

The Gospel of Mark

The Revelation of the Messiah

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New Jersey

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ABBREVIATIONS

Scripture passages will come from the *New Revised Standard Edition: Catholic Edition* (NRSV:CE). All translations are by the author unless a translation citation is provided.

ACCS	Oden, Thomas C., and Christopher A. Hall, eds. <i>Mark</i> . Rev. ed. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 2. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
AYB	Marcus, Joel. <i>Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary</i> . The Anchor Bible 27, 27 A. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2009-2010.
AYBD	Freedman, David Noel, Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, John David Pleins, and Astrid Biles Beck, eds. <i>The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
Talmud	Steinsaltz, Adin, Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, Shalom Zvi Berger, and Joshua Schreier, eds. <i>Koren Talmud Bavli</i> . Noé Edition. 42 vols. Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation: Koren Publishers, 2012.
CCSS	Healy, Mary. <i>The Gospel of Mark</i> . Edited by Peter S. Williamson. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008.
EDB	Freedman, David Noel, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid Biles Beck, eds. <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
Gk	Aland, Kurt, Barbara Aland, and Johannes Karavidopoulos, eds. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . 28th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.
LXX	Rahlfs, Alfred, and Robert Hanhart, eds. <i>Septuaginta</i> . 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979.
NB	Gavigan, James, Brian McCarthy, and Thomas McGovern, eds. <i>The Navarre Bible: Saint Mark's Gospel in the Revised Standard Version and New Vulgate</i> . Third edition. New York: Scepter Publishers, 2005.
NICNT	Lane, William L. <i>The Gospel According to Mark</i> . The New International Commentary on the New Testament 2. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010.
NIGTC	France, Richard T. <i>The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text</i> . The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009.
Mishnah	Neusner, Jacob, ed. <i>The Mishnah: A New Translation</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
PL	Ming, J. P. (ed.), <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina</i> , Letouzey & Ane, Paris 1844ff.

Abbreviations

- PG Ming, J. P. (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, Letouzey & Ane, Paris 1844ff.
- SP Donahue, John R., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Mark*. Edited by Daniel J. Harrington. Sacra Pagina Series 2. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002.
- TDNT Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1964.
- TDOT Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by John T. Willis, Douglas W. Stott, and David E. Green. Rev. Ed. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis;
et vidimus gloriam eius, gloriam quasi Unigeniti a Patre,
plenum gratiae et veritatis.

Ioannem I XIV

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Mark is brisk in its narrative style. Christ moves breathlessly from moment to moment. As Mark turns to these final days of Christ, his narrative is still brisk, but much more detailed. His account of these days is not that much shorter than Matthew or Luke. In fact roughly twenty percent of Mark's Gospel is dedicated to the final (approximately) five days of Christ's ministry. No longer is Christ dashing from location to location and event to event. The whole narrative slows down and enters an hour-by-hour recounting of Christ's final actions.

The last three chapters of Mark pick up with Christ in Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem. He had just previously entered Jerusalem triumphantly, and then had sharply disputed with the Jewish authorities in the temple. Mark recounts this as the one and only time that Christ entered Jerusalem before these climactic events. As a result the stage is properly set for the great final act of this drama. The will of man is set against the will of God. The miscomprehension of the Messiah's mission is set against the definitive completion of his mission. The great arc of all salvation history, the drama of humanity, finds its culmination in these final chapters.

STRUCTURE OF EVENTS

We will analyze these final events in seven sections. Each section forms a complete narrative block and builds upon each preceding section.

1. The Anointing of the Messiah (14:1–14:11)
2. The Last Supper (14:12–25)
3. The Garden of Gethsemane (14:26–52)
4. The Trial before the Sanhedrin (14:53–72)
5. The Trial before Pilate (15:1–20)
6. The Crucifixion and Death of the Messiah (15:21–47)
7. The Resurrection of the Messiah (16:1–20)

MAJOR THEMES

There are a few themes that we will see through the final chapters of Mark. In many ways they are not new to Mark's Gospel, but they seen in a new light in these chapters. It is only in the light of these events that the whole of Mark can be understood, and so as we come closer to the source of this light, it grows clearer, but so in turn the shadows grow starker.

Divine Providence

Introduction

The events of these final chapters are shocking and traumatic to those who experienced them. The modern Christian at times has become so inured to the scandal of the cross, that its horror is often lost. We must first begin by attempting to reenter the events anew; to place ourselves in the scenes and to see the great tragedy and brokenness in chapters fourteen and fifteen. Because it is only when we have rehabilitated ourselves to seeing the shadows that we can once more appreciate radiance of God in these chapters and in chapter sixteen.

Mark presupposes that we will be horrified at what happens to Christ, that one whom we claim to be God will suffer such indignity. In response Mark stresses the freedom of Christ and the divine providence guiding everything that happens. Again and again Christ is shown to be in control and the true governor of events. The antagonists are only successful because of divine interventions. The evil of humanity is bent to the will of God. Much of this light though is only seen with eyes habituated to Faith.

Passover

The events in these chapters revolve entirely around Passover. This is the stage upon which this drama will be played out. The event of Passover had two components: a) salvation, and b) sanctification. The people were saved from Egypt, the place of slavery and oppression. The Lord, through great deeds, forcibly freed the Israelite people and then led them through the sea. In doing this God led his people out of the place of death and into a new life, and in the process destroyed the army of Pharaoh. Every time that the Jews celebrate Passover they are remembering this salvation.

Passover itself though comes to be linked with the second component: sanctification, which was received at Mount Sinai. At this mountain, the Old Covenant was given. This covenant sealed or completed the Passover event. In this covenant the Lord made the Israelite people a people, a nation. In bringing them to himself, the Lord has restored them to a new relationship with him. He taught them how to worship him properly and gave them the design for how to build the Meeting Tent (which was a mobile temple). And he also made them a holy people, a people set apart from all the rest, particularly his own. And so each time the Jews celebrate Passover they also renew their commitment to this covenant.

This dual action of salvation and sanctification frame what Christ did. As the Messiah he both saves us, meaning reconciles us to God and one another; and sanctifies us, meaning establishes a new mode of sharing life with God and establishes us a people particular to God. In the Last Supper Christ stated that he was establishing a New Covenant. This means he was fulfilling and perfecting the Old Covenant. This New Covenant then continues to today and is celebrated in the Mass.

Sanhedrin

During Christ's ministry in Galilee his primary opponents were the Pharisees. When he arrived in Jerusalem, they were still present but were no longer primary. Instead the members of

Major Themes

the Sanhedrin became the primary opponents. In fact the pharisees are not mentioned at all in these final chapters of Mark. Throughout the events of these chapters the Sanhedrin is the antagonist. The Romans in turn are presented in a more neutral light. It is the Sanhedrin that is pursuing clear purposes.

The Sanhedrin was composed of the priests, legal scholars and scribes, and other wise elders in Jerusalem. They were the religious authorities in the city and had judicial competencies. As a result they formed a major political group. Mark will often refer to this body as simply the chief priests, or the chief priest and scribes.

