prophets”) of Mal. 3:1, and Isa. 40:3 refer not to Jesus but to John the Baptist. Mark sees John as the direct fulfilment of the prophecy. He is Christ’s messenger (angelos) as well as forerunner. With John *begins* the action of the good news. The past is now

linked to the present. (cf. Exod. 23:20). Note the substance of these verses – the original message of Isa. 40 was to captive Israel – for redemption. That redemption, partially given, is now to be full. It is to be with the coming of the *Lord*. Jesus, here, is Lord. The forerunner is to make ready the way for the Lord – by the preaching of repentance, and preparing a people ready to hear the Lord when he comes. This is pictured in Isaiah as actually levelling the King’s highway.

The Prophet of The Spirit

1:4-8 In accordance with Isaiah’s prophecy John actually appeared in the wilderness. Luke 1:5-80 gives us a full account of his preparation and the supernatural events attending his birth and commission. It is undoubted that the Jews knew of him, and his claims – see Matt. 3:1f, John 1:19-27, Luke 3:1f. *The baptism of repentance for remission of sins* is proclaimed by John. From one point of view he was unauthorised by contemporary patterns of Judaism. He stands however with great authority. His *baptism* was not Christian baptism, nor linked with the gift of the Holy Spirit. *Repentance* (Gk. *metanoia*) means “change of mind or attitude.” The Hebrew means (*teshubbah*) the complete change of mind with its immediate results – turning away from sin, a changed life, making restitution etc. John demanded that repentance accompany baptism which was for the remission of sins. We can see that cleansing is signified by water, but did they receive forgiveness or remission at this point? Other Gospels link the baptism with the Kingdom, entrance into it being by cleansing. The place in which John baptised was by the Jordan river, traditionally a little north of Jericho. To this great crowds from Jerusalem and Judea came. Their acceptance of his ministry (he was like Elijah in his manner of living) meant they recognised and accepted his divine authority. Whilst some questioned it (John 1:19-28) most responded in obedience by the *confession of sins* which

was the mark of repentance. *Camel’s hair* probably refers to clothes made of camel’s hair. *Locusts* were the actual insects, as often today in eastern countries cf. Lev. 11:22. The urgency of his message is undoubted. It has a fine eschatological ring about it. *Mightier than I = stronger*. John was strong in proclamation inducing water baptism, but the One coming will *baptise with the Holy Spirit*. This statement, although not enlarged upon means the coming One has power to do what no man has authority or power to do – cf. Joel 2:28, Acts 1:4-8, 11:16. Some suggest the synoptic addition “with fire” had the thought of judgment. The reference to latchet – loosing is to the meanest of tasks. John, for all his consciousness of authority is as conscious of the *strength* of the One to come.

The Baptism Of Jesus, In The Spirit

1:9-11 Immediately on the statement concerning the Spirit is the baptism of Jesus, accompanied by the Spirit. It hardly need be said that Jesus had no consciousness of sin – cf. Matt. 3:15f – but Matt. 3:15 shows he was conscious of what baptism was to signify, especially with a view to his ministry. Some have taken the “baptised” of v.5 to be a middle voice, in which case they were baptising themselves (often done with such as the Essenes) but this verse shows that John baptised, both standing in the river. “in those days” would seem to indicate the time when John’s ministry was at its height. Almost unnoticed Jesus leaves his home at Nazareth and travels for this important event. “*straightway*” (used by Mark 41 times) means there was no break in the action of baptism. Jesus saw *the heavens parting*. This would signify the intervention of God at this point and so the Divine attestation – no small or unnecessary thing seeing Jesus was to be acclaimed Messiah. The dove in Jewish tradition is a symbol for Israel, for the Spirit, and sometimes for the Spirit of Messiah. Matthew and Luke

seem to indicate that others saw the dove and heard the voice. The “thou art” of Mark is the “This is” of Matthew (3:17). The actual anointing of the Spirit is linked with Isaiah 11:2, Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. The sum of it all is that Jesus is proclaimed as Messiah – “The Anointed One” – through the baptism of the Spirit but that it is with a view to what he shall do. Any sense of his being adopted as Son at this point must be rejected. The declaration of his Sonship is made but in the particular sense of his being Messiah (Matt. 16:16, 26:63 etc.) Note also that Jesus is here declared the Son in relation to the victorious King of Psalm 2 and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42:1 and following related passages. To any sympathetic onlooker it would mean God’s attestation of Jesus’ acceptance and installation as Messiah by God Himself as Father.

The Spirit, Son and Temptation

1:12-13 *The temptation of Jesus* (Matt. 4:1-11, Luke 4: 1-13) follows immediately upon the reception of the Spirit. Messiah is connected with the coming of the Kingdom and so the testing of Messiah must take place. Matt. 4:1 makes it clear – “to be tempted.” The Spirit compels (drives) Jesus to go into the desert. It is not that Jesus is reluctant to go but is actually in accordance with the strong constraint of the Spirit. Even in temptation one should walk according to the Spirit. Matthew and Luke indicate that the testing was throughout the 40 days. The test “If thou be tile Son of God” is an attack upon his Messianic consciousness, following the Baptism. Mark says “SATAN” the other Gospels “the tempter.” OT prophets receive their call often in the wilderness. The “*wild animals*” may simply outline how deserted a place it was. The “*angels ministered*” (cf. Hebrews 1:14, Luke 22:43). In some way the angels strengthened Jesus in the battle – one suggestion being that it was physically with “angel’s food” (Ps. 78:25). The main point is the assistance was valid and avail-

able. NB “ministered” = “served.” The outcome of the testing was to prove he was the Son of God Isa. 28:16 and to initiate him into a ministry which was Messianic – intended for victory and establishment of the Kingdom of God. The manner of the temptation (whether inner – subjective, or outwardly – objective) is not disclosed.

The Gospel Of The Kingdom

1:14-15 *The Announcement of the Kingdom of God* (Matt. 4:12-17, Luke 4:14). These two verses are deeply significant. Whilst Mark omits what happened between the Temptation and the arrest of John, he nevertheless begins at the height of the Galilean ministry. Note that the Gospel (Good News) is that of the Kingdom of God. The whole matter of the Kingdom of God is raised. Matt. 4:12-16 makes the area of Galilee significant for Kingdom teaching as it was dominated by Rome (cf. Isa. 9:1-2). Mark thus links the defeat of Satan in the temptation with the Kingdom conflict. The time (kairos) (cf. Matt. 13:30, John 7:6,8, Rom. 13:11) or season has been fulfilled. The Kingdom is now at hand. *The Kingdom* must be understood as God’s rule or reign (cf. Ps. 47:7, 24:1). God although King must enforce His Kingdom where rebellion is. He who belongs to the Kingdom says “Thy kingdom come – Thy will be done.” The unwilling such as Satan and his hosts, must be subjugated that God’s people be liberated. The Kingdom has (a) Come (b) Is coming (c) Its coming is both immediate and future. Mark 9:1 suggests within the generation. Mk. 1:15 that it is at hand. (see Matt. 12:28, 11:12-13 etc.) Repentance is mandatory for participation in the Kingdom. Faith is no less mandatory. Hearing cannot be neutral. The Kingdom implies trustful obedient participation. Here Jesus simply continues John’s teaching. The Kingdom was understood as God’s righteous reign when all God’s people would know righteousness, joy and light.

The Call of The First Four Followers

1:16–20 Matt. 4:18–22, Luke 5:10, 11. Fishing with the circular drag-net weighted with small stones still takes place today in the day time. The order is blunt enough (the Greek here “deute” carries the sense of an imperative) but with authority and so they leave their nets. John 1:35 makes it clear that they have already known Jesus although on another basis. *Fishers of men* may have a bad sense (Jer. 16:16) often but it may even mean here the judgment of gathering men for God as in Matt. 13:47–50. To follow (walk with) a great teacher was a privilege and honour – hence the rapid decision to abandon nets and profession. NB. Differences between this and Luke’s account. Here they are alone, in Luke a multitude; here catching fish, in Luke mending their nets (cf. Mk. 1:19) here no miracle of fishes as in Luke.

Christ at Capernaum

(i) Teaching with Power

1:21–22 Cf. Luke 4:31–37. Show Jesus exercising the opportunity any Jewish male might use – teaching. Capernaum (“village of consolation”) was situated on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee. Main roads passed through it. Jesus exercising his authority in calling disciples (no little thing – cf. Luke 14:25–35) now uses this authority in teaching not quoting (it appears) from other rabbis or scholars, but coming with fresh, powerful exposition of his own. We must remember that by this time exposition was often pettifogging, legalistic and cribbed. The people were “dumbfounded” “astonished” – true authority being rare. (Ninehem – p. 73 calls this day “a specimen day”.)

(ii) Healing With Power

1:23–26 Show that opposition to the Kingdom is forthcoming from the powers of darkness – an unclean spirit. Note that Luke 4:33 makes it clear that the man had in him an unclean spirit – not he was in (an) unclean spirit (EN PNEUMATI AKATHART). If Jesus has proclaimed the Kingdom of God then this spirit (demon) fights back. Capernaum had the climate of unbelief in which such powers flourished (Matt. 11:23–24) but this demon – recoiling from Jesus’ power – gives unwilling testimony as to who Jesus is. The voice is not that of the man, as Jesus speaks to other than the man – “come out of him.” The reign of God is now visibly demonstrated – the spirit is cast out albeit *shrieking* and convulsing the man.

1:27–28 Show that the significance of the act is not lost – the powers of evil are vanquished and the possessed are set free – authority in teaching is not different to or apart from authority in (equivalent) act. They do not necessarily believe on Christ but debate (suzétein). However the Kingdom is in action. The news spreads to all Galilee too (v.28).

Peter’s Wife’s Mother Healed

1:29–31 Cf. Matt. 8:14–15, Luke 4:38–39. The healing is simple. In the Talmud “to cause to rise” is an expression meaning to heal (Johnson ad.loc.). Her healing is complete as she immediately ministers.

The Kingdom Action

1:32–34 Cf. Luke 4:42–44. These things have been happening on the Sabbath (v. 21) – without reaction. Now it is *after* the Sabbath (sunset) so that they can legitimately be healed – and they come! The Kingdom is in action (cf. Acts 10:38) and liberation of dominated people proceeds. Jesus keeps his Messianic

identity concealed and certainly will not have it revealed by the powers of darkness – since it must be known by *faith* a quality alien to demonic forces (cf. James 2:19).

The Kingdom Throughout All Galilee

1:35–39 Cf. Luke 4:42–44. Prayer (cf. Luke 3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18,28, 11:1) is significant to Christ. He prays at night and in times of tension, and utterly away from interruption. The disciples “searched strenuously hunted him down” (katediōken). The pressure is on! It seems Simon is anxious for *action* (not prayer!) The crowds are still wanting him but he presses on *from* Capernaum into all Galilee – it is not simply to heal but PREACH. However the context makes it clear that there were not two separate different *entities*. “*for this I came forth*” could mean “from Capernaum” but surely means “from God.”

1:40–45 (Matt. 8:2–4, Luke 5:12–14). Lev. 13:3f shows only the Jew was reluctant to touch a leper (Johnson ad.loc. suggests leprosy was not just Hansen’s disease, but any deep skin disease) but the leper is in a passion of desire (“beseeching...falling on his knees...”) which had been fired by the news of the “good news”. Moved with tenderness (other MSS have “anger” i.e. anger at evil’s infection), he heals with authority. He enjoins (“sternly admonishes”) utter silence so that *healing* does not become more important than *teaching* for which he has come. Not Jesus’ demand for the law’s ceremonial cleansing (Lev. 14). The terrible pressures which the man’s proclamation causes are somewhat lessened by Jesus staying away from the centre of the population.

CHAPTER TWO

The Beginning of Hostility

MARK 2:1–7

Mark has built up the *action* of Christ’s ministry relative to the Kingdom’s coming. Having covered (generally) Galilee he returns to the hub – Capernaum. This is “after some days.”

The Power to Forgive

2:1–12 *Healing of the paralytic*. Cf. Matt. 9:2–8, Luke 5:18–26. Matt. 9:8 gives the significance of this act – God has given power to men (“Son of Man?”) to forgive sins. Certain commentators see this account as a preaching story designed to enshrine (and so teach) the truth of forgiveness. To date nothing has been recorded (directly) concerning forgiveness. The “at home” (v. 1.) shows Capernaum to be his centre. V. 2 shows his emphasis was upon the Word (elalei – “spoke”) rather than *only* healing. At the same time healing may not be separated from the Word because of its Messianic significance (cf. Luke 7:22, Matt. 8:17). Elements of the story are:– the roof is of dried mud (interlaced with sticks, rocks etc.), the bed is a simple mat, the faith is basically that of the friends; whilst faith is not always requisite for healing yet Jesus takes it into account. The scribes are disturbed at the prerogative claimed for forgiving sins – they not recognising him as Messiah although even Messiah according to the Rabbis could not forgive sin. Forgiveness is a theme Jesus often stresses cf. Matt. 7:12, Mk. 11:25, John 8:11, Luke 7:41f, Matt. 18:21f. God alone can forgive (Exodus 34:6–7, Isa. 43:25–26, 44:22). Some see the healing as linked with forgiveness i.e. his palsy was a functional disease. The claim of Jesus is to be “Son of Man.” This must mean more than “a man” and in Mark is significant of the Dan. 7:13f passage of the one to whom judgment with cosmic rule is given – such as in Matt. 26:64 where Son

of Man equates with “Christ, Son of God,” – a claim taken to be blasphemy. The actual healing dumbfounds the audience who were continuing to glorify God saying that the happening was unique. By sign God’s power in Messiah was being made evident but v. 8 shows that Jesus’ inner discernment knew the incorrigible nature of those now being precipitated in their opposition.

2:13 *Christ’s ministry.* “The crowd kept coming to him” – the flowing response to the Messianic action. The sea–shore was an ideal place for preaching. Here he teaches them (edidaskein) so that his healings and miracles are not without teaching and vice versa cf. 1:14 “proclaims” 1:21 “teaches” 2:2 “speaks.”

The Joy of Calling: Levi and His Friends

(i) Call of Levi

2:14-17 Cf. Matt. 9:9-13, Luke 5:27-32). The name suggests his orthodox origin. His profession was hated because he is involved in the iniquitous tax–gathering, probably an agent of “the hated Edomite Herod.” Linked with “sinners” (Matt. 11:19, 18:17, 21:31 cf. 5:46) these tax–collectors were social outcastes. Nevertheless many seemed to have become followers (Matt. 11:19). Matthew may have heard the “Sermon on the Mount” which would explain his quick capitulation here. Jesus’ choice of a tax–gatherer was undoubtedly intended to be significant. V. 15 indicates a special meal prepared. “his disciples” would indicate the twelve. “the many” would indicate others. “The scribes of the Pharisees” (v. 16) may be “scribes and Pharisees” but the point is that in their traditions they ought not to sit with sinners (unclean cf. Gal. 2:12). This situation is deeply significant then – Jesus is teaching a new relationship. The Pharisees also understood repentance to be the way out of sin and in fact the whole of the provision of the sacrificial cultus. Jesus’ remark here is consistent with the

Law (cf. Matt. 9:13), whilst it is his Messianic mission to “preach the Gospel to the poor.” In this act he reveals the whole pattern of confession and spiritual rehabilitation. Note the word “call” – i.e. to the Kingdom – consistent with John the Baptist’s “call” and that of Jesus in 1:14.

(ii) Argument About Fasting

2:18-22 John the Baptist’s orthodoxy was irreproachable and he had testified to Jesus. The testimony was not inconsiderable because of his orthodoxy. Fasting was only enjoined by the Law on the Day of Atonement. Here whilst some *feast* others *fast*. The fasting was a pattern which had grown up with religious brotherhoods and undoubtedly signified earnestness which Jesus’ disciples seem sadly to lack. The principle given in Jesus’ answer is (a) Fasting requires a clean reason: There is none at the moment which is a time for joy because the Bridegroom is present and in the East he was the centre of festivity which ceased when he left (b) The pattern Jesus was establishing would not be seen until he is “taken away”. *Taken away* is the first shadow of the Cross that falls in this Gospel – “that day” has a sense of the ominous about it. Jesus’ emphasis is upon sheer joy of the Gospel. Vs. 21-22 must refer primarily to the old Judaism into which frame the Gospel cannot fit. Its dynamism needs a new container. The bottles of course were leather sustaining only one ferment. The Law of course is not rejected (cf. Matt. 5:23-24) but the Gospel is clearly “new”.