Messianic Secret

One of the defining features of Mark's Gospel (compared to the others) is what is called the Messianic Secret. Frequently when Christ worked a miracle or did anything that might increase his notoriety, he then told those present to tell no one. That is, Christ attempted to keep it a secret that he was doing what the Messiah was prophesied to do. He did so in order to not be misunderstood. The people (and us today) had a particular expectation for just what the Messiah was to do and who he was to be. Often this was a limited and worldly view. They often restricted their idea of the Messiah to simply being a political liberator. Or they expected him to be a religious reformer. Whatever it was that they expected, it was more limited than what God had planned.

As a result Christ wanted to keep this a secret so as to keep the people open to receive the fullness of his message. We know that when we go into something expecting one thing, and then experience something else, we often try very hard to force reality into our expectations. This is exactly what God was trying to prevent.

One of the key aspects of Christ's messianic mission was to take on the penalty of our sins. This suffering messiah was incomprehensible to the people. It is striking then that it was only during his trial before the Sanhedrin that Christ openly professed to being the Messiah. It is finally now, in the events that we will read that the revelation of the Messiah is perfected. Previously we were unable to understand what it meant for Christ to be the Messiah. Now, in his passion, death, and resurrection can Christ forego his secrecy and openly reveal his true glory.

THE ANOINTING OF THE MESSIAH (14:1–14:11)

THE PLOT TO KILL CHRIST (14:1–2)

14 It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ² for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

14:1: “Two days” before Passover was Tuesday evening through Wednesday afternoon. From this moment forward the events of Christ’s life move forward in fixed steps according to a divinely ordered plan. Everything is set within the context of Passover. It is unclear why Mark names both Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, since they are synonymous with each other at this point. If anything it drives home the clear context in which everything that happens is set.

We are also introduced to our chief antagonists, the chief priests and scribes. These were the religious (and so political) authorities of Jerusalem. They also stand in for the entire Sanhedrin. Interestingly the pharisees do not appear in the following events. While Christ was in Galilee they had a more prominent role of antagonism, but now it is the Sanhedrin that takes center stage.

The intent of the Sanhedrin was to “arrest” (κρατέω) Christ, which could also be translated as capture. This translation gives better sense to what they were seeking to do, since arrest implies proper legal protocol is followed,¹ but as we will see during Christ’s trial before the Sanhedrin, there are problems with their proceedings. Here we find the first legal mistake, Jewish law required a witness to bring a charge forward before charges were pressed and an arrest was made. Instead the Sanhedrin was looking for a way to do it, meaning they did not have the required charge to execute an arrest. As such they were seeking to capture Christ like a political hostage, and not arresting Christ as a criminal. This also underlines why they were doing it stealthily, it was to hide the legal issues.

14:2: In a shrewd political calculation they did not want Christ to be arrested during Passover and the feast days that follow. The population increased greatly during Passover from a normal 30,000–50,000 to 180,000–250,000.² Many of the pilgrimages knew Christ and came from Galilee. If the

¹ Cf. SP 385.

² Cf. NICNT 490, and NIGTC 548. Other sources in antiquity greatly inflate this number into the millions. Josephus says that there were around three million (*Bellum Judaicum* 2:280, and 6:423–427) and the Talmud implies around twelve million people would be in Jerusalem. (Talmud, *Pesahim* 64b)

The Anointing at Bethany (14:3–9)

Sanhedrin moved openly against Christ, they quite reasonably could expect a “revolt” from his followers and those from Galilee.

The Jewish authorities had a tight timeline thought if they did not want to arrest Christ on Passover or during the following week of Unleavened Bread. Since it was already “Wednesday” they had between one to two days before Passover to pull this off. Otherwise they will have to wait over a week to do so, and hope that Christ did not leave before then. This will also help explain the hurried nature of the events that will follow.

It is interesting to note that according to Mark, even though the Sanhedrin hoped to arrest Christ before Passover, Mark says that the arrest happened on Passover. Ignoring the dating issues of the Last Supper, Mark shows the Sanhedrin frustrated in their designs and highlights an important element of Mark’s passion narrative: everything is happening according to God’s will, not the will of man. God willed to set his saving action within the Passover context, the desire of the Jewish authorities will not prevent that.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY (14:3–9)

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

14:3: In the middle of the scheming by the Sanhedrin, Christ was at rest with (presumably) his disciples and other guests. His peace is contrasted with the authorities’ anxieties. Christ was in Bethany where he has been since he had arrived in the region.³ The village was about two miles to the east of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. It was along the road to Jericho and the last pilgrim stop from Jericho before entering Jerusalem. The host was a certain Simon the Leper. We do not know who he was. Simon was a common man’s name, and it is unclear why he was called “the Leper.” He almost certainly did not actively have leprosy at this time. Maybe he had been cured of leprosy by Christ and so was now hosting Christ as an expression of gratitude. Whoever he was, he was hosting a formal meal, since they “sat (κατάκειμαι) at the table,” or more literally “reclined at table,” which was only done at a planned or formal meal.⁴ Given Mark’s previous chronological indication this meal was either on Tuesday evening or Wednesday afternoon. Either case means that Christ will have another day (Wednesday evening into Thursday) in Bethany after this meal.

³ Cf. Mk 11:1.

⁴ Cf. SP 386.

The Anointing of the Messiah (14:1–14:11)

Into this meal an anonymous woman came with “ointment of nard.” The Greek (μόρον) more literally means oil; however, the more precious or high quality the fragrances used to scent the oil, the fattier and so thicker the oil that was used, which could give a more ointment character to the oil than traditionally imagined oil.⁵ Nard came from a plant root in India. Alabaster jars were considered the finest jars to store these kinds of oils and had long thin necks to pour out the oil in a controlled fashion. The woman though broke the jar. Though some have posited that this was the common way of using such a jar, there is no archeological evidence for this, and the oil had to be placed in the jar in the first place without breaking the jar. Instead it is more likely that the jar could have been opened and the oil poured out in a controlled fashion.⁶ And so that she broke a precious jar means that she must in turn use the whole of this extraordinary perfume. This only accentuated the totality of this gift that she made to Christ.

The woman then proceeded to pour the perfume over Christ’s head. This is how kings⁷ and priests⁸ were anointed. This was the only time that Christ was literally anointed with oil, and so it is worth remembering that the words *messiah* and *christ* (χριστός) means one who has been anointed with oil. But the scene also calls to mind the Song of Songs, “while the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance.” (Songs 1:12) Here the King is drawn toward a woman by her *nard*, with the hopeful result of her becoming his wife. In events that are about to transpire, Christ weds himself to his bride the Church.

14:4: Mark does not say who complained, but it could be the disciples as Matthew says,⁹ or it could be Judas himself as John says.¹⁰ If it was Judas, it is uncertain why Mark (nor Matthew) did not say so. Though because Mark does not specify the individual, the guilt was shared collectively, and also future disciples are chastened by Christ when they act in a similar way.

The reaction of those present was strong, and surprising so. Sure, one could not agree with this woman’s decision, but it is striking how offended they are. The same word for “anger” (ἀγανακτέω) is also used when James and John made their request for places of privilege.¹¹ Then we saw intimacy sought by one person being treated with derision by the rest, as we see to here. It is also worth recalling just how strongly we often react in false humility when we see another strive for the very friendship that we ourselves do not open ourselves to.

Their first complaint was that the perfume was wasted (ἀπώλεια), and so indicates that the women used all of the oil, nothing was reserved. For their high words and oaths, apparently the one they have proclaimed the Messiah¹² and so in turn King of Israel was not worthy of being

⁵ Cf. AYB 934.

⁶ Cf. AYB 934–935, and NIGTC 552.

⁷ Cf. 1 Sam 10:1, and 16:13.

⁸ Cf. Ex 29:7.

⁹ Cf. Mt 26:8.

¹⁰ Cf. Jn 12:4.

¹¹ Cf. Mk 10:41.

¹² Cf. Mk 8:29

The Anointing at Bethany (14:3–9)

anointed with rich perfumes. Envy and jealousy are such ugly sins, it is amazing how the light of charity darkens when another is honored by the outpouring of charity.

14:5: Their complaint did not stop there, but as their charity had been harmed, they continued in self-righteous indignation protesting that this oil could have been sold and the proceeds been given to the poor. Now it was a custom at this time to give alms during major feasts like Passover.¹³ Further a denarius was the average day's wage of a laborer, and so three hundred denarii is a year's wage. Pliny writing in the first century notes that the most expensive nard perfume sold in Rome cost one hundred denarii.¹⁴ This was an exceptional jar of perfume, surely it could have been sold quickly. And the proceeds could have helped many people.

Assuming this woman had done so, then what? If she had given the money to the poor, what then about the buyer? Might they have used the oil for themselves? Or would their personal use of oil have been a *waste*? Should they have also sold it themselves and given the proceeds to the poor? Who could have used this oil? Is not God incarnate the worthiest recipient of this oil? Their misunderstanding of who Christ is, was manifested in their protestation. But here we also see the great vice of duplicity behind virtue signaling. If they are fine with such perfume existing in general and being used by one in general, then what does their complaints truly serve but to manifest their apparent *virtue* and *holier than thou* love for the poor.

14:6: Christ in turn came to the defense of the woman. He rebuked those accosting her and affirmed the justice of her action. As Christ has said earlier in Mark, “The first [commandment] is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’” (Mk 12:29–30). The woman had made a whole offering of her love to Christ, she had fulfilled the law since she had so abundantly loved the Godhead veiled in flesh first above all other.

Further, the detractors in allowing the darkness of sin into their hearts distanced themselves from Christ, isolating themselves from him. In a way, Christ was poor in the love owed to him, and into this spiritual poverty this woman gave the alms of her love. Only this woman ministers to Christ as he prepared to enter into the poverty of his passion.

14:7: Christ though does not say that we should not love the poor, but that our love is to be ordered. He reasserted that “The second [commandment] is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mk 12:31) We are to take care of the poor, but there is a time to use our worldly treasures for the Lord, particularly in our worship and adoration of God. But since our worship occurs at fixed times, there is plenty of time and resources left over to aid the poor.

14:8: The primary images of anointed in this scene as mentioned earlier are kingship, priesthood, and marriage. Christ though identified this anointing not with any of them, but with his death;

¹³ Cf. SP 387.

¹⁴ Cf. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 12:43.

The Anointing of the Messiah (14:1–14:11)

since how his is king, priest, and spouse can only be understood through his death. This is also important because as we will see, there will be no time to anoint Christ's body after his death before he is buried. Instead this anonymous woman had the honor of doing so. She was the only one who aided Christ in preparing for his death, whereas everyone else sought to stop her or mocked her.

14:9: Through the very recording of Mark's words, Christ's prophecy is fulfilled. This woman has been remembered through the ages and by all peoples. And here her anonymity also speaks to us today because her actions are held up to be reflected upon and imitated by us, the people who have received the Gospel message. We are to remember her and act like her, not like those who attack her.

JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY CHRIST (14:10–11)

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

14:10: Returning to the scheming, Mark gives very few details on the Sanhedrin's plans and Judas' motives. This is in contrast to the more fleshed out scene just prior. It is uncertain when Judas left, why he left, or how long he was gone. After the confrontations between the priests and Christ in the temple, Judas would have had a decent idea of who to approach. Mark though is not concerned with evil *qua* evil, but he is interested in the divine action of Christ, the final revelation of the Messiah. It is enough to simply note that these actions were happening, all the while divine providence is shown to be the true driving force.

14:11: Judas came to the priests as they were looking for away to secretly kill Christ. He provided them with a solution to their problem. This insider will provide the set up and help orchestrate this clandestine operation. They offered to pay Judas without him asking (as in Matthew and Luke).¹⁵ It is only a *promise* to pay, and in Mark, we never see him receive payment. After Judas' arrival in the garden for Christ's arrest we do not seem him again. What happened to Judas is not a concern of Mark after all. Finally, it is interesting that the priests did not elicit a testimony of wrongdoing from Judas. That would have provided some legal cover for the arrest, but instead they will have to depend upon Judas providing the proper moment to capture Christ and quickly, because time is running out and they still have to find testimony to bring against Christ.

¹⁵ Cf. Mt 26.14–16, and Lk 22.3–6.

THE LAST SUPPER (14:12–25)

THE PASSOVER WITH THE DISCIPLES (14:12–21)

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” ¹⁶ So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

14:12: There is debate over how to map the exact chronology of Christ’s celebration of Passover with the celebration of Passover by the rest of the city. Normally, the Passover lamb is sacrificed in the afternoon *before* the first day of the Unleavened Bread (Nisan 14) and then eaten in the evening (Nisan 15) which is the start of the first day of Passover. Mark’s account says that the ask about making preparations on the first day of Passover which would imply it is Nisan 15. We not going to attempt to resolve this confusion here, but merely not that it is now Thursday,¹ and Mark clearly portrays the Last Supper and its preparation as for Passover.² Christ’s intention is clear, this is a Passover meal, and as we will see that Christ will make changes to this most sacred meal, and so it could be that he is also changing the timing.

It is also interesting to note that Christ will celebrate the Passover with his disciples. This feast was normally celebrated by a family (or multiple families if they were small), but here Christ is celebrating it with his disciples. This set him as the head of this family.³ This familial typology will be strengthened in the meal when he speaks of a new covenant⁴ and makes reference to new

¹ Since Mark will go on to say that Christ died on Friday, the Last Supper occurs on Thursday evening. We can then flush out the last days of Christ’s life. The plot to kill Christ by the Sanhedrin started sometime between Tuesday evening through Wednesday afternoon. At the same time Christ was in Bethany and where the woman anointed him. Then presumable sometime Wednesday (or maybe sometime Thursday morning) Judas met with the Sanhedrin. Christ entered Jerusalem for the Last Supper on Thursday, followed by his trial, passion, death, and burial on Thursday Evening through Friday afternoon. He is in the tomb from Friday evening through Saturday afternoon and resurrections from the dead sometime between Saturday evening and Sunday morning.

² Cf. NICNT 497-498.

³ Cf. SP 393.

⁴ Cf. Mk 14:24.

The Last Supper (14:12–25)

wine in the kingdom of God,⁵ which could allude to the spousal union of God and humanity as anticipated in the prophets and developed by Paul in his letters and John in Revelation.