Controversy About The Sabbath

2:23-28 Cf. Matt. 12:1-8, Luke 6:1-5. The actions of the Pharisees cannot be understood unless we see that Jesus and his followers represented (in the Pharisees’ minds) a rival and growing group. They, for their part were academically trained in the niceties of the Law and the traditions – these others

were crude – the ‘*am ha-ares*’– the common (ignorant) people. The Pharisees’ niceties were not appreciated such as this one. Basically they were not based on the Law and could not be sustained in their courts (cf. Numbers 28:9–10). There were Sabbath laws which had been developed (Acts 1:12) but Jesus’ answer here is that hunger justifies such eating and proves it from the great David (I Sam. 21:1–6) shewbread being more significant than the grains of wheat. Vs. 27 and 28 give Jesus’ conclusion (i) (v.27) Having shown that it is self evident that the law of need takes precedence over the law of ceremonial, he goes to the root of the matter showing that “the sabbath is delivered unto you and not you to the sabbath” (an old rabbinical saying) i.e. the Sabbath is a provision for man, not a bondage–inducing prescription. (ii) v. 28 (Some commentators do not see the relevance of this verse) The “Son of Man” is master of the Sabbath and can so (rightly) interpret its law with reference to need. “Son of man” might mean generally – man, or specifically Jesus. In any case the Pharisees who themselves are interpreting prescription above need are claiming some similar authority. Elsewhere we see that Jesus’ healing action on the Sabbath was deliberate to break the (wrong) tyranny of this day. (Cf. Mark 3:4, Luke 13:10–17, 14:1–6, John 5:1–18, cf. John 9:1f).

CHAPTER THREE

Another Sabbath Situation

3:1–6 Cf. Matt. 12:10–14, Luke 6:6–11. Probably the action is still in Capernaum. The connecting “and” or “again” (*kai*) could be linked with 1:21 and/or 2:23 i.e. Sabbath situation. A tradition (“Gospel of Hebrews” quoted by Jerome) has it this man was a plasterer and needed both hands. The mind of the Pharisees (Cole ad.loc. “the theological delegation from Jerusalem still apparently held its watching

brief”) is to catch Jesus not to see the wonder of his Messianic ministry. They by–pass the real need of the man. Jesus deliberately (sensing the attitude) brings the man to the front. This may be for the man’s sake (confession of a need and public showing of it) as much as for a deliberate act to show the Pharisees. The question – v.4 is unanswerable in the spirit of the law – and therefore it is the true “letter” (cf. Matt. 12: 11). Healing this arm will be to do *good*. Their silence is proof of his righteousness, their guilt of pettifogging. “Hardness of the heart” is not limited to the affections but to mind and will. The unreasonableness rightly angers Jesus. The command carries with it a thrust to faith–obedience (cf. Rom. 10:17) – the healing being instant. V. 6 shows that his anger is matched by another stubborn anger. To the Pharisees are added the Herodians in opposition though why we do not know. They also had scribes but possibly they sensed a political movement and on those grounds opposed. Cf. John 5:11f, Mark 6:14–29.

More Messianic Action

3:7–12 Cf. Matt. 12:15,16, Luke 6:17–19. Jesus shows a distaste for “brawling” or conflict. The opposition is not by accident – his ministry inevitably causing the cleaving and early on vs. 7–8 show that the “great multitude” is from all over Palestine – no small thing. This must have been doubly infuriating to the opposition – to see him thus vindicated. The ship saves the pressure of the crowd (cf. Luke 5:1f) which must have presented a terrifying “mob” spectacle in its desire for healing and release. The cries of the demonic powers must have added to the confusion – all this he handles quietly and exercises his authority in keeping the demonic testimony unspoken. Matt. 12:24 shows how the opposition derided the significant ministry attributing it to an evil source.

The Call of the Twelve

3:13–19 The training of the Twelve is most important – see Matt. 5:1–11:1 cf. Luke 6:13–16 to which Luke adds 24:25–33, Acts 1:1–8. The choice of the 12 in Mark is placed here (cf. 2:15). It is significant here because the rejection (virtually) of the Jews is the cause and occasion of setting up his (own) church. Luke 6:12 shows he spent a night in prayer before selecting the twelve. They were *to be with him* i.e. to stay in his company and be trained by action and teaching and *to be sent out to preach*. The word “ordain” (AV) “appoint” (RSV) is literally “to make” perhaps “created.” The twelve is significant as with the tribes of Israel. Their delegated authority is for the preaching (proclamation) and is sealed by their commission to cast out demons. They, as disciples, will do what their Master does. This is not only training for the later ministry but is also part of Jesus’ Kingdom action (cf. Luke 10:8–9, 9:1f) (For the list and names of disciples see Cole pp. 80–81).

The Charge of Madness

3:19–21 As he goes “into a house” – “home.” The vastness of the crowd appals his “friends” (associates). This could be the family of verse 31 in which case there are two occasions of their misunderstanding him – perhaps because they could not get into the house – after long travel – to eat. However they seek to seize him – as one would a maniac. “Went out” may simply mean out of the house into the courtyard. The point is that he was not understood by those closest to him (cf. John 7:5) – how much less by the leaders of the Jews. We must also remember the incredible nature of all that was happening – something in the nature of a “revival” with its attendant passions etc.

The Evil Charge

3:22–30 Cf. Matt. 12:24–29, Luke 11:14–20. The “theological delegation” were making charges but not directly before Jesus. He took the initiative to summon them – this matter being horrifically serious (see vs. 28–29). Beelzebul is here designated as the “prince of demons” and in the OT Baal-Zebub – “lord of the flies,” or in the Ras Shamra texts (c.1400BC) “Lord of the earth.” In any case it is a name for evil. Exorcisms were prevalent (cf. Mk. 9:38, Acts 19:14, Matt. 7:22) and they may have been misunderstood as to their source. Jesus leaves no doubt here – these large numbers of exorcisms cannot nationally be put down to Satan (Hebrew name for the tempter) who is the “strong man”. He who exorcises is stronger than the strong man seeing he binds him. These exorcisms are a principal attack upon Satan’s kingdom (“house”). To say the source of this authority and power is Satanic is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. This is holy work – not evil. Misjudging is not forgivable it is associated with deliberate rejection of the Spirit and His illumination. To such, forgiveness is unable to be given – he is guilty of an eternal sin. NOTE AV. “in danger of eternal damnation” not in text.

The True Brethren

3:31–35 Cf. Matt. 12:46–50, Luke 8:19–21. The crowds are still coming. The family is asking for him – perhaps in addition to the act of v.21 and if so may be of the same mind. Those not of his family are closer to him and understand more viz. the Twelve. To do the will of God is the true nature of the Son of God, therefore other sons and daughters (brethren and sisters) will – as he – wish to do God’s will. Jesus gives a higher view of relationships, including the “family” – all who do God’s will. This changes membership in God’s people to a family – and not just a national relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR

Verses 1–34 Cf. Matt. 13:1–23, Luke 8:4–15.

The parable of the sower and its meaning, and other parables of the Kingdom.

The Parables Of Hearing

4:1–25 The “again” (v. 1) suggests a further episode in teaching. A great crowd is with him but he has been strongly rejected by the Pharisees and Scribes and Herodians amongst others. The three parables here are to show the effects of hearing (true) and hearing (ineffective). Johnson (ad. loc.) says they “can be considered as teaching encouragement in different ways: do not worry about the seed that is lost look at that which succeeds (the Sower): do not worry about the seed once it is sown, the result is in God’s hands (the Seed Growing Secretly): do not worry about the smallness of the seed, look at the result (the Mustard Seed).” Note too the *change in method* of the Teacher. He speaks in parables to sift the hearers, his method being designed not for the intellect but the spiritual response. V. 10 shows the disciples sense the change in method. The use of parable at once makes clear and yet conceals. Only he who has the key may open the meaning. The “hear ye: behold” of V. 3. means an important discourse is to follow. As usual with parables we should beware of reading too much meaning into details knowing they are but the background to the main principle – in this first parable, hearing. The four kinds of soil are four kinds of hearing – note Vs. 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20 – “hear”. Vs. 10–12 (cf. Matt. 13:10) show the disciples are puzzled. John 16:29 indicates they found his teaching method (when in parables) most difficult. He now tells them that they of the inner circle may have a clear explanation – know the mystery of the Kingdom of God – the others can only be told parables. The quotation from Isa. 6 seems a grim one until it is realised that the judgment of not

hearing, seeing, knowing is inherent in the attitude of “hearing” and the blessing comes from obedient listening. Why one listens and not another is a philosophical question not debated here. V. 13 shows they ought to have understood so simple a parable without (his) explanation. V. 14 word (logos) is probably the whole Gospel. The Sower is Christ. Satan and the “birds of the air” (v. 4) are linked as one. The soil refers to the nature of the hearer although v.16 identifies the hearers as though they were the germinated word. *Persecution* of v. 17 makes these “hearers” *stumble* i.e. they are offended at being persecuted. The *receive* of V. 20 is “accept” i.e. are not offended by it in any way (as say, the Pharisees are). Matthew says (13:23) that this is “understanding it”, and in Matthew *hearing is receiving* (i.e. although at different levels). The phrase of V. 9 “he that hath ears to hear let him hear” throws the responsibility to receive and understand upon man. The parable of Vs. 21–25 is plain. The lamp (light) is truth. It is to be shown to all – that is its purpose. To conceal it (once received) is criminal, all that is truth is made for showing forth. To conceal it is as though one does not have it. (One is too “offended” to reveal it) and so one loses it and vice versa, i.e. true hearing is obedience to light given, and disobedience results in loss of that insight.

The Kingdom Is Growth

4:26–29 The Kingdom parables are designed to show the mysteries (secrets) of the Kingdom on the principles by which it operates. These are not known *naturally* to men (cf. John 3:3–6, I Cor. 2:14) but they are rational within the Kingdom. The earth is the place in which the seed flourishes as in the parable above, but its flourishing is a matter of God’s sovereignty. Here the Sower is Jesus although at any time anyone may be the Sower – it is an indifferent matter – but the

response to the sowing is in God's hands. The manner of growth is a mystery – but a consistent principle nevertheless. Man does nothing but sow – God gives the increase – and this is what man does not understand but simply sees. The process is *not at all freakish* or against the equivalent principle in nature. The point is that wherever the seed is sown *the Kingdom comes*. The *harvest* could have two connotations

- (i) *A harvest of joy* (cf. Psalm 126:5–6, Hosea 2:21–23) or
- (ii) *of wrath* (cf. Joel 3:13, Rev. 14:15).

The most we can conclude is that it is a *moral* harvest, for so is the Kingdom.

The Strange Growth

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

4:30–32 This is one of the most difficult. It is patent of 2 interpretations: (i) From a tiny beginning there will be a rapid and profitable growth this being a principle of the Kingdom. The birds nesting will mean others not of the Kingdom being – as it were – helped by the Kingdom – “can make nests in its shade.” (v. 32). The seed would be the Word, and the growth the spiritual kingdom quickly attaining fulness. (ii) As in Matt. 13:24–30, 47–50 with the tares and the bad fish that the Kingdom has evil as well as good connotations. The “birds of the air” (4:4 cf. Dan. 4:12f, Gen. 40:19) have been likened to Satan (his minions?) and his activity. If the tree is unnaturally large (as it seems here to be – the mustard plant attaining 4 ft. – or at the most 15 ft.) then there is a bloated aspect of the Kingdom which may not only *call* for judgment but actually lay the basis of it, i.e. evil is inclined to be related dynamically to judgment. The clear point common to both interpretations is rapid growth (for whatever purpose) is a principle of the kingdom. Note that the “lodge” AV “nest” RSV or “perch” are all permissible interpretations.

The Authority of The Man

4:33–34 Cf. Matt. 8:23–27, Luke 8:22–25. Ministry around the Lake (4:35–7:23).

The cluster of parables concludes giving away to a cluster of miracles. Matthew's account shows much more activity than that of Mark. He narrates the Sermon on the Mount, some miracles and then the gathering of the crowd to the house which induced Jesus to leave, crossing the lake. It is clear that elemental forces here are hostile (Luke uses the word “rebuked” 3 times – against demons, sickness and this storm Luke 4:35,39 8:24 *epitimesen*) as later the legion of demons. The hostility of the religious group is not replaced by this hostility but simply enlarged. Jesus lacks what is called “natural fear” and is at rest. The storm was dramatic as often storms are on the Lake of Galilee. Johnson (ad.loc.) suggests his words “Be quiet, be muzzled!” are words of exorcism. The “other little ships” (V. 36 and only recorded by Mark) would also be sharers in this miracle. V. 38 is in the nature of accusation. V.40 is not a counter-accusation but implies that faith ought to be active in his presence. Note the “fearful” (*deiloî*) of V.40 is mild to the intense form of V.41 “they feared a great fear” (*ephobethesan phobon Megan*). This is a revelation that he is Lord over nature (cf. John 2:1f, i.e. the miracle of water into wine). The implications of this miracle are great. For “Who then is this?” see 6:49–52, 8:17–21, 9:32, 14:37–42.

CHAPTER FIVE

His Authority Over The Demons “The Demoniac of Gerasa”

5:1-20 Cf. Matt. 8:28-34, Luke 8:26-37. (For a discussion on Gerasa, Gergesa and Gadara see article “Gerasa” IVFBD p.463. Note too, the theme of fear in the above and this miracle 4:40,41, 5:15.)

There is no emphasis particularly upon an exorcism for countless numbers of these go virtually undescribed. eg. 1:32,39, 3:11 etc. The disciples also had such delegated power. It is thought by some that the person possessed was a Gentile. Certainly the area may have been primarily Gentile. The tombs (V. 2) were caverns cut in the rock and in this gloomy background this man lived or – as with Matthew’s account more than one and who threatened any who sought to pass by. The menace brought concerted action of trying to bind him (V.4) without success. V. 5 shows the tragedy of demon-possession. It seems these details are outlined so that the clear authority and power of Jesus to heal immediately might be known. The “worshipped” (prosekunesen) of V. 6 is the word generally used in the New Testament of worshipping deities. The identification of the possessed one with the actual (unclean) spirit cannot clearly be known as our available data is limited. However the demons are driven to prostrate themselves before Jesus who, as they admit, is the Son of the Most High God (cf. Dan. 4:2,17 – a pagan epithet). James 2:19 shows that the devils “believe” in God. Here is prostration NOT adoration. The demon/s admits that there is nothing demons have to do with God – indeed the “contact” is torture (V.8). Without the professional exorcist’s formula he casts out the demon, the demon “going on begging” (imperfect). The number “Legion” makes the possession significant. The permission to enter into the swine seems to indicate the demonic

desire for embodiment. The destruction of the pigs would be understandable – according to Jewish law – if the owners were Jews. Apart from this demonic possession always brings forms of irrationality – or protest against the harmony of God’s universe. The fear of the local community is aroused by the *healing* of the man (V. 15), whilst the possibility of more commercial loss must also have added to their request that Jesus should depart. Jesus accedes to this terrible request – an act of judgment. The contrast is the affection (firstly) of the healed man and secondly his complete obedience in what must have been a difficult task. The completeness of his evangelism and its results is seen in V.20.

His Authority In Healing

Two more (healing) miracles: 5:21-43 Cf. Matt. 9:18-26, Luke 8:41-56.