14:13–15: The disciples showed their own initiative in asking to prepare the meal. Christ in response gave clear instructions for a person they are to meet up with. This implies that Christ had already made plans for this night.⁶ This reinforced by specified person being a man carrying a jug of water, which may have been an action done by women, and so may not have been a spontaneous action.⁷ The reason for such furtive plans may be to either allude Jewish officials in their search for Christ,⁸ or to delay Judas learning of the location so that he could not warn the officials in advanced and so interrupt the meal.⁹ After all it is interesting that Judas was not among the two sent to do this even though he held the money bag;¹⁰ seemingly he should have be one of the two to make the arrangements so that he could pay for them. Finally on a simply pragmatic level, the city swelled with pilgrims during Passover and so it was perfectly routine to prearrange your accommodations ahead of time.¹¹

By revealing these prearranged plans Christ is showing that he is in control, not Judas and his schemes, nor the Jewish authorities, nor even the disciples. All things are unfolding according to God's plan. He knows that what they are entering into will be traumatic and trying. It will cause their faith to be sorely tried. From the very beginning Christ is trying to assure those around him that everything is going according to divine providence.

The room prepared is a large and well-furnished room. It is not a simple arrangement but extravagant. Such a room is probably larger than was needed for the Christ and his disciples. This foreshadows the extravagance which Christ will pour out upon his people at such a dear cost and also reinforces the justice of the extravagance of the woman of Bethany. Surely Christ could have saved money and made more simply reservations, but instead Christ spends money for this most sacred of nights.

At the allegorical level we can see the presence of man carrying water as prefiguring the link between baptism and Christ's Passover.¹² Baptism is the sacrament which begins out journey into full participation of the Paschal Sacrament, of the New and Eternal Covenant. The rite by which we become full partakers in this was ordained in the Upper Room, and so now the water leads the way to that place. But the water itself does not lead the person to the Upper Room as if it were a spring trickling from the inner sanctum out into the streets, but it is brought by a man

⁵ Cf. Mk 14:25.

⁶ Cf. CCSS 281.

⁷ Cf. CCSS 281. This is the commonly held position; however, the Old Testament does show men carrying water (Dt 29:10–11, and Josh 9:21–27) and the underlying attestation to a sexual differentiation in water carrying practices comes from a twentieth century source, so hardly contemporary. See AYB 945 for further discussion.

⁸ Cf. CCSS 281

⁹ Cf. NB 129.

¹⁰ Cf. Jn 13:29.

¹¹ Cf. NIGTC 564.

¹² Cf. Tertulian, *On Baptism* 19 in ACCS 192.

The Passover with the Disciples (14:12–21)

carrying it into the sacred banquet. So too do souls reborn by the waters arrive at the table of sacrifice, through the hands of the Church's ministers who ensure that these newly washed souls touch not the filth of the road and arrive assuredly at the banquet of the Lord, wherein these same ministers feed these souls with the Bread of Eternal.

14:16: The pair of disciples then went forth and they prepared for a normal Passover; the bread, the wine, the table, and also the preparation of the lamb. From their perspective all was proceeding as would be expected.

¹⁷ When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" ²⁰ He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

14:17: Mark indicates that it was the evening, after the sun had set in order to say that the new Jewish day had begun. This is when the Passover meal was eaten. Mark also identifies that there were the twelve with Christ at this meal, it is irrelevant if there were other present as a historical fact,¹³ since Christ is concerned with the twelve not with whomever may have been present.

14:18: The disciples came and arranged themselves around Christ. They reclined in their places. A slave could not recline, and so they are taking the posture of freed persons and as wealthy people. Within this context they are taking the posture of freed persons from Egypt.¹⁴ At the start of the meal Christ proclaimed publicly that he knew one of them was plotting against him. He did this once more to reinforce that he has freedom in his actions, not even hidden schemes are beyond his grasp.¹⁵

In the biblical world, table fellowship was a sign of great intimacy (which is also elevated by Christ acting as the father for the disciples in this meal). It was also a sign of God's covenant with his people.¹⁶ And so there was not greater breach of loyalty and intimacy than to reject this fellowship by turning against the one who offered the hospitality.¹⁷ In showing that he knew the one in their midst who will commit such a grievous sin, Christ showed wonderful patience "in the way he dealt with his disciples. He was even able to tolerate Judas to the end with enduring patience. He could eat calmly with his betrayer."¹⁸

14:19: The disciples responded naturally enough with great distress. Who would not be taken aback by such an allegation? Particularly since Christ did not mention who, he implied it could be any of them. On the other hand, could they not also know the fickleness of their hearts? That deep

¹³ Cf. SP 392.

¹⁴ Cf. AYB 949, and SP 393.

¹⁵ Cf. NB 130.

¹⁶ Cf. Ex 24:9–10, and CCSS 282.

¹⁷ Cf. Ps 41:9, and CCSS 283.

¹⁸ Cyprian, *The Good of Patience* 6 in ACCS 193.

The Last Supper (14:12–25)

down they may be capable of doing such a thing. Are not our hearts the same? In order to reassure themselves they each claimed innocence by saying, “Surely, not I?” Such a phrasing implies a negative answer, that it is not them. But it also could betray a distrust in themselves, that they want the Lord to reassure them and to say, “No, it is not you.”

14:20: In response to this plea by the disciples, Christ doubled down that the one who will betray him has eaten from his same bowl, and that it could be any of them since they all had shared from the bowl which Christ, as head of the meal, would have shared with those present.

14:21: Christ continued on in one of those sayings that are hard to accept and also to understand. On one hand everything is happening according to God’s plan, but on the other that does not remove the agency of the betrayer. He is still culpable for choosing what he will do.¹⁹ Just because God uses Judas’ agency does not make his choices good. Further, since Christ maintains the anonymity of the betrayer, the curse is not limited to Judas, but comes to all those who betray Christ, not just Judas.²⁰

THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER (14:22–25)

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” ²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

14:22: The “load of bread” in Greek (ἄρτος) simply means “bread.” The bread was probably unleavened since that was the bread used in the Passover meal. This is why the Roman Church uses unleavened bread in the celebration of the Eucharist, in imitation of Christ at the Last Supper. Christ then broke this bread and gave it to the disciples, which shows that they are all sharing in the one meal, the one loaf, and that they are united. Mark implies that even Judas received from this one bread, since he does not say that Judas had left. This only further draws into contrast that he is in fact not united to the assembly, but nevertheless falsely shares in their unity.

Christ identified this bread with his body. Just as in the Bread of Life Discourse in John, Mark shows Christ to be clear and straight forward, this is his body, not a symbol or idea, but his true body. Interestingly we do not see the Passover lamb eaten, the only body explicitly mentioned is the *bread* which is Christ; Christ who is called the Lamb of God by John the Baptist. And so Christ through this Eucharistic breads replaces the paschal lamb.

¹⁹ Cf. NICNT 503, and SP 395.

²⁰ Cf. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 50 in ACCS 194.

14:23: Like the bread, sharing in the one chalice indicates friendship. Here Mark is clearer that all receive from the chalice, even Judas.²¹ It is clearly implied that there is wine in the chalice, since that is what was drunk during the Passover meal.

14:24: Christ, only after they have drunk, identified the cup with his blood. Since Mark never said what was in the chalice, this non-attribution creates a rhetorical force when Christ then revealed that it was his blood in the chalice since it was strictly forbidden for a Jew to drink any blood, let alone human.²² Blood is the source of life. This is why it could expiate sins.²³ Christ then is indicating that it is his blood/life-force which will provide expiation. Further, blood was used in covenants, but it was sprinkled or poured on objects not drunk. It moved from the exterior of a thing to the interior. Now, with Christ's blood of the covenant, it transforms us from inside, from within our very being.

The phrase “for many” is a common semantic phrase used to indicate “a lot” or an unbounded collection. In this context then it means that Christ's sacrifice is not for a specific group, as previous covenants were, but for all peoples.²⁴ From the fall of Adam and Eve, God has been offering progressively more and more expansive covenants. Christ now is bringing this “salvation history” to completion with this new and eternal covenant for all humanity.²⁵

In the Roman Mass we use similar words to these in the prayer of consecration over the chalice. In both the Latin and English we retain the “for many” language as used here. The first reason is to maintain the clear link with the Greek text of the Gospels. As a result the words of consecration have the same universal reach as in the Gospel. The second reason is that in time the Church came to realize with greater clarity that even though God entered into covenant with all of humanity, all have not accepted it. This creates the reality that this universal covenant is only received by “many.”

14:25: The dinner thus far has not gone as the disciples had expected. They learned that their master was going to be betrayed, and one of them was going to do it. The meal itself then did not follow a normal Passover meal. Christ gave them his body and blood to consume and is creating a new covenant when they were supposed to be celebrating the “old” covenant. Finishing the meal he concluded by moving the focus off the meal and events that would follow and instead to the eschaton. He called the disciples to understand everything in the future light of the resurrections and union with him in the Eucharist.²⁶ He did this by speaking of “new wine” which symbolizes a wedding banquet and the “kingdom of God” which was thought to usher in the eternal rule of God's justice and peace.

²¹ Cf. AYC 958.

²² Cf. Gen 94, Dt 12:16, Lev 17:14, and CCSS 286.

²³ Cf. Lev 17:11, and CCSS 286.

²⁴ Cf. CCSS 286, and SP 396.

²⁵ Cf. SP 396.

²⁶ Cf. CCSS 286.

The Last Supper (14:12–25)

Further, Christ in proclaiming that he will not drink until this eschaton initiates a fast. This also fulfilled when Christ had previously said, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.” (Mark 2:19–21) Now as the Bridegroom is about to be taken away, he himself fasts. In doing so he fulfilled the whole Old Testament typology of fasting.²⁷ His fast is then fulfilled in the eschatological wedding banquet (first in the Resurrection and then definitively at his glorious return).²⁸

²⁷ Cf. SP 397. Fasting in the Old Testament is done in mourning for death, for repentance, in preparation for contact with the divine, as petition, and in preparation for the day of the Lord (Joel 2:12–14).

²⁸ Cf. SP 397.

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE (14:26–52)

PETER’S DENIAL FORETOLD (14:26–31)

²⁶ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷ And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written,

‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” ²⁹ Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” ³⁰ Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” ³¹ But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same.

14:26: The Passover meal normally ended with the singing of the Hallel psalms (Ps 113–118). This is most like the “hymn” sung that they sung before departing. Up to this point it has yet to be stated that Judas has left, yet he will not be among the disciples when they arrive at the garden. He may have left during the meal as in the other Gospels, or maybe he separates himself now as the group was in motion during the night.

14:27–28: Christ here is referring to the prophecy of Zechariah:

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,
against the man who is my associate,”
says the Lord of hosts.
Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered;
I will turn my hand against the little ones.
In the whole land, says the Lord,
two-thirds shall be cut off and perish,
and one-third shall be left alive.
And I will put this third into the fire,
refine them as one refines silver,
and test them as gold is tested.
They will call on my name,
and I will answer them.
I will say, “They are my people”;
and they will say, “The Lord is our God.” (Zech 13:7–9)

The Garden of Gethsemane (14:26–52)

Mark though makes a slight change from both the LXX and Hebrew version. In Zechariah it is implied that the Lord will be responsible for the downfall of the shepherd. Mark makes it explicit that it is God who will strike down the shepherd. This emphasizes that what is happening is according to the divine plan.¹ Further in Christ announcing this now, he is providing away for the disciples to see that their failures are part of the divine plan, and that they will be brought back together once more in Galilee.²

14:29–30: Peter spoke boastfully that he would not fall away even if his fellow disciples did. In his language he is focused upon himself, he is not speaking for the whole, but has separated himself from the rest. Christ responded to him forcefully using the singular you, singling out Peter and stating that he will deny him.³ Peter stood alone and so will fall in sin alone. Not only will this boast lead to his sin, but his sin grows from falling away in weakness to the greater sin of active denial.⁴ To deny Christ is the antithesis of true discipleship. True discipleship is the denial of self so as to follow Christ.⁵ Peter's denial of Christ then approached the rejection of his own calling and discipleship. What is even more striking about this is that Mark may have been Peter's scribe and so told Mark this story and approved it. What humility does Peter show later in life.

14:31: In response to this Peter doubled down reaffirms that he would rather die than deny Christ. We will see shortly how "strong" his resolve will be. And so his strong denial comes across a bit much.

CHRIST PRAYS IN GETHSEMANE (14:32–42)

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴ And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." ³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸ Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

¹ Cf. SP 402.

² Cf. CCSS 288.

³ Cf. SP 402–403.

⁴ Cf. SP 403.

⁵ Cf. Mk 8:34, and CCSS 288.

14:32: Place (χωρίον) indicates it is the land or fields just outside of the city. Gethsemane means “oil press” in both Hebrew and Aramaic.⁶ This makes sense Gethsemane since it is on the Mount of Olives, so named for the olive trees there. Naturally, there would be an oil press (multiple presses).⁷ It was also within the bounds of greater Jerusalem in which one needed to remain during the night of Passover. This is also the third time in Mark where Jesus is shown in prayer.⁸ As at the other moments, this the prayer marks a fulcrum in Christ’s action.

14:33: The first two times Christ prayed alone, now Christ brings along the three favored disciples: Peter, James, and John. These three had witnessed Christ’s power over life and death in the raising of Jairus’s daughter,⁹ and his divine glory on Mt. Tabor.¹⁰ Now they bear witness to his humanity and his intimate suffering.¹¹

These three are also those who expressed their willingness to suffer and drink of the Lord’s chalice.¹² Now they witness what such desires looked like, the sufferings which they boasted and which they would endure.¹³ Does this fortify them? Does this cause them to second guess their hasty oaths?

14:34: And so Christ made clear his great anguish to his most intimate of companions. He echoes the words of Sirach, “Is it not a sorrow like that for death itself when a dear friend turns into an enemy?” (Sir 37:2) The word for Christ’s sorrow (περίλυπος) indicates a deep agony. The only time outside of Christ’s passion that this word is used in the New Testament is in the encounter between the rich young man and Christ.¹⁴ It is used slightly more frequently in the LXX, once in Daniel,¹⁵ and three times in the Psalms.¹⁶ Most interesting is the use of the word twice in Psalm 41 which Christ also alludes to when he speaks of the one who will betray him also sharing a meal with him. The overall atmosphere of betrayal or *traditio*, that is handing over, is core to Christ suffering. He is betrayed by his intimate friend(s), by himself for those who betray him, and by his Father for the world.