The reader must remind himself that Jesus is not just a “wonder-worker” but that miracles are acts not only of healing, but of personal restoration of people and also demonstrations of God’s nature as communicated by Jesus’ significant actions. *Vs. 25-34* indicate the faith of the woman “if I touch even his garment.” The account tells two significant things: (i) the healing took “virtue” or “power” (dunamin) from Jesus. There is no indication that this was painful, weakening or distressing, but simply a fact. Matt. 8:17 (cf. Isa. 53:4) is probably connected with this. (ii) The woman must have the *most* and the *best* of her healing. It is not to be done furtively. Her faith is commended and the grace of God put on a clear footing. Through this she will get the most from the incident. For her part there must be *confession* – something that probably Jesus saw was needed, as her disease (at least ceremonially) was an unclean thing (Lev. 15:25-27). *V.26* strongly contrasts the physicians’ and Jesus’ treatment. *Vs. 21-24, 35-43* give us the full account of the healing of Jairus’ daughter. “The other side” (V.21) indicates return to Capernaum although Matthew’s account indicates other action before the crowd actually

gathered. Jairus is an important man, undoubtedly – one of the synagogue’s presidents. Luke tells us his only child was about 12 years of age. His falling at Jesus’ feet shows his deep concern as well as his deep faith in Jesus. The incident of the woman being healed ought to have been helpful to Jairus. Her actual death served only to further outline the tremendous significance of the Son of Man now as Lord of life. V.36 “Do not fear only believe.” The concept of fear is the antithesis of faith. Both commands are durative presents – “Be not be fearing only go on believing.” Faith is to survive the crisis of seeming defeats (cf. Matt. 1:20, John 14:1 etc.) V.37 shows Peter, James and John to be of the intimate circle eg. they too (only) view the Transfiguration. V.38 shows the typical custom (often professional) mourning. Jesus (see John 11:11, 33f) dislikes this giving of (mournful) recognition and obeisance to death by man who was not appointed to death. Sleeping means that at the point of (physical) “death” it is sleep that comes not the dissolution of an actual death. In I Kings 17:19, II Kings 4:33 and Acts 9:40 the raising from the dead is not a spectacle. V.43 indicates that Jesus would have it remain this way. Taking the child by the hand (V. 41) is manual contact which communicates life. The occasion is a warm vital one. Aramaic is used, whatever Jesus may have done on other occasions (cf. Mk. 7:34, 15:34 for other such affective situations). V.42 shows the large dimensions of their astonishment “immediately exceedingly astonished” – “overcome with amazement.” The demonstration of life-giving by Jesus escaped competent articulation.

CHAPTER SIX

A Significant Rejection

6:1-6 Cf. Matt. 13:54-58, Luke 4:16-30. Whilst his house or “home” is at Capernaum and he was actually born in Bethlehem yet the name “Jesus of Nazareth” was never lost. By this time his fame has spread throughout Galilee so that they ought to be both glad and convinced. V.2 shows they were “dumbfounded”. They acknowledge the evident facts of his wisdom and his acts but they cannot understand it and therefore do not really accept what is evident to them. They list Jesus’ brethren by name. The contradiction of admitting his words but refusing a true source is all they can do apart from accepting him totally – a thing they cannot do with a “local” Vs. 4-6 show that their unbelief is a source of astonishment to him although a few healings are done. The significant point is V.3 “they were offended (stumbled) at him.”

The Sending Out Of The Twelve

6:7-12 Cf. Matt. 10:1-42, Luke 9:1-6. 3:13-15 shows the disciples already have had this kind of ministry. Luke 9:2 explains the principle preaching the Kingdom of God, whilst 10:1 (with the 70) explains that Jesus was to come later into this prepared situation. V. 6 shows Jesus was “in circuit” and so the outward movement of the disciples must have been comprehensive. It was a simple multiplication of his own ministry, especially in the actual liberation of people bound by sin, disease and demons. The simplicity of the life Vs. 8-9 would show their dependence upon God (not upon man) and their lack of personal ambition and so the true nature of the Gospel. Sandals indicated a long journey. The staff is for walking (not protection) the bag or pouch is not to be taken in which, as a precaution, supplies of food are

carried. One tunic is enough – not even are they to take against possible coldness – another to wear – “utter dependency” is their watch cry. V. 10 shows they must not be “choosey”. V.11 is to indicate (a) to the disciples the seriousness of their own ministry and (b) to the stubborn hearers the authority of those who have come. The dust may be a witness that they have trod this portion of soil and have fulfilled their duty – probably not just contempt. V. 11b is not correct here (in old MSS) but is of Matt. 10:15. Vs. 12–13 show their preaching was of repentance and involved the action of healing especially with the use of oil, the mention of which is only here in the Gospels. A. Cole (ad. loc.) says the early church did not differentiate between “spiritual” and “medical” work – but that they were the one.

Herod Hears Of Jesus

6:14–16 Cf. Matt. 14:1–4, Luke 9:7–9. Herod for all his evil has perception. Whilst John the Baptist never did miracles Herod believes *been raised* from the dead – this being a mighty miracle and so he (John) can easily do “mighty works” – these powers are at work in him. (*NB* the “some said” of RSV (V. 14) is better translated “he said”). Undoubtedly the forces of conscience and fear are working strongly. V. 15 “Elijah” is understood to come in the Messianic period (Mal. 4:5). The attestation of Jesus being a prophet – “like the old prophets” was a high attestation although not actually Messianic. The teaching and healings would have given this impression.

6:17–29 tell the story of the tragic murder of John. John’s statement of V.18 was the Mosaic law (Lev. 18:16, 20:21) Herod’s fear of John makes him seek to protect him, plus the deeper working of his conscience that John is right. Josephus (Antiqu. 18: 5.2) says that Herod was afraid of John’s influence.

The dancing of Salome (name as such by Josephus) Herod’s step-daughter indicates the debauchery of the court situation. She may even have been married by this time to her uncle Philip, tetrarch of Ituraea and Trachonitis. V. 29 shows the end of John’s group as an organised whole. In this sense John has “decreased”. Matt. 14:12 adds “and told Jesus” to this – significant of the continuity of the two ministries. Acts 19:1f shows a persistence of some outside Palestine as John’s disciples.

The Feeding of the 5,000

6:30–44 Cf. Matt. 14:13–21, Luke 9:10–17, John 6:5–13. The disciples are filled with the action they have been through “on mission”. They need to report it especially as its significance is deeper than they realise, and they have been in conflict with forces of darkness. “Reaction” is also a danger after being somewhat up in ministry in addition to little time for eating – so he desires to give them rest and relaxation. The very ship voyage must have been helpful. However (V.33) they had not landed before the crowd was with them. Whilst the disciples are weary he is moved with *compassion* (cf. Matt. 9:35–38) and his shepherd’s heart feels for them. The answer to their need is teaching which he supplies. V. 35f shows perhaps the impatience of the disciples. John’s Gospel makes it clear that Jesus had more than human sympathy for a hungry crowd – he clearly intended the feeding to be a sign and deliberately takes as well as makes the occasion. The disciples – perhaps irritable – concern for the lateness of the hour (teaching too long?) and the need for food draws a command from the Lord that they supply the need. Their answer is humanly reasonable though not for ones who have just shared in the supernatural. The crowd also had a political mood as later (John 6) they tried to make him a King. (A mob can always be fickle.) The “mob feeling” is curbed by the orderly

seating. Mark alone notes the detail of green grass (a sign of spring season). The feeding, though prodigious was not (to be) wasteful. The portion left over was to be used. The baskets were large ones.

Further Revelation of Authority For the Disciples' Sake

6:45-52 The Lord thinks in terms of his disciples and presses them to go off immediately, counselling them also to rest. He himself goes to pray cf. 1:35, 3:13 (especially – John 6 – as they seek to make him king) possibly over his disciples also. They in rowing had made little distance (about 3 miles) having a strong persistent head-wind against them (not a storm). The Fourth Watch is between 3 am. and 6 am. “He meant to pass them by” probably means he wanted them to recognise their own need – which they did as they were in fear from the elements and now this “ghostly” appearance. His coming to them and the stilling of the elements ought to have quickened their understanding especially of the greatness of Jesus (Son of God) and the whole supernatural and moral order in which they were sharing “but their hearts were hardened” i.e. dulled, unseeing, unresponsive, cf. Isa. 6:9 – Mk. 3:5, 8:17, Rom. 11:7,25, II Cor. 3:14. The two miracles ought to have had a climactic effect.

Recognition of His Powers

6:53-56 Cf. Matt. 14:34-36. Gennesaret was a most fertile region. On landing here this section emphasises the need of people, and the supernatural powers of healing he exercised. Demons are not here mentioned as such. What link did this have with their “hardness of heart?” Both at the feeding of the 5,000 and this event the disciples do not seem to exercise that to which they had been commissioned.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Revelations of Legalism and Inner Corruption

(i) Wrong Use of True Law

7:1-23 There are 3 sections here (a) Vs. 1-8 unwashed hands, (b) 9-13 Korban vow, (c) 14-23 ritual uncleanness contrasted with actual moral defilement. The actual audience is a group of Pharisees (possibly Galileans) and scribes who are from Jerusalem. They represent a hostile Judaism. Jesus' healing drew no less critical investigation than any might today. The real question here is opposition to the new wine an insistence upon the Traditions (v.3). These Traditions were later to form the Mishnah and Gemara known today as the Talmud. Notice that the traditions although oral, were binding. The “Elders” – V. 5 gives the authority for ritual cleansing, as also its necessity. We ought to *note that ritual washings* which probably had their origins in hygiene may be psychologically compulsive where there is guilt, or legalistic fear. NB There were 613 such rules as in V.4. V.6 Refers to the people of Isaiah's day primarily, but here to these of Jesus' day. A hypocrite is one who wears the mask of another personality in acting. V.7 Shows a deeper, more serious wrong – the worship of these tradition-mongers is vitiated as they give God's authority to their own (human) traditions. V. 8 Shows a further and logical slip – the essential rejection of God's true commandment by tradition. V,9 Emphasises this and Vs. 10-12 give the example of the conflict of God's command and man's traditions: true filial love and pity is set aside by a vow to give to the temple the money that ought to have been expended on the parents. (Corban = “given to God”). The holy commandment is thus set aside. The terrible sin is “making void the word of God” – and by (holy?) traditions. We should not think that *all* Judaism allowed precedence of

the traditions over the Law. Note that the accusers are overwhelmingly crushed and subdued.

(ii) True Purity and Actual Defilement

7:14–23 Are spoken deliberately to the crowd. His desire is to teach them and these words are very important. He is not defending the action of his disciples but pointing out that moral defilement is that worthy of judgment and that physical defilement must not be confused with or placed above the moral. V. 16 again points to willingness (or otherwise) to hear. It is clear that the disciples had, to *some extent* held the Pharisees' view. Food, as such, is of itself clean. V. 20 is important – cf. Matt. 12:34 “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”. The *moral system* as against the *physical system* proves itself by its manifestations. The ugly depravity of man is here fearfully portrayed. *NB* “heart” = affections, mind, will. Man’s heart proves an evil fountain. Its innate *deceit* veils from it its own horrible condition.

Faith Brought To Firmness

The Syrophenician Woman

7:24–30 (See map for the area into which he went – North–West). This is *withdrawal* from the conflict for prudence’s sake. The house seems to be one of a friend–incognito] The fearful need of this Gentile woman brings her to Christ. V. 26 “she kept on beseeching him” Matt. 15:24 and 10:5 make it clear that Jesus came only to Israel. In Matt. 15:22 she calls him “Son of David” which shows her knowledge although not a rightful claim. In actual fact blessing is to come to the Gentiles also, through Messiah, but ... eventually! The key to the whole thing is “*first*” (v. 27). He does not cut her off. The contrast is between “children” and “pet–dogs” (puppies?). There is no harshness. He does not turn her away. She gets the

hint but accepts the *fitness* of “Jew first and *then* the Gentile.” Jesus is tutoring her faith and she responds! He then rewards it, having perfected it, Matt. 15:28 “Great is thy faith!”

The Fruit of Witness: A Significant Healing

7:31–37 We are reminded of 5:20 and the spreading of the news by the healed demoniac of Gadara. In Matt. 4:25 we see that Jews had come from Decapolis to hear him. Since our Lord uses Aramaic the deaf and dumb man is a Jew. Note that he is brought by others (are they too friends?). The actions of Jesus are a sort of healing by miming or sign language. The action is in private, another gracious withdrawal from a “spectacle situation”. He treats the man personally, with dignity. The sigh (miming ?) is to show the power comes from heaven – although not *to* Jesus but *from* Jesus. Note the word of *coward* “Be opened” (no sigh of despair!) The immediate speaking is thrilling. The command to conceal this is to retain the dignity and holiness of the act. It is not fitting to blaze it abroad. Also the action may be prejudiced or hurried into unwanted precipitation. Gen. 1:4,31 “it was very good!” is the joyous acclaim of men taken beyond themselves by this glorious act.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Feeding of the 4,000

In Matthew 14:15–21 we have the feeding of the 5,000. In Matt. 15:32–39 we have the feeding of the 4,000 as here in Mark. (cf. 6:32–44). It cannot be that one account is the erroneous repetition of the other as the details are varied, and the early church has accepted both. To say that Jesus never repeated

his sayings or acts in varying situations is to make a strange claim. The *significance* of the feeding of the 5,000 is easily seen in John 6. There is not so much significance in the second, necessarily, as the clear act of compassion, and doubtless the same significance is implicit, if not expressed. Certainly the word “compassion” in V. 2 is the key. Some explanations of the amounts are interesting but not really significant. In feeding the 4,000 there are more loaves and fishes than in feeding the 5,000 but it is doubtful whether this is of any great point. For the rest many of the comments on 6:32-44 will obtain here. Note “green grass” in 6:39 and “ground” in 8:6. Some have tried to say that the happening with the 5,000 is with Jews and here with Gentiles, but that is almost certainly not so. The account simply shows the practical compassion of Christ and helps us to see how large a crowd remains at the end of three days.

The Sign Given but not understood

8:10-13 The territory of Dalmanutha is disputed, some placing it on the western, some on the eastern shore, although it is almost certainly the western side. See Matt. 15:39 – “Magadan” (RSV). We are reminded in this spiritually barren situation of the response or reaction in the Nazareth area. Why is asking for a sign wrong? The answer is in “testing him”. They do not believe him (Has he not done many signs in fact?) but subjected him to their own unbelieving minds. Should a king prove his kingship? The “to question” of the AV is the “to argue” of RSV i.e. “to dispute.” This is not the climate for rational discussion and the necessary humility is missing. The obstruction does not lie in intellectual ability but spiritual (theological) dullness and deliberate obtuseness. His “sighing deeply in his spirit” is right indignation (cf. Mark 9:19, Luke 16:31, John 7:17, 5:40, 4:48). Faith sees (Heb. 11:1) but they wish to

see to have faith, thus reversing the principle. John 2:11 shows that a manifestation causes belief – in the right-minded, as against 2:18, cf. Matt. 12:38. Seeking a sign is unbelief telling God to prove Himself. In fact sufficient evidence (apart from spiritual recognition) has already been given. In any case for them no evidence would be admissible.

The Disciples Forget the True Sign

8:14-21 It does seem they go to the eastern side to a lonely place (they are on their way to Bethsaida). They have forgotten bread and Jesus takes up the point of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. That of the Pharisees is their influence and attitude which is persuasive and evil. Herod’s is a moral (or immoral) leaven, his licentiousness catching the generation. Jesus spoke of Herod as “that old fox” (Luke 13:32). Instead of accepting the advice the disciples sense guilt in having forgotten to bring bread. Jesus is amazed at the hardness of their hearts (a) in mistaking his meaning and thinking only of a rebuke (b) in forgetting, in any case, that Jesus is not “afraid” of having no bread – why look at what happened. Heb. 3:13 is salutary here. Lenski (Comm. ad. loc. p.326) says “We see here that Jesus expects us to use our mind and our reasoning powers in religion, not indeed to rationalise but to understand and comprehend in true enlightenment. But back of mind and reasoning powers lies the heart, the centre of the personality itself, the seat of the will and of the thoughts it controls (this is the NT and the Greek conception of *kapōia*). The mind and its reasoning powers are never independent. The intellect does not control the heart so that the heart is swayed by what the intellect determines. This is the mistake of all rationalists both ancient and modern. The reverse is true. The intellect, mind and reasoning powers (*óuveóis*) are the slaves of the heart, i.e. of the will, the central force of our being. The

intellect always reasons as the will demands, never otherwise.” V. 21 in the light of this means that Jesus believes that if he stirs their hearts by the reminder of what they have seen then they will respond positively. The Pharisees (because of theological bias) and the Herodians (because of worldliness) will be so infected with an “anti” spirit that they cannot respond. NB V. 16 “reasoned” shows uneasiness and insecurity by which their attitude is detected. V. 21 is not an accusation but a question (gentle enough) “Do you not yet understand?”

Coming To True Sight

8:22–26 The Pharisees wish to “see” a sign (8:11), the disciples do not see because of the “hardness of the heart” (8:17). Here the blind man is made to *see*. In 8:29 Peter truly “sees” Jesus as the Christ, and in 9:1f they see his glory with their own eyes, yet Peter cannot “see” that Jesus should suffer. We have seen enough of the miracles of Jesus to know their *general* significance. Here we see a special purpose, i.e. to kindle and aid faith. There is patience here – with the man’s faith in view. The faith of *the others* (“they bring him”) is the *link* of faith. Again Jesus prevents the healing being a spectacle – he takes the man away privately. The spitting is an act designed to show the man that Jesus was acting upon him. For some reason, best known to Jesus, he does not immediately heal the man, but lays hands the second time upon the eyes. The partial vision has been used as an illustration innumerable times in the experience of growing faith. The objection that “men as trees walking” could not be valid is itself invalid. The man “looked up” (V. 24 RSV) himself. He could have had an inner imagination of what a man or a tree might be like or may have at one time had sight. In V. 25 he looks “intently” – total restoration. Jesus (V. 26) will not allow him to be handled popularly, as he has regard for his total healing. It is in his own home that he

is to find himself after the healing.

THE CONFESSION AND THE TRANSFIGURATION

8:27 – 9:10

Note: The Kingdom action is not here terminated, but it ends now as simply an *outgoing* action. It now becomes orientated towards the Cross. Both the Confession and the Transfiguration are in line with the Cross, and must thus be understood. We are now at every turn faced with the note of suffering. The triumph is not taken away but it is as though the full darkness of this world and of all evil is being faced with a view to the final outcome. *To this point* the Gospel has been proclaimed. From this point it becomes the Gospel in fulfilment.

Confession by Revelation

8:27–30 Cf. Matt. 16:13–16, Luke 9:18–20. Bethsaida was Peter’s city (see John 1:44) – perhaps another point Peter has given to Mark (alone). Moving towards Caesarea Philippi Jesus is deliberately discussing the matter of his being in privacy and quietness. He initiates the conversation. He is not at all concerned about what men think him to be: he is concerned that they have the correct understanding. Matthew uses “Son of man” in addition to “I”. For V. 28 “John the Baptist” see (Mk. 6:14, for Elijah (Redivivus) see Mark 1:3,4 of the latter Jesus has said he is John the Baptist (Matt. 17:13). He had not been “guessed at” as the Messiah but only as one of the prophets (Matthew adds – “Jeremiah”). All these answers reveal a strong belief in the resurrection (*not* re-incarnation), and are “high” concepts. If the ministry of Jesus had not been so dynamic then these ideas could not have been born (cf. John 2:23–3:3 –

Nicodemus' concept of Jesus – “a man come from God”).

V. 29 Jesus now asks the vital question – “the rapier–thrust that transfers theology from an armchair discussion to an uncomfortable dialogue between God and us.” (Cole ad. loc.). Peter's immediate answer, Matthew claims, is only by divine revelation (see Matt. 16:17) where Peter has added “the Son of the living God.”

V. 30 The language is strong – they must not reveal this incredible fact to others. Mark leaves out the words connected with the keys of the kingdom and binding, and loosing.

The First Passion Prediction

8:31-33 IS tremendously significant. It comes immediately on the revelation of his Messiahship, revealing the NATURE of it, i.e. inevitable and indispensable suffering. This then, that the Messiah must suffer, is the logical conclusion of this passage as “Son of Man”, “Christ” are equated. Notice “many things” – which may mean all of the passion and Cross or even more – cf. Heb. 5:8. The *death* of Messiah is a scandal, the resurrection a dazzling new truth. (Particularly is it a scandal at the hands of Israel's leaders – those who should recognise Messiah, i.e. the Elders, Chief priests and scholars!) However not much really penetrates, for much is even yet veiled, although “suffer, rejected,” “killed” come with shocking plainness – “he said this plainly” (V. 32a) – without a parable. More shocking is the (human reaction of Peter – “having taken him to himself” – an act of rebuke from a superior (!) position. Whilst human “love” would commend this “saving” care of Peter, it is in fact (as always) diabolical. V.33 Jesus rejects this (worldly) “wisdom”. To this point all has been “the Kingdom” and the suffering is necessary to gain the Kingdom and to seal it forever. What Peter says is of the same mind as Satan who would have Jesus obtain the Kingdom by other than suffering. Notice the word Satan – adversary. Satan's, as man's, mind is self-saving.

The Cost and Conditions of True Discipleship

8:34-38 The Master, their Leader, must go to the Cross. So then his followers. Jesus was not just setting out a way for himself but also for his *own SELF* is man opposed to God's way. *All* of this – not part must be “crossed out.” It is a rejection of the way of man. The Messiah shows a new way, the way of suffering. Note that one does not lose one's life for one's own sake – in order to gain it (for then it is a subtler form of self) but

- (a) for Messiah's sake, and
- (b) for the sake of the Gospel (V.36).

Jesus is going to the Cross *FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE* – this is his true rationale – and must be ours. The question here is not one of salvation but “for salvation's sake.” If on this matter of the Gospel one seeks to save one's physical life he will lose his eternal life. If this world is gained and the next lost – then what gain is there? In fact if a man think deeply there is nothing so precious as having one's soul eternally. In hard-headed terms it is better to suffer now and to live forever. V. 38 shows that rejection of Christ and his suffering now will cut off the rejector at the great day of judgment. This generation is sinful and adulterous and to be identified with it (rather than the Cross) can only bring judgment by the Son as he comes in the glory of the Father, and also with the *holy* angels. This is the picture of Dan. 7:13. So much for the quiet beginning before the confession. Jesus has pinned all followers down to being of the same character as himself – there is no place of neutrality.

CHAPTER NINE

The Transfiguration

(i) Jesus Is Transfigured

- 9:1** Is not simple. The Kingdom of God coming with power seems totally eschatological. By the time Mark was written, perhaps even Peter had died, and so the writer would scarcely record a remark which would now seem foolish. It may, then, mean (Matt. 16: 28 – “the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom”) either the transfiguration which follows immediately, or the kingdom going on as in Luke 10:19 (with power) or to the triumph of the Cross (the kingdom came with power in victory over evil – eg. John 12:31, 14:30–31, 16:11 etc.), or the resurrection which certainly was with power, so that Matt. 28:18 (“all authority”) is applicable. All these could be true, and so the saying would not be foolish. “Taste death” certainly is a Semitism for “die” (cf. Heb. 2:9). On the other hand “the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom” seems to point to a point in time, and this could mean the first “coming” in AD 79 when Titus decimated Jerusalem, a judgment on her, see Luke 23:27–31 and 90,000 Jews were sold into slavery. Mark 13:32 makes it clear that at this point Jesus did not know the *time* of his final coming. Certain it is that the Kingdom both now, and from the time of the Cross “comes with power.”
- 9:2** The “six days” (Matt. and Mark) is from the point of the saying, or rather from the *confession* of Messianism, evidently to connect (deliberately) the two. Peter, James and John (cf. 5:37, Matt. 26:37) seem especially close, – do they have more spiritual understanding – or are they being given more? Transfigured = the actual *morphé* (form) of Jesus was *changed*. It happened right in front of them – this miracle. (cf. II Cor. 3:18, Rom. 12:2).
- 9:3** Shows the intensity of the glory. See II Pet.

1:16, John 1:14 which even transfigures the clothes. It is not easy to say whether the glory was of the Son of God or the Son of Man (is there a difference)

- 9:4** Moses and Elijah represent the law and prophets, and all they represent. Luke says they were speaking of his *exodus* which he was to *accomplish* at the Cross – “He was transfigured that he might be disfigured, that we who are disfigured might be transfigured.” The truth of the Cross is discovered in the midst of the Transfiguration.
- 9:5–6** Peter, James and John go to sleep with the glory heavy upon them, and then awake (they heard the “exodus” discussion) and Peter was garrulous. The glory must have given a “lift” to him. (Cf. Shekinah glory in Ex. 40:35). In his terror he gabbles, irrationally, yet with some idea coming through, *three tents*. Elijah had been translated, and the tradition was Moses also, since his body had not been discovered. Jesus is obviously either in this state, or is at least on the heavenly plane (Peter has no reason to think the glory will fade, as it had with Moses).
- 9:7** The cloud was bright (Matt. 17:5) and it signified the Father’s presence. Enveloped in the cloud (cf. Exodus 33:9) they hear the Father’s voice. The “This is my beloved Son (Lk. “the one who has been elected, chosen”) hear him” is mainly intended to confirm the conversation concerning the “exodus” i.e. the Cross which was a scandal to Peter (8:32). Nothing Jesus says is to be left unheeded. This accords with Deut. 18:15, most significantly. The saying is intended to remind of the baptism and so of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1,2.
- 9:8–9** Shows the incident is closed. V. 9 that its significance will be seen only in the light of the resurrection. He was, himself to rise from the dead.

9:10 “Kept the matter to themselves” or “they fastened on the word by disputing with each other” what the rising from the dead is. They have not yet understood (see 8:31) what is the resurrection, so they discuss.

(ii) The Prophecy Concerning Elijah’s Return

9:11-13 They fix on Elijah’s appearance as it must precede the coming of Messiah (in Jewish tradition, cf. Mal. 4:5) and restore or make right all things – why then must the Messiah (Son of man?) suffer? Jesus has said of John the Baptist that he is Elijah come (“Elijah redivivus”) (cf. Matt. 17:10-11) but the *Son of Man* “must suffer many things” i.e. he is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (cf. Mark 8:31). John the Baptist has suffered persecution – there is no reason why the Son of man should not. It is prophesied of both that they suffer (v. 12 “it is written” – of the Son of man, V. 13 “is written of him” i.e. John the Baptist.). The Transfiguration has been in order to prepare them, nor can they deny what he now says, seeing the Father has just attested to him and what he says.

The Demoniac and the Power of the Son of Man

9:14-29 The disciples with all their previous experience have not, whilst the Transfiguration has been (unknown) going on, been able to heal the demoniac lad, although nine of them have tried. This has attracted a group of arguing scribes, whose orthodoxy questions the unauthorised disciples – obviously they are fastening on the failure of the disciples. Noticeably they are not exorcising. Jesus asks the scribes why they are questioning his disciples as they are in a painful situation. The multitude is not involved, and is delighted at his appearance, running to him.

9:17 Shows the father in weary despair. His son has a *dumb* spirit. Spirits were exorcised by giving their name – did this make it difficult to exorcise him – or was the child simply dumb because of it?

9:18 Shows the powerlessness of the disciples.

9:19 “Oh faithless generation]” is a half-quote from Psalm 95:10. I Cor. 10:1f and Heb. 3:7f shows how terrible was the occasion and principle in this Psalm. Faithlessness must bring judgment, and death! It is addressed to the disciples, doubtless, and the scribes, but also to the multitude. In spite of his work, they look only to him – without strength themselves. There is indignation and weariness at their unbelief – an attitude calculated to bring them to faith. “How long shall I be with you – bear with you?” indicates divine wrath.

9:20 The fearful and perverse reaction of the evil spirit shows the desire demonic powers have to possess and torment man. Man was made for joy. The demon has a last savage thrust at the boy. Jesus asks concerning the boy, not so much to know the details as to outline the desperate case, and to show the father how there is no solution apart from Jesus.

9:22 Shows that the man realises his plight and applies in his desperation to Jesus. In 1:40 the leper says “if thou wilt, thou canst.” Here “If you can...” The man sees that Jesus has compassion.

9:23 Jesus (cf. Matt. 21:22) really says “All things are able for the one believing.” i.e. “If you believe I can I will.” The “cried out” of V.24 (the father is in deep emotion) might be translated “Yelled”. His passion makes him say “I do believe” (for the child’s sake) but “Be helping my unbelief (lest it prevent the healing.)” He wishes to be freed from unbelief – most commendable for the *disposition* is now right.

9:25 Probably the man’s shriek, as that of the possessed child is making a spectacle. The *faith* of the father is *immediately rewarded*. (NB. Faith is not a necessary *work* but an attitude of dependence and trust. In one sense faith accomplishes nothing. It rests upon the accomplishment of God.) The thrilling command of the Lord reveals the *nature* of the demonic possession – deaf and dumb spirit – and the possession must have been ghastly. The last savagery of the demon nigh on kills the lad. The power of Jesus defeats it even in its last throes of rebellion, – “crying out and convulsing him terribly.”

9:28–29 Show the subdued disciples – they had been able to do nothing. Is it that the *nine* disciples were less faithful than the special *three* who had gone with Jesus? Romans speaks of a measure of faith and grace. What was the need for more prayer – prayer is not a work – but a waiting upon God. They could not have prayed simply at the point of meeting the father of the boy. It must mean a deep attitude which persists, and finds us able and ready at any point of demand. They admitted they could not cast it out – surely – for only God may do this – through His servant, and so the same principle of faith obtains.

The Second Passion Prediction

9:30–32 In 8:31 he had begun to teach the disciples. Here he “goes on teaching” them. “Disciples” means “the ones learning”. But they are not deeply committed for they are afraid – they deliberately ignore the *depths* of the teaching. Later they will regret their refusal to face the anguish inherent in the teaching. “Did not understand” shows again that it is not intellectual acumen, but willingness of spirit.

Wrong and Right Views of Greatness

9:33–37 They walked not apart (probably) from the Teacher but behind him (crocodile fashion) and were having a private discussion. The “strange saying” has been put aside. See Matt. 18:1–6, Luke 9:46–48 and cf. Luke 22:24–27, for even at the Last Supper the debate is going on – concerning greatness! *The house* may be Peter’s home, but it seems the home of Jesus or his family had been transferred to Capernaum (cf. John 2:12). The “they were silent” suggests they knew Jesus would not receive their argument very well. The essence of the passage is without debate: “Greatness does not lie in being someone, or dominating others, but in serving others.” Certainly a man may aspire to be great, that is not wrong, but let him discover greatness is in humility – putting others before himself.” Like other truths this can only be known revelationally as it goes against the “natural” spirit of man. The child runs trustingly to Jesus – needing him. To “receive” a child is to *serve* it – i.e. in any way needed. There is a simplicity in trust (being received) – there is a simplicity in trusting. Jesus is King of the Kingdom, but they are to receive (serve) him with simplicity. Another way is to say “Treat the child as you would the King, or the King as you would (warmly) the child.” True humility has no special reference to *rank* as to such, but only to relationships.

No Room For Intolerance

9:38–41 Partisanship is dangerous. Disciples outweigh in “zeal” their master. This man is on the side of Jesus in his conflict with the demonic world. Indeed he is an example of the one who “receives” Jesus being himself simple in serving him. In Mark 3:22 the scribes put down Jesus’ exorcism to Beelzebub, and there is a similar suggestion here, against this

person. Yet he also can only be casting out in Jesus' name, and so be under the assistance of the same Spirit. If this incident follows on their revealed inability to do this (in a certain case) then it ill behoves them to criticise. V. 41 simply means that anyone is *for* Jesus who gives a disciple (a "marked man") a cup of water, i.e. in the name of Jesus. He can never be against Jesus. "Lose his reward" is another way for saying "will gain a reward." (Cf. II John 8).

The Sin which causes Sin (Stumbling)

9:42-48 The "these" (V. 42) may refer to the man in simplicity casting out demons (the disciples might have prevented him and destroyed his faith in bewildering him) or perhaps to the child – still in Jesus' lap. It refers generally to the ones believing simply. Perhaps the passage is thinking it is better that *before* causing such to stumble dire catastrophe should overtake the intending wrong-doer, eg. cast with a mill-stone weight into the sea.