The word for his suffering is also the same word that the LXX uses to describe Cain’s disposition before killing Abel.¹⁷ In English (as in the Hebrew) the Lord says to Cain, “Why are you angry?” In the LXX the Lord says, “Why have you become deeply grieved (περίλυπος)?” This expresses the truth that the difference between deep sorrow and anger is often slight. In such an

⁶ Cf. SP 407.

⁷ Cf. NIGTC 581.

⁸ Cf. Mk 1:35, and 6:46.

⁹ Cf. Mk 5:37.

¹⁰ Cf. Mk 9:2.

¹¹ Cf. CCSS 291.

¹² Cf. Mk 10:38–39, and 14:29, 31.

¹³ Cf. NICNT 515–516, and NIGTC 582.

¹⁴ Cf. Lk 18:23–24.

¹⁵ Cf. Dan 2:12

¹⁶ Cf. Ps 41:6, 12, and 42:5.

¹⁷ Cf. LXX Gen 4:6, and NIGTC 582.

anguished state it is common for one to also lash out in anger and violence. Cain was in this state because his sacrificial offering was rejected by God, while Abel's was accepted. Christ in turn is in agony because his offering will be accepted by the Father, while he is rejected by those from whom he makes the offering. Cain in his sorrow spilled the blood of the just man Able. Christ will have his just blood spilt so as to make just the unjust.

In the process of doing so, “for our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor 5:21) The horror of experiencing this goes beyond the prospect of the human inflicted suffering which he will endure. The “experience” of taking on our sins is the “experience” of distance from the Father. The “experience” of betraying God is at the heart of all sin. This is the greatest horror that Christ the God-Man could face.¹⁸

In the face of this, Christ told his disciples to “keep awake.” They are entering with him into this moment of profound spiritual combat. It is the moment of primordial trial for all creation as its creator enters into the depths of creation's fallen state. Our only response is to hold our silent vigil with the Lord. Spiritual wakefulness is necessary for humanity to endure such a trial.¹⁹ This Marian stance provides the condition for the disciple to receive the fruits of God's anguished prayer.

14:35: Christ moved a little distance away and prostrated himself before his Father in prayer. Such acts of prostration were not extraordinary; however, it was not a common posture in prayer. It was only used in the most grave or solemn of situations.²⁰ This serves to underline the humility of the Son before the Father. But Christ does not just prostrate himself but throws himself down. The drama of the effect underscores the weight of the burdens which he carries and foreshadows his struggle to carry his cross.

He prayed to be spared of what is to come. This does not indicate that God was divided in his intention, nor that Jesus in his humanity was rebelling against God the Father. It simply recognizes that this is a great burden, and since he is truly human, it is truly painful.

14:36: Christ called God his “Abba” or Father. Some have greatly overstated this term to mean “daddy.” Christ's use of the word Abba is novel (both in the Our Father and here), but the word itself indicates a filial and respectful intimacy with the Father. It does not represent an infantile relationship.²¹ It is instead closer to the mature intimacy that is expressed by an adult son calling his father “dad.”

And this mature aspect of Abba was a profound cry by Christ to his Father. He comes now to his Father seeking aid in his anguish as his heart is rent by his experience of betrayal. The Father

¹⁸ Cf. NICNT 516.

¹⁹ Cf. CCSS 291.

²⁰ Cf. NICNT 583.

²¹ Cf. AYB 977–978, and NIGTC 584.

is the only one in whom the Son can confide in the midst of this darkness. And he began by expressing his trust in the Father. “All things are possible” for the Father, and the Son has complete trust in the Father. This is happening according to divine providence. That nevertheless does not remove the pain which Jesus is experiencing. His two wills though were united as he proclaimed, “not what I want, but what you want.” Though all will betray him, Christ will not betray the Father.

14:37: Christ rose, came to the three, and found them asleep. A charitable read is that their “sleep” was a stupor similar to what they experienced on Tabor (which also explains how they heard Christ’s prayer).²² Though the counter point is that Christ’s recorded prayer is short, and he was in prayer for an hour, so they could just as easily have heard the first part of the prayer and then fell asleep. Christ’s rebuke of Peter favors the interpretation that they were actually asleep.

Christ particularly named Peter since he recently boasted, but it is implied that the rest are implicated too.²³ More literally Christ said to Peter, “Were you not strong enough to watch one hour?”²⁴ Peter after boasting of his strength when they entered the garden²⁵ was found weak. Christ is trying to point this out to him so that he might rest his strength upon Christ, so that the rock might rest upon the Rock. Instead Peter did not grow in the needed humility as he fortitude will fail shortly.

14:38: Christ did not approach the disciples in this moment because he was lonely and needed companionship. The Father was with him. Instead Christ came to the disciples because he was concerned for them. He was concerned that they remained vigilant.²⁶ This is also why he came to these three in particular. They are the most vulnerable on account of their self-confidence and boasting. They are his most intimate disciples and are destined to be pillars of the Church. He came to give them special aid to weather this storm, if they would let him.²⁷ And what profound love and concern does Christ show them, and in turn us, in doing so? In such agony we are not forgotten, for we are the reason he endures such agony.

But why does Christ direct them and in turn us to pray? “We do not pray that we will never be tempted at all. For that is impossible. We pray rather that we not be encompassed by temptation.”²⁸ Temptation comes whether we will it or not. It comes from Satan and his angels, and the powers of the world.²⁹ We cannot will ourselves to resist temptation, and our determination alone is not sufficient, but we can freely pray that we might be given the grace to resist

²² Cf. NICNT 519.

²³ That Christ called Simon instead of Peter was probably not a rebuke in this situation given how Mark uses these names. See Note 27 in NIGTC 586.

²⁴ SP 406.

²⁵ Cf. Mk 14:29, 31.

²⁶ Cf. NICNT 519.

²⁷ Cf. NICNT 519–520.

²⁸ Origin, *On Prayer* 29.11 in ACCS 202.

²⁹ Cf. AYB 979.

The Garden of Gethsemane (14:26–52)

temptation.³⁰ This is the only way by which we can unite ourselves to Christ’s suffering and death, and so into his resurrection.³¹

14:39–41: This pattern repeated two more times with the same results. The disciples grew in awareness of the awkwardness this produced since, for “they did not know what to say to him,” but that did not produce the needed humility for perseverance. But the time of preparation has passed. Christ is now to be betrayed, the climax of his mission has arrived.

THE BETRAYAL AND ARREST OF CHRIST (14:43–52)

⁴³ Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.

⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷ But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ All of them deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵² but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

14:43: Christ was the clear actor up to this point, now and until his death he is acted upon. This though is not total passivity, but an *active* reception. He reveals what Mary modeled in her *fiat*, he is fully engaged and receives what is placed upon him.

Judas arrived with a crowd from the city authorities. The place was probably well known to the disciples and so Judas knew where to find Christ. Unlike at the Last Supper a few hours earlier where Christ was trying to hide, now he has placed himself at a known location. The crowd which accompanies Judas was probably not an assorted mix of persons, but a formal arresting party. Mark denigrates them as a crowd since they have come to perpetrate injustice instead of justice.

14:44: It is interesting that Judas had to designate Christ by a sign, since Christ was a public figure. The darkness at that hour and the sensitivity of the occasion may have necessitated it so as to prevent any mishaps from occurring.