These "little ones" are his precious ones – their faith is precious – their redeemed lives are precious. One does not cut off an actual limb (false literalism) yet one must – *at the heart* – destroy that which *the hand* would do. The "cutting" and "plucking" is not literal, yet it is *actual*. (If we cut the limbs there would be nothing left of us!) The use of "*if*" is the clue. It demands a subjunctive sense "should be". (Vs. 45 and 46 have a present subjunctive – "be offending" or "be entrapping" showing that the action is not complete as yet – you can do something about it.) "Hell", "the fire unquenchable." These words from "ge Hinnom", the Valley of Hinnom, speak of a disintegration by endless fire and of maggots (V.48) (symbols) such as were found in the endless burning of the refuse fires. See Isaiah 66:24. The opposite to being thrown into *hell* is (v.47) to "enter into the Kingdom of God." The actual link of the resurrection body with the

Kingdom or of the doomed body with hell is told in pictorial language. However the symbol is intended to conduct to the reality.

A Question of Salt

9:49-50 "Everyone will be salted with fire." It could mean (i) 'Everyone who enters hell may be salted with fire, i.e. *preserved* in eternity of torment,' or, (ii) 'Everyone must suffer as through fire to *avoid* sin,' or, (iii) 'All is to be tested and purified by fire.' cf. I Cor. 3:13. It may mean that on the one hand the fire will purify and make acceptable, and yet the same fire be (as above) torment to the lost. If fire means suffering (Luke 12:49) then it may mean that just as no sacrifice was truly one without salt (verse 49b found in some ancient MSS) so no offering or life will be truly so without suffering (purifying?) V. 5d which speaks of salt being salty probably refers to salt which becomes adulterated (since salt cannot become without savour) with things other than salt. Is Jesus referring to a savourless life and witness, especially amongst the disciples (previously quarrelling) who ought to be both 'preserved' and 'taste' to those to whom they witness. In any case salt is a quality which makes men live together (cf. Col. 4:6).

CHAPTER TEN

Jesus In Judea 10:1-15:47

I. Jesus on the way to Jerusalem

The Question Concerning Divorce

10:1-12 For Mark's Gospel, this is the only journey to Jerusalem. For the synoptic descriptions it is the last journey to Jerusalem. Luke (chs. 9-18) it is the Peraean journey. Jesus travels into the "boundaries of Judea and beyond the Jordan." He has left Galilee for the last time (in his earthly life) and the crowds to which he had been ministering. Now, probably the crowds come from Judea into Trans-jordan, and perhaps from Galilee also. He was "again engaged in teaching them," the durative imperfect showing the process kept continuing. Note "as his custom was" – this gives us a window into the pattern (as the purpose) of our Lord.

The word "tempt" (test) (V.2) shows the motive of the Pharisees. They were seeking to entrap Christ, *not to learn*. They delighted in the intricacies of the *law* and their intellectual superiority (so hurt by Jesus' actual actional ministry) now sought to have play. Where better than to show him up in the "niceties" of the law. The *general* view of the day was that a man could divorce for any cause, the school of Shanghai only in the case of adultery. Matthew 19:3 includes "for every cause" – they possibly trying to catch him on such laxity – seeing he so often seemed to disregard the law (traditions in fact). Jesus (V. 3) counters question with question (his habit). The Pharisees, put on the level of law, suggest Moses suffered (allowed) a man to divorce his wife. Here is their own suggestion that Moses (see Deut. 24:1f) *permits* – not legislates – divorce, by which is meant that divorce is not originally envisaged as of the ethos of law.

10:5 Shows that Moses' permission is concessive (not innately basic to law) because of the hardness of their hearts.

10:6-9 Show the following: Man is male, woman is female. God has made them thus. It is not just a pronouncement ("Male and female made he them") but the nature of things. A man will leave his group (and she her's) to become one united whole. They become *one flesh*. God has made it so. Let no one change this inviolable law. God purposed this oneness by the nature of creation as well as His intention for the well-being of man. This bond is the closest humans can know. Being "from the beginning" is not superseded by later "laws".

10:10 Shows that his disciples have not understood all. Matthew shows (19:10) that the disciples regarded the indissolubility of marriage as impossible – especially when adultery alone could be the cause of Jesus' answer in Matthew is that only certain can accept this. Matthew's use of "unchastity" (*porneia* – 'fornication') may mean before marriage, and may mean that in any case it is no marriage, but that when truly married even adultery is no cause for divorce as the union is not broken by it (only marred). This makes (here) verses 11-12 intelligible. The union is indissoluble, and no human form of "Marriage" or remarriage can make it otherwise. (NB: I Cor. 7:15 – whilst it speaks of separation does not seem to contemplate re-marriage.)

Concerning children

10:13-16 V. 13 shows they "kept on bringing" children to him. The disciples were obviously resentful thinking that Jesus' time was too much taken up with them – the important ones being the adults. Just

as Jesus was indignant at the making inferior of women, so now of children. Children are (just as much at least) in the kingdom already. Who are the disciples' to hinder (prevent) them from keeping on coming? The Kingdom is theirs by right. Which way is the kingdom of God to be *received*? In trustfulness – in the way they are doing so now. Contrast the Pharisees] Contrast the disciples! Note however, that children are not necessarily (automatically) in the kingdom – they too have to *come*! Jesus' love for them and acceptance of them is shown in the affection of sweeping them up into his arms, and also his blessing them.

The Rich Young Ruler

10:17-22 Cf. Matt. 19:16-30, Luke 18:18-30. Matthew tells us he was young, Luke that he was a ruler. (Note, marriage, children, now *earthly possessions* are treated). The ruler does not ask *how* may I inherit eternal life. He *knows*, i.e. by doing – “What must I do?” He has *run* and *knelt* which are signs of *humbling* (in the pursuit of eternal life.) “Good teacher” is not the conventional address – which is why Jesus takes it up. “Good” is certainly only applicable to God. The young man sees Jesus as good, i.e. he *has* eternal life, and can tell now what needs to be done. Jesus' question directs the young man to what is *really good*. If Jesus is *good* then the young man must look at him again. (The claim that Jesus denies goodness (being God) is not so. Indeed the opposite could be the case – he claims he is God, but wants the young man to see this, since he uses the term without giving it its full meaning.)

V. 19 covers man's “duty towards his neighbour” but not “toward God.”

V. 20 shows the young man believes he has given obedience, and his answer rejoices Jesus (V. 21 “loved him”) who out of his love gives liberating advice. The young man lacks one thing. Matt. 19:21 shows this – to be perfect or full

one must make up the thing missing. What is missing?

Is it *doing* or *aim and attitude*? To sell all, to give to the poor is *doings* but he will not *do* all, when he loves his riches. He does not really love God (his duty towards God.) There is nothing wrong with riches, but only with attachment to them. V. 22 “sorrowful” is in Matthew “became gloomy” (translated in Matt.

19:22 “to grow lowering) and shows the inner reaction as his motives are shown to be flimsy in fact. He is not really wanting eternal life (i.e. more than riches).

Riches – Their Danger: Renunciation – Its Rewards

10:23-31 In V.23 Jesus shows how attachment to riches makes it difficult for a man to set his mind on eternal life (in truth). *NB*. Most of us today are rich – and the Gospel is often a side-line to the riches. The fact that Jesus *looked around* meant he was deeply earnest (Matthew – “Amen, I say to you ...) in V.24 Jesus makes it clear that it is hard (for anyone) to enter the kingdom (AV “who trust in riches). Probably his meaning is that you do not have to *possess* riches for it to be hard, but covetousness is in rich and poor alike. V. 25 the “needle here is not the gate where a camel with difficulty squeezes through (that is possible!) but an actual needle's eye. V. 26 The disciples are shocked. They have not known how hard it is to get into the kingdom (had they not heard John on repentance?) and it may well mean they, up to this point, are still bent on riches themselves. There is indignation and despair in their question “Who then can be saved?” There is *a reason* namely that the door is closed against *purely human effort*. Salvation is monergistic (not synergistic). This Jesus states clearly in V. 27. V. 27 also shows that man's total hope lies in God (and only in Him!) cf. Gen. 1:1, I Cor. 1:28. V. 28 Does Peter still cling to what *he* has done? – “left all” etc. Note the “Lo!” – a sign of a significant saying (with deep feeling). V. 29-31 are a reiteration

of what Jesus has previously said (8:34f). Leaving must be for Christ's and the Gospel's sake (8:35),

V. 29 i.e. not just in order to obtain salvation. We do not have to explain what is *promised* – it is clear. Note however, “with persecution” (V.30). There is a disproportion between our “doing” and the prodigality of God's rewards. A man, in God, enters into new relationships – one of the old is replaced by the quality and quantity of the new so as to outpace the old, on every level. V. 31 In this world many are first (eg. the rich young ruler) but in the kingdom they shall be last. Peter (sad sack!) will be amongst the first – let him not worry about the loss of anything. What has he lost?

The Third Passion Prediction

10:32-34 In 8:31 he begins to *teach* them, in 9:31 he is *teaching* them, and here (10:32) he begins to *tell* them, almost as though they had forgotten the previous occasions. Luke 9:51 possibly applies here “He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” (cf. Isaiah 50:7 “I have set my face like a flint”). There is no thought of turning from the Cross. The same elements as previously are mentioned, although the description here is fuller.

Request To Be Great: True Leadership

10:35-45 Cf. Matt. 20:20-28. Matthew makes it clear that the mother of James and John was with them as they sought an unconditional boon from Jesus. If their immaturity were not pitiful we might be angry (as were the disciples) for their demand of favouritism. Already Jesus has offered them unlimited blessing (Vs. 29-31) but they obviously do not understand or are trying to get the better portion of it. The *glory* both of these have seen at the Transfiguration and they

undoubtedly anticipate similar glory. Probably for this reason Jesus deals with them kindly. Salome the mother has a human love for her sons, and desires it thus, i.e. they should be the two principle members of his cabinet] The (jealous?) disciples are mad at them for such asking (later), but Jesus takes them calmly. V. 38 is a question at a high level. How can they know, although he has told them three times what it is? (see Psalm 42:7, Isa. 53:2, Ps. 16:5, 23:5, 116:13, 11:6, 75:8, Isa. 51:17,22, Jer. 25:15,17). Well, if it is the cup of suffering and of death, they will drink it, but not in that measure or quality that he will (V.39). V. 40 shows that Jesus leaves the Father's prerogatives in His (the Father's) hands. Why, it *may be* that they are appointed to sit there, but they may not bargain it into being so. See also 13:32 where Jesus is again voluntarily under the Father's hand, himself. V. 41 shows the (righteous!) indignation of the others. The principle here is: “To wish to have the place of authority may be all right, if it is for exercising it for the purpose for which authority is ordained, i.e. to serve others. If it is only to lord it over men, then it is a Gentile way, if to serve, then the Kingdom way. Jesus who is Lord has come not to “lord it” but to serve. His service is in giving his life a ransom for many. He serves as the Substitute. He pays the ransom price (to God). Isa. 52:13-53:12 is the background of such a servanthip, and the giving of his life particularly in Isa. 53:11,12. True the “Son of man” is both Servant, and Saviour. The ransom concept is for *release* (captives, debtors, slaves). See Psalm 49:7, I Pet. 1:18,19. This reverses the pattern of the ego-seeking disciples.

Blind Bartimaeus And His Healing

10:46-52 One element is common to the three Synoptic accounts (Matt. 20:29-34, Luke 18:35-43) that Jesus is called “Jesus of Nazareth” and also “Son of David”. Some commentators would reduce this to

a polite form of address but it is clear the Synoptists deem it important. Bartimaeus (Son of Timaeus) immediately on hearing it is *Jesus*, addresses him as the Messiah (Son of David). He cries, then, even though rebuked, yells louder. Some may have wished to hush him because this was a high address and even seditious. However he perseveres, not giving up until his faith is requited by healing. His yelling may have desperation as they tell him (having rebuked him!) “Be of good cheer!” This is a high word, and increases faith. The address of “Rabboni” (Mary uses it in the garden) is higher than just Rabbi. It is a rich designation for “Teacher”. Bartimaeus knows him as Teacher. “Let me receive sight”, i.e. *now*). Faith expects and is not disappointed. Jesus tells him to *go*. Bartimaeus *follows*.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

II. Jesus in Jerusalem

Chs. 11-13 cover the course of ‘Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem although Ch. 13 is a special discourse Jesus has with just his disciples. Whilst from Mark it may appear to be Jesus’ first visit to Jerusalem, we know it to be the last of many. John shows us the day was a Sunday and Matthew that there were 2 crowds – one *with* Jesus and the other *coming to meet* him. John tells us that Lazarus’ raising added to the rising enthusiasm and adulation. Bethphage and Bethany were 2 villages on the way – “toward” the Mount of Olives.

The Entry Into Jerusalem

11:1-11 Zech. 9:9, Matt. 21:1-9, Luke 19:29-38, John 12:12-19. There is no caution in Jesus’ entry. All caution is abandoned. The details of the proposed entry are meticulous and exact, also many. Only a colt is mentioned in Mark, Matthew adding the dam which would mean the hitherto unriden colt would not be restive. Matthew clearly has Zech. 9:9 in mind. (cf. Numbers 19:2, Deut. 21:3, I Sam. 6:7). If he is a king (and he is) yet he comes meekly – with suffering in view. The owner of the colt would (did) know who *the Lord* was (ὁ kupios) and was willing to give his colt (no light thing where such was most valuable.) The intensity of the crowds’ emotions is seen in the ready use of garments both upon the colt and the way – giving the appearance of royalty. The salutations as seen compositely in the 4 Gospels add up to high adulation. Here in Mark “Hail! (Hosanna = Save now!) Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our fathers.” whilst we may not understand all the meaning of the salutation (Psalms 113 – 118 were used as the festive Psalms at the time of the Passover) yet it is an acclamation the Messiah – King. It is the “kingdom – coming” in contradistinction to the kingdom of the past. Luke 19:39 shows that the Pharisees take grave exception to the salutation. The significance of the colt cannot be designated as meaning royalty. *V. 11* Jesus has a look at the temple – a preliminary to his cleansing act of the morrow.

The Cursing Of The Fig Tree

11:12-14 Little if any breakfast is eaten in the East. Fig trees bear for 10 months. It is clear that Jesus *expected* figs on it. True – the other trees were not in this leafed state – but it ought to have had figs. The *cursing* (V. 21) of the tree was not out of spiteful pique, surely. Surely the incident is significant of Jerusalem (Israel) giving the *appearance* of

fruitfulness but lacking true fruit. The universal principle of fruit-bearing is not fulfilled also.

Cleansing Of The Temple

11:15-18 Cf. Matt. 21:12-16, Luke 19:45:47 cf. John 2:13-16. The act of cleansing was highly dangerous (a) Because it was against “vested interests,” (b) He asserted an unique authority without it being delegated by “the powers that be.” The leaders saw it as “stirring up the people” (Matt. 21:10, Luke 23:1). The act may well be Messianic, cf. Mal. 3:1f but in any case it is warranted. The place where quietness should be ideal for true worship, all that which is against the spirit of worship is in progress. “Cave of bandits” (V. 17) was a strong charge. Rackets were worked on the sale of sacrificial animals and foreign exchange. V. 16 shows they used the temple (court-yard) as a ‘short-cut’ to the city. Mark, writing to Gentile Christians uses *Isa. 56:7* for two purposes (a) to designate it as the house of prayer and (b) for all nations (Gentiles). The fear of Jesus was related to the never decreasing astonishment of the people at His authoritative doctrine.

Meaning of the Withered Fig-tree.

11:20-26 The “behold” of V. 21 indicates astonishment. The withering of the tree is decisive. It may be a significant truth that cursing from Christ’s life (judgment) is equally effective as his blessing (it is!) However, the point is illustrated. He has faith – something happens. Let them go *on believing* (in their hearts – i.e. with all their beings) and they *will secure* the fruits of faith eg. throw a mountain into the sea. The faith is not in their ‘faith-

ability’ but in God! Note the continuous imperatives. V. 25 seems unrelated until *forgiveness* is seen as a prerequisite of effective prayer, i.e. we need forgiveness but hinder it by unforgiveness and so destroy the ‘climate’ for faithful praying. The subjunctive is a present *iterative* i.e. “may be remitting” – he forgives where it is possible. (NB. V.26 is not in most ancient authorities, cf. Matt. 6:14-15).

Jesus’ Authority Questioned

11:27-33 Cf. Matt. 21:23-27, Luke 20:1-8. The most puzzling thing of all is Jesus’ authority. Not formally trained, or ordained at men’s hands, he is an “outsider”. “Come again to Jerusalem” – he is now not approaching it, but inside it. It was said that the Temple could be cleansed by the Sanhedrin, a prophet or the Messiah. Jesus does not evade their question. He indicates that the source of John’s authority is his also. If they do not know John’s (or will not know!) neither may they know his. The knowing or not knowing is again proved to be in the area of the will/s.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Parable of the Vineyard and The Wicked Tenants

12:1-12 Cf. Matt. 21:34-36, Luke 20:9-19 cf. Isa. 5:1-7. Note “parables,” plural, although Mark tells only one. Isaiah 5:1-7 ought to be read to get the background. The listeners would know this story.

Israel is the vineyard, the “husbandmen” its leaders. No provision is left unmade. The servants are the prophets, the well beloved son (cf. Matt. 3:17 etc.) expected to be respected. The “killing” – or its plot – is even now in progress. The judgment, the first instalment being in AD 70 under Titus, will also be that the kingdom will be given to *others*. This latter (a 1á Mark) would surely refer to the Gentiles – a statement bringing (in Luke) an involuntary “God forbid!” If the judgment is terrible it is only because it ‘fits the crime’, i.e. the excommunication, i.e. death of God’s Son. Doubtless (V. 12) the very story itself precipitates the murderous intent of the leaders’ hearts. The verdict of God is endorsed by citing Ps. 118:22,23 (LXX). The builders are the leaders, and rejectors. The stone is Christ. Is it significant that this is the very Psalm related to the people’s cry at his entry – also being a Passover Psalm? The quote indicates, however, the triumph of the *Stone*. V. 12 reveals they knew the parable to be directed at him. His favour with the people alone saves him from the anger to which they are provoked. (see also Acts 5:28, 24:5, 4:11, I Pet. 2:4-18, Isa. 28:16).

Tribute to Caesar: A Question

12:13-17 Cf. Matt. 22:15-22, Luke 20:19-26. The Herodians would have opposed any move to be disloyal to a tax demand, and the Pharisees would have done the opposite, i.e. opposed any payment. Here he would be wrong whatever he said. He saw the wrongness of the motive for the question. The answer is not a clever evading of being caught. Rebuking the spirit of their tempting, Jesus says that whatever belongs to Caesar, give it to him! (cf. Peter and the tax, Matt. 17:27). Romans 13:1 insists that the powers are

ordained of God. To give God that which is His contained a strong rebuke. This sort of questioning (see previous parable) is not giving to God His due. The *amazement* is not only at the failure to be caught – wily ones were good at that – but the authority in the command.

The Sadducees’ Question

12:18-27 Cf. Matt. 22:23-33, Luke 20:27-28. The Sadducees are mentioned here only in Mark. They were dangerous opponents being in charge of the Temple – being its hierarchy, being immensely rich. Theologically they were liberals and opposed to the supernatural. They are rough and arrogant in manner. Their example was intended to make Jesus appear a fool, and so silence him. The custom of not allowing the brother’s seed to die out was Mosaic (Deut. 25:5-10). They permit a hypothetical resurrection only in order to discredit (see V. 18). The verb “erring” may be a middle in which case they are deceiving themselves. Being deceived comes from not (truly) knowing the Scriptures, i.e. in this case what the Scriptures taught about the resurrection but on the whole the vast *principle* of Holy Writ. Nor do they know the “power of God,” i.e. to raise from the dead and to make those raised above the human earthly levels of sex as such. Vs. 26-27 – The very Moses they quote (for their inveigling proposition!) is taught of the God of the *living*, i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (once alive) are still alive. To truly know God is to live or, more correctly, because God knows man he lives. He is not the God of a collection of bones! So, he repeats, you “are greatly in error.”

The Greatest Commandment

12:28 -34 Cf. Matt. 22:34-40 cf. Luke 10:25-37. The third questioner (Matt. 22:34 says a Pharisee) alone receives some commendation (V. 34). He is a

scribe. Jews usually (at this time) assessed the primacy of a command by the nature (extent) of the penalty for breaking it. Much controversy was attached to the value and nature of the various commandments. Whilst the answer Jesus gave is “second nature” to us now (to believe) yet his answer was in fact, brilliant. The answer actually lifted the subject from the academic to the mercilessly searching area of experience. Far from being the object, Jesus was the subject. The questioner is constrained to applaud the answer and Jesus deals kindly with him – “you are not far from the Kingdom of God.” The crowd is terrified. Undoubtedly the dimensions (and atmosphere created) of the answer heard, were revealing the state of the hearer – they dared not ask another question – for fear of the answer!

Jesus Questions The Pharisees

12:35–37a Cf. Matt. 22:41–46, Luke 20:41–44. Jesus now takes the initiative. His argument is very clear. Once (V. 36) it is made clear that *David* is the author of the Psalm (110) then the *conventional idea* of *David’s Son being Messiah* gives way to *Messiah being the Lord*. If in accordance with other parts of Scripture he is David’s son, then from this statement he is not merely David’s son i.e. Messiah must be regarded most highly. Doubtless also this kind of questioning is to indicate a plane of thought (a new dimension) far beyond that of his audience. Something thrilling about these indications of other dimensions caught the people so that they were enraptured.

Denunciation Of The Scribes

12:37b–40 Protocol, honouring greetings destroy reality, especially spiritual reality (cf. Luke 20:46). Seeking to be No. 1 because of one’s formal (academic) training is really against what one has been

trained for (cf. Luke 14:7–10 for modesty in such situations). The social and moral ‘promise’ of these is belied by their damnable hypocrisy. Cole says “They were nothing if not biblical expositors and commentators ... conservative to the hilt nay positively fundamentalist in their approach to the Bible ...” (Ad. loc.) They got hold of widow’s houses by “legal” ways. The “cover-up” is long prayer, without sincerity, and to gain praise. For all this, terrible judgment.

The True Offering Of The Widow

12:41–44 Cf. Luke 21:1–4. As against the above, true sincerity by one who gives all, reveals the true inner disposition to be right as against the murky hypocrisy and outward show of the greedy and proud religionist. Note that Jesus sits down quietly to watch the treasury; in this he is Master of all. We need such a story to wrench us back to reality in the matter of giving.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

III. The Discourse On The Last Things

13:1–37 Cf. Matt. 24–25, Luke 21. This chapter has occasioned much controversy. Those who do not agree with prophecy after the Old Testament ethos, i.e. who do not admit “supernaturalistic foretelling” cannot believe this passage was written *before* the events (seemingly) foretold. Consistent with “form-criticism” (the value of which on some levels cannot be denied) they assert that the early church was, by these words

put into Christ's mouth, teaching, giving a rationale of events. It is suggested that just prior to the proposed desecration of the Temple in AD 38 by Caligula (setting up a statue of himself through Petronius the Procurator) a Christian saw the act as the fulfilment of the prophecy (on another level) of the "abomination of the desolation" (Dan. 9:27) which would give birth to a new age and this with the coming of the Son of Man. In fact, these are surely the words of the Lord himself. It is after called "The Little Apocalypse," amplified in the book of the Revelation and somewhat similar to that of I Thess. 4:13-17. The purpose of the passage is that of warning

- (i) Against undue trust and reliance upon the established religious order (Vs. 1-4),
- (ii) Against deceptions of false Messiahs (5,6),
- (iii) Against world troubles and turmoils (7,8), and
- (iv) Against the traumas of persecution and betrayal because of their loyalty to the faith. This foretelling will take the 'sting' and the shock from the events and cause a calm in the believer in the time of the events.

Jesus Predicts The Destruction Of The Temple

13:1-4 Josephus tells of the immensity of the stones – 37 by 12 by 18 feet. They were also polished. The destruction in AD 70 of the Temple literally, apart from the foundation, left not one stone upon another. The *purpose* of the destruction is not named here, but we are awed by our Lord's look into the future – it was not simply to be the destruction of a building, but the destruction of a sacrificial culture embodying the whole *ethos* of the Jewish people. The announcement was electrifying. Peter, James and John (this time Andrew is with them) come to ask him concerning the amazing revelation.

The Birth Pangs of the Future: Signs of the Parousia

13:5-8 The deceit of evil must be watched (cf. Rev. 12:10). False messiahs will seek to supplant the true. They will come (claiming to be) in my Name. Wars and rumours of wars *must be* (V. 7 cf. Dan. 2:28), but these are not signs of the end but the *birth-pangs* of the terrible age – "the end is not yet." V. 8 shows the manifestations of the sufferings – these too, are a *beginning*. (cf. Isa. 26:16-19, Micah 4:9-10, Hag. 2:6, Rev. 12:1-6). A rationale of suffering is not given except that it is inseparable from this "time." Whilst some of these things may have referred to Caligula's time, yet they certainly are not *limited* to that time.

The beginning of troubles:

Persecution of the Disciples

13:9-13 Now the "heat" is turned on the believers (church). The "beginning of sorrows or birth-pains" (V. 8) gives way to deeper spasms as persecution begins. To "take heed" is to be constantly on the alert. Seemingly not to escape *from* these things but to be vigilant *in* them. Necessarily, they will be arrested, beaten, forced to defend the faith, and will be persecuted in the high courts of the world. True enough these things happened in Acts – in Palestine and beyond, eg. Paul before Felix, Festus, Agrippa etc. With this (V. 10) there will be universal preaching of the Gospel, a startling prophecy to his few hearers. Is Israel rejected as the favoured nation? V. 11 shows they are to be of the same "stuff" as their Lord. Not tutored in the schools of rhetoric, logic or scholastic reasoning, they will be like him, with ready answers. Here is one of Mark's rare references to the Holy Spirit. In Matt. 10:20 He is called "the Spirit of your Father"

– giving an even warmer comfort (‘not as orphans’.) Vs. 12–15 show that relationships within families shall become bitter over the matter of the Gospel. This could easily be with Jews and Jewish Christian brothers – but again must not be limited (see V.10). “For my name’s sake” – this name is hated, cf. Acts, also *1 Pet. 4:12–16*. V. 13 “endure unto the end” cannot refer to the “end” in time, seeing it is a long “age”, but in the line of Acts 14:22 “through much tribulation we shall enter into the Kingdom of God”, i.e. we who are already in it] “Shall be saved” does not mean by endurance, but by the faith that endures. It might be said “He that is saved will endure unto the end.” The end will mean “life” or “that period of persecution” or “until he (if at that time) should come.”

The Abomination of Desolation

13:14–20 Matthew says “in the Holy Place”. The abomination is sacrilege. It is “the idol that profanes.” Undoubtedly this language is guarded lest it fall into wrong hands. Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12: 11, refer originally to the statue set by Antiochus profaning the holy place. If this is the same as Luke 21:20–21 then even the standards of the Roman eagles would be regarded as horrible defilement. Later too, AD 135, a statue and temple of Zeus was established and much later the Moslem mosque. “Let him that reads understand” is to cover the cryptic use of “abomination of desolation” – “let him understand the first and then the later abomination/s.” “Those in Judea” Eusebius 3,5 reports that the Christian congregation in Jerusalem received reliable news before the war in Jerusalem (AD 70) and retired to Pella in Perea and were all saved. Johnson (ad. loc.) suggests a parallel in Rev. 12:6 where the woman who has borne the Messiah has a place of refuge for 1260 days or nearly 3.5 years

– the approximate length of the Jewish war. Vs. 15–16 mean he must not go into the house (the stairway is on the outside) but to flee immediately. Mothers with babes, and expectant women would find it difficult – as such tension brings on childbirth! Winter flight would be severe with the cold etc. Such horrors did exist in the Jewish war. V. 19 would seem to suggest a wider perspective, however, than the Palestinian conflict although this phrasing would not have seemed excessive to those involved in it. The intensity of tribulation should call for pause and consideration. Yet in Palestine the mopping-up operations of the Roman army were literally cut short by “the scramble to establish the new Flavian dynasty” (Cole ad. loc.) – if the flight to Pella is indicated, then “shortened those days” would be confined to that period (c.A.D.70). If, however, a Great Tribulation is yet to happen then this principle would be repeated, and God will shorten the time of horror by the return of the Son of Man.

False Christs and False Prophets will Appear

13:21–23 A return to theme of V. 6 cf. Deut. 13:1–3. The desire of evil is to unseat the faithful. That they are the *elect* means they will not (cannot?) be deceived – “if possible” – and these may have been “messianic emulations” in those days, and will yet be. (We know of them in the cults and sects). However V. 23 shows that it is the warnings (of all these things) which shall keep the eyes of the elect open.

The Parousia of the Son of Man

13:24–27 Cf. Joel 2:10,30,31. Jesus is here quoting from Isa. 13:10, 34:4 (not LXX). The question is whether this language (truly eschatological) is apocalyptic or literal. Apocalyptic of course may

be literal. Are the sun, moon and stars references to high powers – eg. rulers of Roman Empire, or even the angelic forces (cf. Rev. 12:4). There is no reason why there should not be celestial changes certain it is that these will be a “shaking of the foundations” and that this will be evidently discernible. These things will make clear to believers the imminent return of the Lord. V. 26 See such parallel passages as Acts 1:11, II Thess. 1:7–10, 2:8, Rev.1:7, 19:11–16. The language of course is of Dan. 7:13. The “clouds” when seen in OT language refer to the Shekinah glory. The Son of Man is to come in this manner with authority. V. 22 In Daniel 7 the coming of the Son of Man precedes the judgment and the initiation of the everlasting Kingdom. It seems clear that I Cor. 15:51–53 and I Thess. 4:13–18 are fulfilled at this point. The phrase “uttermost part” is intended to convey the thought that nothing shall be missed. The “elect” are mentioned, but not the “non-elect” – quite often the case in the NT “gathering” refers to the dispersed; “height of the sky” see Deut. 30:4.

The Parable of the Fig-tree

13:28–38 The terrible things of the “end-time” give away, however, to the glory of the “summer”, i.e. the times of sorrows are a prelude to glory. Instead of defeating they will give true hope – they are not the carriers of pessimism but of true optimism. They are, however, to see the portents and interpret them. “These things” – see Vs. 14–25.

V. 30 “this generation” would certainly refer to the generation of Jesus’ time. They would witness the things of the destruction of Jerusalem. This has led some to think that the chapter refers only to that event. A reconciliation has been attempted by saying that “this generation” refers to kind but not to If this is so, his meaning is “This sort of generation

shall go on being and will (be bound to) see all these things until the eschatological consummation.” It is quite clear that the NT looked eagerly, in its time, to this climax. Other indications are also present (eg. II Thess. 2:3f) – that suggest a fulfilling of the “age” or “time” before the consummation *can* take place, cf. Mark 13:10. It is better to see 2 mountain peaks – one near and one further away – and whilst from one perspective they are very close, yet in reality a wide valley may exist between them. Some suggest that Jesus and the early church were wrong in their immediate expectancy. II Pet. 3:4–9 has a rationale of this. The living church is always living in immediate expectancy. The thing to remember is our Lord’s authoritative and solemn “Truly I tell you”, i.e. it WILL come to pass – so verse 31.

V. 32 is a puzzling verse. Jesus obviously knows both the *how* and the *why* of the events leading up to the last event. His “self-limitation” at least puts the *whole matter* out of the realm of precise prediction and this may be part of the *why* of the self-limitation. It is not that the Son *cannot* know, but *will* not know. This is not posited of his post-resurrection situation, but may be natural to any pre-resurrection understanding. The mention of Son and Father here is one of the rare Markan relational references.