14:45: Rabbi at this time does not exclusively mean “teacher” but instead means “my great one.” It is used to express the high esteem one has for another.³² This honorific with the kiss only heightened the irony and betrayal of Judas. In the very moment of betrayal Judas still expressed

³⁰ Cf. Augustine, *Letter 218, To Palatinus* and *Letter 175, To Pope Innocent* in ACCS 202.

³¹ Cf. Rm 6:3–11.

³² Cf. AYB 633, and SP 415.

The Betrayal and Arrest of Christ (14:43–52)

such intimacy and respect towards the Lord. Was there no repentance in his heart? Was there no compunction for what he was doing?

14:46: The guards quickly arrested Christ, it is the Passover, and they do not want “trouble.” They arrested him (presumably they bound him) so that he could not escape and so they could quickly withdraw back to their masters.

14:47: But their quick snatch-and-grab job was not to be. Though Christ did not resist his arrest, a “bystander” does. Who is this bystander? It could be a disciple as in Matthew³³ and Luke,³⁴ or it could be Peter as in John.³⁵ It is interesting that Mark would omit these details after including Christ’s rebuke of Peter when they arrived at Gethsemane. To add further confusion to the question, Mark never uses the word bystander in reference to a disciple. So the person could have come with the crowd, or maybe there were already others there with the disciples (as we will see with the young man that flees).³⁶ Given available evidence and the testimony of the other Gospels, the bystander is probably one of the disciples and Peter himself.³⁷

14:48: Christ’s meekness in the face of violence from both parties fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.” (Is 53:7–8)

They treated him like a violent person, and he responded with civility. Again and again this pattern will play out in the lives of the martyrs, the Christian witness in civility is countered with violence. The eruption of God into the world requires a response, and to the lords of the world, this person is the most dangerous person possible. But his power is that of the Spirit which cannot be destroyed with iron.

14:49: “Day after day” showed that Christ was in Jerusalem more frequently than Mark recounts (as is shown for example in John and the finding of Christ in Luke). He was a known person. He did not teach in secret or in the shadows. He proclaimed his message publicly. Now the “strong” and “powerful” of the world act in the obscurity of night outside of the city walls. Their show of force only betrays their weakness before Christ. Christ even made note of this by saying, “but let the scriptures be fulfilled.” Even as they sought to silence him, and impose their power on him, he proclaimed that even this happened according to his divine will, not those whom this crowd obeys.

³³ Cf. Mt 26:51.

³⁴ Cf. Lk 22:46–50.

³⁵ Cf. Jn 18:10–11.

³⁶ Cf. SP 415.

³⁷ Cf. AYB 993, and SP 415.

The Garden of Gethsemane (14:26–52)

14:50: Christ, radiantly noble in his arrest, only casted a greater shadow on the cowardly flight of those who mere hours early took oaths that they would not fly. But this also means that no one can stand justified before the Lord, and so all in turn receive his mercy.³⁸

14:51–52: The identity of this young man is ultimately a mystery. We do not know when he arrived or why he is there. It is thought though that this may be Mark, but that is not certain.³⁹ The person was dressed lightly for the time of the year⁴⁰ and so he may have dressed hurriedly to enter the garden. Linen was also expensive and so the person was probably wealthy. This person flees naked, preferring the shame of nudity to remaining with Christ. All ran away, nothing could motivate them to remain, not even preserving their dignity.

³⁸ Cf. Rm 3:23–24.

³⁹ Cf. NB 136.

⁴⁰ It was cold (or at least chilly) this night as is witnessed by Peter warming himself by a fire a little while later in Mk 14:52.

THE TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (14:53–72)

CHRIST BEFORE THE COUNCIL (14:53–65)

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴ Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶ For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷ Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸ “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” ⁵⁹ But even on this point their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” ⁶¹ But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” ⁶² Jesus said, “I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death. ⁶⁵ Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” The guards also took him over and beat him.

14:53: As Christ entered the city secretly so as to not be found by the officials, the officials in turn brought Christ to themselves secretly so as to not be found by the people. The Sanhedrin was assembled at the high priest’s house, not at their official location in the temple precincts.¹ Mark indicates that “all” those who would compose the Sanhedrin were present. This does not necessarily mean the totality of the Sanhedrin since the time and location would have made that difficult. Though, it is true that the high priest could have preemptively assembled everyone while the guards were going to arrest Christ. Instead the “all” is most likely a literary device designed to highlight the contrast between them as a group, and the lone and abandoned Christ.²

There is also some doubt as to whether this was intended to be a formal legal trial since the Jewish officials could not convene a trial for a capital offence under Roman law. And so instead it is more likely that this was a pre-sentencing trial where they simply needed a quorum to build their

¹ Cf. CCSS 296

² Cf. NIGTC 603.

legal case which they would in turn present before Pilate at the real trial.³ And for a quorum they only need twenty-three members of the Sanhedrin, not all members of the council.⁴

14:54: At the same time Christ was introduced to the high priest, Peter in turn arrived in the courtyard just below the chamber with Christ. Mark sets up this scene to indicate that the Christ and Peter cycles are happening at the same time.⁵ Both are on trial in different courts, and both respond in such different ways.

Peter has shown some courage to catch up to Christ and to enter the high priest's courtyard. Even so, he still did not understand the full commitment required to be a disciple. He followed, but only so long as it was on his terms. As his master suffers, he in turn warmed himself by a fire.⁶

Mark uses the word for light (φῶς) to describe the fire by which Peter warmed himself, not the more common word for fire (πῦρ). At the most basic linguistic level this is fairly unremarkable, since Mark is simply using a synonym for fire in Greek as a matter of literary style.⁷ After all, fire was the only means to produce artificial light until the invention of the electric lightbulb in 1809. To say that there was light at night is the same as saying there was a fire. That Mark does use the word light though does set up for the servant girl to question Peter later, since it means that he is *in the light* and so visible.

The guards (ὑπηρέτης) with whom Peter was sitting are better described as general attendants or servants of both the high priest's house and of those who were attend the meeting. It probably does also include some guards, most like some of those who brought Christ in, but it was not exclusively guards. Whatever the exact purpose of these people, they are not general people milling about, but there with a specific purpose and at the service of specific people.⁸

14:55: The Sanhedrin then began their trial. Jewish courts did not have a prosecutor, but instead depended upon a witness to bring forth a charge upon which they would then pass judgement. In this case, since they were looking for a charge, that meant that they had arrested Christ before they had properly secured a charge of prosecution.⁹ Given this opening legal *faux pas* they attempted to give the appearance of legitimacy by seeking for a charge to be brought forward and the required two witnesses for the death penalty.¹⁰

In their attempt for legitimacy, the Sanhedrin could find no one to give the proper legal testimony and had not prepared a charge. Yet, in the midst of all this, where was Judas? He was there a few verses ago at the arrest. Where was he now to give testimony? Why had the Sanhedrin

³ Cf. NIGTC 602–603.

⁴ Cf. NIGTC 531.

⁵ Cf. NICNT 532.

⁶ Cf. CCSS 296.

⁷ Cf. NIGTC 604, 620.

⁸ Cf. ὑπηρέτης in TDNT 8:530–544.

⁹ Cf. NIGTC 604.