V. 33 The point of the knowledge being only with the Father is well made – *all* must be perpetually vigilant, i.e. watchful. Sleepiness or drowsiness (an affluent age please note!) is a constant danger (see Romans 14: 11–14) and is in the *moral* realm. Watching is not sitting with hands folded on the lap but being morally obedient and in the action of doing God’s will. As the disciples were shocked at their powerlessness with the demoniac so we may be shocked (unprepared) for the coming of the Master. (For concept of “house” see John 10:7, Matt. 25:11, I Cor. 16:9, Col. 4:3). The door–

keeper in the East is guardian of the house, as well as the one who admits the Master. The four (Roman) watches are mentioned in V.35, no doubt Vs. 36–37 are intended to indicate terror known by the unwatchful servant. Note (V. 34) that there are other servants, other tasks also. Note, too, how all of this is related to all the actions of Ch. 13.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IV. The Passion Narrative: 14:1 – 15:47

From 14:1 – 15:47 we have the Passion narrated. It is a matter for surprise that the terrible events are so described. It can only mean that the Gospel writers, whilst recognising the shame of the events, also recognise the validity of the events as historical happenings and the indispensability of them for the truth of the Gospel.

Cf. Matt. 26:2–29, Luke 22:1–29.

Mark (as Luke) has only a general interest in reporting the time and action of the Sanhedrin. The question of the actual time of the Passover and the festival of unleavened bread have been strongly debated. The most that can be drawn from Mark's Gospel is that it was in the *general* period of the Passover that the Lord was killed.

The Plot Against Jesus

14:1–2 show that the overt decision to kill him was now made. They did not wish to kill him on the actual Festival day simply because it was *wrong*

at that time, but because of the unfavourable reaction by the people! The actual event seems to be on the Tuesday evening which would make the Passover and Festival of unleavened bread to commence on Thursday. NB. Feast of unleavened bread lasted for 8 days. See Exodus 12:14–20.

The Significant Anointing of Jesus

14:3–9 Cf. Matt. 26:6–13, John 12:1–8. This story occasions some difficulties. Was this the woman of the account in Luke Ch. 7? In John, Martha and Mary seem to be in their own home. In both occasions the hosts are named Simon. It is clear that Luke's account is of another place (Galilee) and the Simon is a Pharisee. The women are different – Mary of Bethany being a godly woman. The houses may easily be the same, as Simon the leper's house may have been where Mary and Martha were cooking and entertaining for Simon. The alabaster box was a flask with a long neck that was always broken in order to use the contents which were of a volatile oil. Its value was about \$44.00 (300 denarii). It is the disciples that murmur at such extravagance for it seems against the widow's mite principle, where indeed it is not, seeing it is intended to glorify God.

In V. 6 Jesus rebukes them for “glowering at her” – for they are angry with the waste of money. Whether “give to the poor” is sincere or not, Jesus makes it clear that she has truly understood his “value.” Mary is the one who has truly listened to him. Judas has not and is the most indignant for obvious reasons. The prodigality of Mary's love is commended. The poor will always be with them but not Jesus. Mary knows of his death – even if the others do not. Note that Mary anoints the ‘*whole body*’ (v.8) and this is an act of faith with a view to the death. V. 9 shows that the world will have a different view to that of the disciples.

Judas Agrees To Betray Jesus

14:10-11 Indicates that this precipitates the feelings within Judas as also his thoughts. Matt. 26:14-15 shows it was his love of money that drove him. The gradual deterioration of Judas, because of greed and ambition makes a sad story. The chief priests have a clear murderous intent.

The Disciples Prepare For The Passover

14:12-16 Sound in *principle* like the arrangements for the triumphal entry. Mark clearly indicates Jesus' control and planning of the situation. The first day of unleavened bread is the *actual day* of the *Sacrificing* of the Passover, i.e. 14 Nisan (cf. Lev. 23:5-6) (Thursday here). The lambs were killed on the afternoon of 14 Nisan and eaten on the Thursday evening after sunset, i.e. 15 Nisan. The whole matter of times is still under debate as some suggest the meal was not the actual eating of the Passover but was a fellowship meal preceding the day of Passover (cf. John 13:1, 29, 18:28, 19:14,31 where this would seem to be so). What emerges from the passage is that they look to the Lord for direction. He gives it, but only to two disciples (V. 13) so that Judas will not know *where*. Thus the Passover will be eaten in security and safety. To see a man carrying a waterpot is most unusual (V. 13) and he would be easily detected. The arrangements would not be made with him, but with the householder. V. 15 indicates that the arrangements had already been made. The disciples were to make the preparations, i.e. preparing and roasting the lamb, providing the bread, bitter herbs, sauce, and at least 4 cups of wine. The meal is as follows (Lenski ad.loc.) –

- (i) The first cup with its blessing;
- (ii) The bitter herbs to recall the bitter life in Egypt;
- (iii) The unleavened bread, the chasoret, the roasted lamb, and the chagiga (other sacrificial meat);
- (iv) The housefather dips the bitter herbs into the chasoret with

a benediction, then eats, and the others follow;

- (v) The second cup is mixed (wine with water), a son asks, and the father explains the feast;
- (vi) The first part of the hallel is sung, Ps. 113,114, and the second cup is drunk with a prayer of praise;
- (vii) The father washes his hands, takes two cakes of bread, breaks one and lays it on the unbroken one, blesses the bread out of the earth, wraps a broken piece of bread with herbs, dips it into the chasoret, eats it and a piece of the chagiga and a piece of the lamb;
- (viii) All join in eating, and it is to this point of the feast that Matthew and Mark refer with “while engaged in eating.” At no previous point could the exposure of Judas have been made without spoiling the ceremony;
- (ix) The conclusion was reached when the father ate the last morsel of the lamb, after which no one ate. Then came the third cup;
- (x) The second part of the hallel, Ps. 115-118; The fourth cup, sometimes a fifth; Then the final part of the hallel, Ps. 120-137. This is the rabbinical description.

Jesus Foretells The Betrayal

14:17-21 Cf. Matt. 26:20-24, Luke 22:14,21-23, John 13:18-19. It is evident from this that Jesus knew who was going to betray him. The use of Psalm 41:9 shows the anguish Christ must have felt. The one eating with him would be one who would dip in the common dish with him. This communal dish signified the height of friendship. It would cause horror if any should abuse this. The disciples were shocked and insecure not knowing their own hearts, but not intending betrayal. Matthew tells that Judas asks after all the others have asked – he knows his non-asking will be significant. V. 21 “it is written” can refer to Psalm 41:9 or mean all that Jesus does (he calls himself Son of Man) is in accordance with the Scriptures. There is no need to have a mechanistic determinism which puts Judas on the track of fate. He is responsible for his own actions.

The Last Supper

14:22-25 Cf. Matt. 26:26-29, Luke 22:17-20, cf. I Cor. 11:23-26. The blessing of the bread and giving thanks for the wine would probably be the usual ones. The “loaf” was a flat unleavened bread-cake and the breaking could simply be in order to distribute portions and might *not* refer to the body broken. His body was not technically broken. The bread referred however to his body. V. 24 “blood of the covenant” would refer back to Exodus 24:8 for *kind* but this would be *another* covenant and would equate with Jer. 31:31-34, cf. Zech. 9:11, Ezek. 37:26. Passover blood and covenant blood are two different concepts and yet they are here fused with all their richness of meaning. The words of institution with the great Biblical background can only mean the significance of the Passover, of the covenant, and of sacrifice for sins (if we add the Matthean account – “for the remission of sins”). The “many” shows its universal nature – which is consistent with Mark writing to Gentiles. V. 26 Paul notes the eschatological nature of the Supper (I Cor. 11:26) “till he comes”. The messianic banquet was a concept loved by the Jews, for with it comes the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. In the Didache (later) the Cup is connected with the line of David, and the Bread the scattered elements of (one) church to be gathered finally into the Kingdom of God. The reference in Luke 22:16 makes the (future) heavenly feast a heavenly fulfilment of the Passover plus the Lord’s Supper. See Rev. 19:9, 20:4-6, Matt. 6:10,11. The whole point is that the Cross and the coming Kingdom are set together, their meaning and relationship being inseparable.

Jesus Foretells Peter’s Denials

14:26-31 V. 26 the traditional hymn of the Hallel section of the Psalms (115-118) was sung.

V 27 Instead of returning to Bethany they simply camp for the night among the trees of the Mount of Olives. Here Jesus quotes Zech. 13:7 of himself and tells them that the events of the night will ‘scandalise’ them, because they expect a victorious Messiah, not a defeating arrest, and the Cross. In V. 28 he forecasts the victory of resurrection. V. 29 Peter denies the possibility of any denial. Jesus points out that *immediately* i.e. ‘this night’ Peter will deny him. The other gospels speak of the cock crowing (i.e. the 3rd watch of the night) being the time by which Peter will make denial. Here it is said the cock will crow three times (see 13:35). Peter was spokesman for himself and the apostolic band. They also personally deny that they will disown him.

The Agony Of Gethemene

14:32-42 Cf. Matt. 26:31-44, Luke 22:31-44.

V. 32 Introduces the agony over which there has been much controversy. A. Cole suggests that Jesus placed his disciples strategically to guard his time of prayer (a) Some, eight near the entrance and (b) Three (Peter, James and John) nearer. He then went ahead “as a king might be surrounded by his holy-guard”. V. 33 shows the depths of his suffering “sore amazed”, “very heavy” (AV), “greatly distressed”, “troubled,” (RSV) “deep amazement and anxiety” (Johnson ad. loc.). Here is an unique phenomenon. His explanation is “my soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death, so sad I am near death” (Johnson). The weight of sorrow has pressed him down to the point of death (cf. Heb. 5:7, Psalm 42:5,11). V. 35 shows the burden in that he *fell* to the ground. The usual posture of prayer was standing, but (see Num. 16:22) prostration was the posture of anguished supplication. The use of the word “hour” is of the time when he is to die for the world (cf. John 12:23,27, 13:1).

V. 36 The cup (see 10:38) is the terrible baptism of suffering. “Abba” is the term of endearment, signifying

closeness to the Father. If Heb. 5:7 is to interpret the scene then it means (as his words of V.34 imply) that he was actually dying and he was praying for deliverance from (a non-crucified) death. Otherwise it means he was praying for deliverance from actual suffering and that the cup was not really taken away. Further it could simply mean the temptation to evade the cup, which temptation he eventually overcame by submission to the Father's will. Luke 22:43, in which an angel strengthens him, means he was delivered from actual impending death, or he was strengthened to take (the coming) death, and the suffering of this hour.

V. 37 shows that the *nearest* disciples are not watching, i.e. keeping alert and guarding. The rebuke of

V. 38 (note:- the name Simon is used, not Peter) is intended to warn them against the immediate coming events when they will need alertness. *Temptation* of course means trial or tempting. They will have to pray that this does not happen to them, cf. Lord's prayer. It is implied that God will give weak ('the flesh is weak') humans the power to be able to 'watch'. Peter who was strong to assert his faithfulness is weak to execute it. V8. 39-42 show the continuing self-concern of the disciples. The "sleep on" is not of bitterness but of sadness. They have missed sharing with him in his great hour of crisis. V. 42 shows that Jesus knows Judas is about to arrive. He is in stating this still Master of the situation.

Jesus is taken captive

14:43-52 Cf. Matt. 26:47-56, Luke 22:47-53, John 18:3-11. The group which comes is from the scholars, elders, chief priests – the ones representing the intelligentsia and responsible leadership. That such a crowd (multitude) should come is explainable only on the grounds of great feeling. A signal (V.44) was needed so that the wrong man might not be taken

and the true culprit escape. The disciple's cry "Master!" and the disciple's kiss are a mockery, but enough to identify Jesus. John 18:3 speaks of the court soldiers and it is certain that Roman soldiers were present. John's account tells of their shock as he admitted he was the one sought. Mark simply remarks that they apprehended him, whilst Luke says he told them it was their "hour" and "the authority of darkness." In Matthew Peter is shown to have cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest. Judas (V. 44) is anxious Jesus be "led away safely" to the high priest, otherwise he will not receive his money. The disciples (V. 50) see the "game is up," and all lost. There is no sudden denouement which will defeat these powers and give them the Kingdom – they are utterly defeated. Peter, having made an attempt with a sword, is now suspect and most of all must not be apprehended. In V. 48 Jesus rebukes them for treating him as the leader of a bunch of bandits. V. 49 shows how pathetic is their action but he explains it as God's action because it is the fulfilment of the Scriptures eg. Isa. 53:12, see Luke 22:37. This is a most significant prophecy meaning "He was made equal ('put on equal footing') with the transgressors. See also *Acts 2:23*. The prophecy now of their being scandalised (V. 27) is now fulfilled.

Vs. 51-52 concern an interesting incident. The anonymity of the young man (Gk. *veaviskos*) in teens or late adolescence may mean it was Mark himself. This would be so if the disciples had already fled (so that they might not be apprehended) and the young man had remained behind. Probably sleeping with them, or near them, his covering was loose and when grasped at came away. Tradition has it that it was John Mark. It may even have been at his home that the Last Supper was shared. Acts 12:12 shows this home was well known to Peter. The word 'naked' does not necessarily mean totally nude as it also means a person in an undergarment.

Jesus Is Examined Before The High Priest

14:53–65 Cf. Matt. 26:57–68, Luke 22:54–62, 23:1f, John 18:19–23.

It is clear that Peter is the one telling this story through the evangelist. The actual times and events of the trial/s are difficult to assess in chronological order and we are only concerned here with Mark's account. He tells of 3 meetings (a) one at night (Vs. 55–65,) (b) one in the morning (15:1) and (c) a trial before Pilate (15:2–15). It would seem that the first trial was in the high-priest's house. Note V.53 that the entire Sanhedrin is gathered. John 18:19 speaks of an earlier trial before Annas (cf. 18:24). Matthew names the high-priest (reigning by Roman selection) Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas. V 54 shows it was a cold night. Peter warming himself, having gained entrance as far as the courtyard. It is difficult to understand his motives. He had already been told what would happen.

V. 55 shows that this gathering of the Council was more a “fact-finding” one than an actual trial.

Vs. 55–59 show that the witnesses are not of much value to the Council. This is why the High Priest hopes to involve him in some admission of guilt. Under Jewish law it was illegal to force a man to bear witness against himself. The trial had to be so conducted that whilst the Sanhedrin might convict it would need to produce evidence so that the Roman authorities would see execution as necessary. Nothing less would prevent the people from dangerous hostility. The Jewish courts as such had no power to execute.

In V. 61 the high-priest uses the word “the Blessed” to avoid using the name for God. He thus places Jesus under oath. Jesus says (Mark's Gospel) “I am”. His addition of quoting Dan. 7:13 and Psalm 110:1 does not lessen the claim to Sonship but intensifies it. The tearing of his clothes (mantle) was the *formal* sign of grief, but here it is the exultant sign of victory. There is no attempt to see *whether* these

claims are true or not or what is meant by them. For a true trial the priest was required to be in his vestments. It is said these were in the custody of Rome, being used only on special occasions and so, technically the court was not, according to their rules, properly constituted. The high-priest would scarcely tear the holy garments. The unanimous judgment of V.64 is not a calmly considered one as is shown by the abusive conduct of V. 65 (Cf. Matt. 26:68 where they say “prophesy unto us thou *Messiah* who is he that smote thee?” a gibe at his Messiahship).

Peter Denies That He Knows Jesus

14:66–72 Cf. Matt. 26:69–75, Luke 22:56–62, John 18:17, 25–27.

If Peter thought his presence might help, he might find out something, he is nevertheless doomed to deepening degradation. At each step he is forced to eat his own ‘brave’ words. The deceit of sin is shown. Peter's act is truly evil. How are we to understand Peter's action? The first is his idea of what Jesus might seek to do – use a sword to win his Kingdom (V. 47, cf. John 18:10–11). His own insistence on bravery is made mockery of by a servant girl who is probably seeking attention by her ‘find’. One lie leads to another. The sound of the cock crowing near-by or in the distance reminds him of his brave promises. Luke 22:61 says at this point our Lord turned (“wheeled”) and looked on Peter. V. 72 indicates that “he began to think” and then as the whole horrible failure burst in on him his cup of terrible remorse is full and “he burst out weeping,” i.e. in a paroxysm of passion. We should not be led into human sympathy with this failure – it was fearful.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Trial Before Pilate

15:1-5 The two “trials” of the night are really simply a gathering of the materials by which to impeach Jesus – they are not impartial trials. Now with the gathering of the full consultative body of the Sanhedrin, not just a faction within it, they conspire to actually *force* Pilate’s hand. Again, there is no room left for a just trial. In *V. 2* Pilate’s question is a surprised one “*You* are the king of the Jews?” (emphatic – “you”), i.e. How can *you* be a king – there is nothing to indicate this.” John 18:33-37 disarms Pilate as to any attempt at political insurrection. *V. 3* The chief priests make enough accusations to blacken his character as is evident from *V. 4*. The evidence that the accusations are without basis is his quiet ignoring of them. Pilate is cynical of the rabble-rousing leaders and obviously impressed by Jesus. He sees (*V. 10*) that these leaders are personally envious of Jesus. John and Matthew show us how Pilate is impressed by Jesus but vacillates in making the decision that will free the One against whom no legal conviction can be made.

Jesus Is Condemned To Be Crucified

15:6-15 Cf. Matt. 27:15-26, Luke 23:17-25, John 18:38b-40. The name of the insurrectionist, Barabbas, is in some MSS Jesus Barabbas and this could mean “Son of the father”. However, it seems he was a dangerous man, although popular with the multitude. He too could be a cause of trouble to the Jewish leaders, but not to place their ruling in jeopardy. The state of the rulers and of the crowd (always fickle) now stirred by the chief priests is such that reason has been dissipated. Deeper than this (see John 10:19-21) the hatred of Jesus which has shown in

the common people as well as the leaders is a moral matter (cf. Acts 4:24-25) i.e. they hate the Holy One of God. Although (*V. 14*) Pilate asks “Why, what evil has he done?” yet this may be a jeer at the rabble as much as a form of cynical incitement. The suggestion has not been made by Pilate that he should crucify, but they take up such a cry. They called for the most shameful death with a view to his being upon a tree, where he would be a curse (cf. Gal. 3:13, Deut. 21:23). The hideous hatred is not incidental but deliberate. His innocence incites and inflames through their own guilt. Pilate is conscious, as the other Gospels show, of having judgment over a Special Person, yet it is to satisfy the crowd (*v. 15*) which is demonically aroused (See Luke 22:53) that he delivers Jesus to crucifixion. Scourging (*V. 15*) was a cruel act, a torture often inflicted before crucifixion (cf. John 19:1) and was carried out with a leather whip with pieces of bone and metal set on it. The flesh was actually torn in strips.

Jesus Is Mocked By The Soldiers

15:16-20 Cf. Matt. 27:27-31, John 19:1-3.

In *Vs. 16-20* we see the Roman soldiers who had little time for the fierce Jewish rebels sneering at one whom they consider to be an imposter, seeking to be a King. Their mockery is cruel, but they, at least, do not know him as the one claiming to be Messiah. Their mockery is of a different quality to that of the crazed crowd, and the cunning religionists.

The Crucifixion Of The Lord Of Glory

15:21-32 Cf. Matt. 27:28-56, Luke 23:32-49, John 19:4-37.

V. 21 The names Alexander and Rufus are obviously well known to the church and readers are reasonably expected to know them also.

Simon (their father) here named is a Jew from Cyrene in Northern Africa. No Roman would demean himself by carrying a cross and to a Jew it was accursed.

V. 22 Golgotha is Aramaic for *skull*, probably referring to the *shape* of the hill. V. 23 “gave” (AV) is “offered” or (imperfect tense) “were going to give”. “Wine mixed with myrrh” was the local sour wine laced with myrrh – i.e. doped in order to temporarily sedate the one to be crucified so that they could more easily crucify him. He would not take an anaesthetic so that his faculties would remain clear.

V. 24 (cf. Psalm 22:18, Matt. 27:35) “they cast lots” refers to the prophecy and its fulfilment. V. 25 “third hour” – 9 am. Jewish time.

V. 25 Crucifixion was the cruellest and most degrading form of punishment. It was execution by torture. Death came slowly, often only after some days and then by thirst or loss of circulation, or gangrene. Palestine had seen mass crucifixion a number of times. V. 26 It was customary to place a placard with the man’s name and accusation. Mark does not record the Name, only the charge. The four Gospels give the full title (in aggregate) to be “This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”.

V. 27 shows that the crucifixion had been arranged in any case and probably the third cross was for Barabbas. Ancient authorities insert

V. 28 as it is in the AV “and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘He was reckoned with the transgressors’”, (cf. Luke 22:37). Vs. 29–32 the words “those who passed by” have reference to Psalm 22:7 and perhaps Lam. 1:12. The general attitudes of hatred, however, is seen clearly in Psalm 22 and 69 both of which are Messianic and identified with the suffering of the cross. They argue from the greater to the lesser – if he can rebuild the Temple he can easily come down from the cross. In V.31 the priests and the scribes (no doubt with dignity!) have

a reassuring mockery within their own group – i.e. We are right. If he were truly King he would now save himself. See! “We have judged him rightly.” The thieves who might be thought to have had sympathy with a fellow-sufferer show the bestiality of heart that accompanies criminality. Luke shows that one changed utterly when he recognised, as by a revelation, the truth of the Sufferer.

Vs. 33–39 The composite picture of the four Gospels is a brilliant end. Jesus remains self-possessed throughout it all, with the possible exception of the 3 terrible hours of darkness. V. 33 sixth hour = noon. The darkness is the sign of the curse (see Exodus 10:22) as in Egypt the plague of darkness was a curse (cf. Gal. 3:13). Luke 23:45 makes it an eclipse but as it was the (Passover) time of the full moon, it could not be a natural eclipse. It was supernatural. What connection may there be between this moral turmoil and the ‘nature’ of nature itself? The ‘great shout’ (V.34) is a terrifying cry which cannot be argued away. This One receives the wrath of God. Whilst the passage does not explicate the cry, yet the *fact* of it, and the anguish of dereliction renders it one of the most revealing and significant in all history. The earlier horror of Gethsemane is now revealed in its utterness by this shout of anguish. Note the possessive “my” even in the midst of suffering. II Cor. 5:21 would show, as other verses, that God had taken the initiative in the action of this suffering. The cry “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!” (cf. Psalm 22:1) was in Aramaic, not Hebrew. Yet V. 36) the “Eloi” is identified by some with a cry to ‘Elias’ or Elijah. It is suggested that this understanding of Elijah being called to, is a cruel pun, a gibe at Jesus for seeking the aid of Elijah whom the Jews said would precede Messiah and introduce him to the Jews and live beside him and attest to him as such. Whilst it seems incredible that the hardest of hearts should not be wrung, it is also proof of the very evil Jesus suffers on the cross. The vinegar in this case

is not drugged and may have been given in response to Jesus' "I thirst" of John 19:28 cf. Psalm 69:21. There would be no real anticipation that Elijah would come.

15:37–39 The *loud* voice of V. 34 and 37 imply strength and self-possession, not defeat and exhaustion. This last cry is probably the one of committal (John 19:30). "Gave up the Ghost", "breathed his last, expired" are translations which cover this last moment. It is a deliberate act and not prolonged as the aorist tense indicates. V. 38 The Temple veil was reputed to be nine inches in thickness. Its opening so that all men might look into the Holy of Holies would be seen as deeply significant and perhaps the (later) reference of Heb. 10:20 and Ephes. 2:14 would refer to this. It is recorded in all 3 synoptic Gospels. Luke puts the event (seemingly) at the beginning of the crucifixion (23:44f). V. 39 The translation can be "a Son of God" but the evidence is basically for "the Son of God." What the pagan centurion meant cannot be wholly determined but the evidence to him was overwhelming – this Man in all was superb. We may fill in to the utterance what he in part ignorant, may have cried. The dying thief, also, may have been partly ignorant, but would seem to be a Jew because of his understanding.

15:40–41 The mention of the women might seem surprising, but they are especially mentioned in John as here in Mark, perhaps more so are they to figure in the matter of the burial, bringing of spices etc. Mary Magdalene is not Mary of Bethany, nor the woman of Luke 7 who was a sinner, but one out of whom had been cast 7 devils, see Luke 8:2 (cf. Mark 16:9). Salome is described in Matt. 27:56 as the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. These women had been supporters of the cause of Jesus and seemed to understand him more deeply than the disciples themselves. NB. Mary is mother of "James the son of

Alpheus" cf. Mark 3:18. Also called the wife of Cleopas (John 19:25) and sister of Mary, Jesus' mother.

The Burial Of Jesus

15:42–47 Cf. Matt. 27:57–61, Luke 23:50–56, John 19:38–42.

The details need no adorning. Nothing more is known of Joseph of Arimathaea than is told in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 27:57, Luke 23:51, John 19:38). The body had to be removed before the even. Jesus had died after six hours of suffering which is why Pilate marvels. Note that Pilate ascertains that he is really dead. The fact that Joseph was a member of the Council (Sanhedrin formerly) and that he is described as one waiting for the Kingdom, means he was a truly godly man. He is courageous enough to go to Pilate himself. All would be glad to see the body taken away before the Sabbath began. Arimathaea was some 15 miles east of Joppa. The grave was hewn out of a rock, i.e. a cave of a rich man, thus fulfilling Isa. 53:9. V. 47 shows that because of hasty burial preparations the work of this Friday afternoon would have to be completed after the Sabbath, i.e. Sunday morning. For this the women had come to look and to prepare.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IV. The Empty Tomb

16:1 – 8 Cf. Matt. 28:1–10, Luke 24:1–12, John 20:1–10.

The chapter falls into two clear sections

- (i) The visit of the three women to the tomb, Vs. 1–8,
- (ii) Vs. 9–20 a summary of the Resurrection appearances of Christ concluding with his ascension.

The Visit Of The Women To The Tomb

16:1-8 We are not to read “the sabbath was past” as being an emotional utterance as such, yet the day must have been one of terrible emotion and gloom. The women, too, would be waiting to finish the burial of Jesus. Their minds would be set on this work and they would possibly, the night before, have bought the precious spices which they were now bringing. None was prepared for what was to come. Humanly this was understandable. Whatever the manuscript value of V. 14 may be, it does indicate that it was hardness of heart which was responsible for unbelief. Jesus’ disciples (see 4:41) had never really understood him, and were afraid of the supernatural elements he displayed. All would expect to see the much beloved body of their former teacher. John 19:39 shows that a hundred pounds of spices (a small fortune) had been used by Joseph on the body, and it was upon such a situation that minds were fixed. The women being the first would naturally wonder as to who would roll away the stone from the tomb, fixed as it usually was in a slot, and being difficult to move – a guard against spice-robbers!

Matt. 28:2-4 mentions both an earthquake and an angel who moved the stone. We are not to think that the stone had to be moved to allow the risen Jesus to emerge. Matthew reports the angel, Luke two men in dazzling clothes (24:4) and here (in Mark) a young man in white clothing. The whiteness is a dazzling one according to the Synoptics. A reconciliation can be made of the varying accounts “an angel”, “two men”, “a young man”, by simply saying there were two “angels” or “young men” but the narrators tell what they saw as they saw for the purposes for which they are telling. The women are “amazed” (RSV), “affrighted” (AV), “dumbfounded” (Lenski). The scene is so different to that expected.

V. 6 The angel seeks to reassure the women who are shocked by the unexpected. It is difficult for them to believe what they actually see. In this realm of the

unusual the mind demands a ‘rational’ explanation. The angel points to where his body had been laid. Obviously and in accordance with John 20:6,7 the grave clothes are still there. This is even better than a bare tomb as his body might ostensibly have been stolen.

V. 7 They are to tell what they have heard “He is risen” or aorist “He did rise”. Whilst all the disciples are to be informed it is Peter “in particular” who is to be told, i.e. he is to be relieved of his sorrow and sense of rejection (by the Lord) for his denial. This is a command as also to tell the information that Jesus will meet them in Galilee.

V. 8 The women flee still trembling and dumbfounded. Their astonishment, however, would be of the joyful incredulous type. Undoubtedly there would be some emotional reaction at the first frightening and now exciting experience.

The Longer Conclusion Of Mark

16: 9-20 Cf. Matt. 28:16-20, Luke 24:13-25, 50-51. John 20:11-23, Acts 1:6-11.

See notes for discussion on the ending/s of this Gospel. The ending does seem to construct a harmony of the various resurrection appearances of Jesus. S.E. Johnson (op. cit. p.265) gives the following reconstruction from the use of Codex W cf. Jerome, Dial. adv. Pelag. II.15 following (our) verse fourteen:-

When he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary the Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and brought the news to his associates as they were weeping and lamenting. Although they heard that he was living and had been seen by her, they disbelieved. After this he was revealed in another form to two of them as they went on foot into the country. They went and brought the

news to the rest, but they did not believe the two men. Afterward he was revealed to the Eleven as they were at table, and he reproached them for their unbelief and dullness of mind because they did not believe those who had seen him risen. (They made their defence, saying, ‘This age of lawlessness and unbelief is subject to Satan, who does not permit the unclean things which lie under the spirits to make the true power of God their own; therefore reveal your righteousness now’, they said to the Messiah. And the Messiah said to them, ‘The limit of the years of Satan’s authority has been reached, but other afflictions draw near; and because of those who sinned I was handed over to death, that they might return to the truth and sin no longer, so that they might inherit the spiritual and imperishable glory of righteousness which is in heaven’.) And he said to them, ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all the creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved, but he who disbelieves will be condemned. These signs will follow those who have believed: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new languages; they will pick up serpents, and even if they drink something deadly it will not harm them at all; they will lay their hands on the sick and they will get well.’ Then the Lord after speaking with them ‘was taken up into heaven’ and ‘sat on the right of God’. They went out and proclaimed the word everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and certified the word through the accompanying signs.

The shorter version is as follows:–

But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

NOTE. Generally speaking in critical principles, when there is a short text and one or more longer texts,

the shorter take the precedence. However, in this case the longer has been traditionally preferred. To say the least the phrase “the holy and incorruptible proclamation of everlasting salvation” does not really sound Biblical.

16:9–11 This account seems to be of the events described in John 20:11–18 but the author here adds two details (a) that demons had been expelled and (b) that the disciples “mourned and wept”. V. 11 shows that they are nevertheless unbelieving. V. 12 shows that these two who were unbelieving whilst on the road to Emmaus had told Jesus of that unbelief. Luke 24:33 shows that the residue (of the disciples) did not believe. Thus V. 14 makes it clear that this account is given to show the unbelief of all the disciples. It is a reflection on their former uneasiness and fear of the supernatural and their “pre-Pentecostal” turn of mind.

In Vs. 15–18 we have the command to preach the Gospel universally – “whole creation” (Lenski op. cit. p. 765). It is also personally (person to person) as the “whosoever” implies. This would seem to be the occasion recorded in John 20:19–23 and if so the ‘commission’ is recast (cf. also Luke 24:44f). Note strongly, however, the emphasis upon belief as saving (v.16) – this in contrast to the disciples’ own unbelief. Refusal to believe will bring condemnation (cf. John 3: 18). However it should not be adduced that baptism as such is necessary for salvation although it will be normal for all who believe. V. 17 shows that belief will, in addition to saving, be accompanied by signs. They will not believe because of the signs but have the signs because of the belief. These signs (if their meaning is limited to literal acts) are with one exception (the drinking of poison) all recorded in Acts viz: *tongues* (Acts 2:4 etc), *demons exorcised* (Acts 8:6f and 16:18), *snake-bite* (Acts 28:5) and *healing of the sick* (Acts 28:7,8, cf. James 5:14–15).

The Gospel According to Mark

MARK 16:18-20

Note that these signs are not as such promised to the apostles, (but see II Cor. 12:12 cf. Rom. 15:18-19), so much as they who (will) believe (V. 17). Notice also that these things will be done “in my name” and this is found in Acts as such.

Vs 19-20 speak of the Ascension (cf. Luke 24:5f, Acts 1:9-11) and the sitting at the right hand of God (cf. Acts 7:55, Psalm 110:1). Obviously this section is intended to give the assurance that “Jesus is Lord” and is not passively reigning but actively in the work carried out by his followers. It is in a sense a “mini-Acts”. The phrase “confirming the word with signs following” very much resembles that of Heb. 6:4. In any case the Gospel closes on a note of great triumph as having witnessed not only the successful conclusion of Christ’s ministry, but also the ministry of his followers.