¹⁰ Cf. Dt 17:6, 19:15, Num 35:30, CCSS 297, and SP 421.

not secured a charge from him when they paid him? Surely his testimony was worth just as much as him showing them where the garden was to arrest a publicly recognizable figure. Surely he could have made quick work of this trial with his testimony. For all the show of proper form, their hurry could cause them failure at any moment.

14:56: Many witnesses came forward. Mark emphasizes the illegitimacy of the affair by stating their testimony was false and contradictory. The Sanhedrin for their part presumably was doing their due diligence and cross examining the witnesses by which they are finding the problems with the testimony.¹¹ They cared that this appeared legitimate so that when they presented their case before the Roman court it would be accepted.¹² They knew that they had one shot to get this right.

14:57–59: We do not know what the previous charges were that were brought forward. This charge against the temple though is a very serious charge. Jeremiah the prophet prophesied against the temple he was nearly killed,¹³ and when Uriah attempted to do the same, he was killed.¹⁴ The immediate issue is that Christ did not say that he would destroy the temple but that the temple would be destroyed without specifying when, who, or how.¹⁵ Nevertheless this charge becomes the focus of the high priest's attention since it is the source of his and the whole Sanhedrin's authority.¹⁶ Further, the destruction of a sacred place was a capital offense throughout the Roman empire,¹⁷ and this could have finally provided the charge needed to bring this to a close. Unfortunately for the court though the charge by the witnesses fell under cross-examination.

Mark in recounting this charge adds a theological shift since the word he used for the temple (*ναός*) indicates the sanctuary of the temple proper instead of the temple complex (*ἱερόν*). This move shifts meaning of Christ's prophecy from the physical temple to instead indicate him, since he will become the place of worship as the new and eternal sanctuary.¹⁸ This is reinforced by the charge that the temple "made by hands" will be replaced with one "not made by hands." This first refers to a temple of human origins (and so worship of human origins) and the second then refers to a temple of divine origins (and so worship of human origins).¹⁹ The temple in Jerusalem was in fact built by human hands though the worship of God celebrated inside it was patterned upon the worship of God in heaven. Christ, who is conceived by the Holy Spirit and is begotten of the Father from all eternity, is the temple not made of hands. He in turn is coming to the cross where he will offer the definitive and perfect act of worship of the Father. As a result, that which

¹¹ Cf. Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 4:5–5:4.

¹² Cf. NIGTC 604–605.

¹³ Cf. Jer 26:7–19.

¹⁴ Cf. Jer 26:20–23.

¹⁵ Cf. Mk 13:2.

¹⁶ Cf. CCSS 298.

¹⁷ Cf. NICNT 533–535.

¹⁸ Cf. Heb 9:11, 24, and NIGTC 605–607.

¹⁹ Cf. SP 421–422.

was prefigured in the old worship in the old temple is perfected and fulfilled in this new temple and worship.

14:60: In response to the charge against the temple having been dismissed, and after having been so close to having a charge to secure his purpose, the Chief Priest recalled order. This charge most directly challenged his authority and so he reasserted his authority. He then tried himself to see if he could not trap Christ in his own words. In this desperation, one can sense providence at work. The authorities in their poor preparation are verging on having to acquit their prisoner, but this intervention ensures God’s will is fulfilled.

14:61: Christ’s non-answer fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” (Is 53:7) Further, what does he need to say? The court themselves had dismissed the claims, he had no need to defend himself since there was not a concrete charge for him to contradict. Further in this silence we find the new Adam acting in the inverse of the old Adam. Here the just one in the face of unjust accusations remains silent, whereas in the garden the unjust one protested in the face of just accusations.²⁰

In response to Christ’s silence the high priest cut directly to the core of the issue, “who does Jesus claim to be?” The Messiah is a familiar enough title, but the “Son of the Blessed One,” though readily comprehensible is not a common title. The high priest shows his piety by using a circumlocution to speak of the Lord.²¹ This is rich irony as he uses such a pious phrase in speaking to the face of God in condemnation of God incarnate.

14:62: Christ responded plainly and clearly. He for the first and only time in Mark, Christ spoke openly that he was the Messiah. This is also one of the most direct affirmations by Christ of his divinity in the Gospels. He can do so now because there can be no confusion as to what it means to be the Messiah. No one can stop him from completing his mission on behalf of humanity.²²

Christ in affirming the high priest’s statement he said in the Greek, “ἐγώ εἰμι,” which are the same words that God used to speak his name to Moses in Exodus.²³ Christ then continued to affirm that he will sit “at the right hand of the Power.” This cites Psalm 110, “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” (Ps 110:1) In doing so he placed himself (the one under judgement) upon the divine throne of judgement and so over those who were judging him (who in turn are not even sitting in their proper thrones of judgement). He laid claim to the divine prerogative of judgement and the divine name. He also showed his filial

²⁰ Cf. NB 138.

²¹ Cf. SP 422.

²² Cf. CCSS 299.

²³ Cf. LXX Ex 3:14, and CCSS 299.

piety by speaking in a circumlocution too in saying that he will be at the right hand of the *Power*. Unlike the high priest though, Christ does so with authentic piety.²⁴

14:63–64: In response to Christ’s answer, the high priest charged him with blasphemy even though he has not directly misused God’s name. Christ had spoken in reference to God in a circumlocution just as the high priest did. Such a circumlocution was perfectly fine to use.²⁵ Instead he was charged with blasphemy because he had laid claim to divine prerogatives.²⁶ The penalty for blasphemy was stoning,²⁷ and yet Christ will be crucified. This is because though blaspheme is a capital offence for the Jews, it is not for the Romans, and so another charge will be brought to the Romans.²⁸ The formal charge brought to them will not be blaspheme *per se*, even though that is the Jewish motive. Instead as we will see it will be for Christ laying claim to the title of Messiah which the Sanhedrin will use to present Christ as a threat to Roman rule, and so it is a charge that could receive the death penalty under Roman law (the penalty of which was crucifixion).

These charges were only possible because Christ’s “self-accusation” in his answer, which also eliminated the further need for witnesses, and so brought the trial to a conclusion.²⁹ This must have served as a relief to the Sanhedrin since they had been unable to secure the prerequisite two witnesses. Christ supplied that himself. This once more reinforces the profound truth that he is in control. The legal incompetence of this kangaroo trial will not prevent the execution of the divine will. And so in accord with God’s will the Sanhedrin is able to draft the formal decree of condemnation that they will bring to Pilate.³⁰

The high priest in response to Christ’s confession tore his clothing so as to express the great grief of hearing such a statement. This gesture was used when tragic news (like the death of a loved one) was heard and it was the “standard” response to hearing blaspheme.³¹ A cynical view of this response would be to say that this was entirely for show. At the same time, this would be the proper response for a devout Jew when hearing extraordinary utterances of blasphemy and Christ had just made a strong claim to divinity. Just because Christ’s answer provides the perfect cover to bring about the high priest’s desired death sentence, does not mean that he was not sincerely shocked at the evidence expressed by Christ.

The high priest tore his *clothes* apart. The Greek (χιτῶνας) indicates that he had multiple layers of clothing on (unlike the young man at Gethsemane who was dressed lightly). It would have been normal to have at least two layers (if not more in the middle of the night at this time of

²⁴ Cf. NIGTC 610.

²⁵ Cf. AYB 1008, and Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 7:8.

²⁶ Cf. NIGTC 613–616.

²⁷ Cf. Lev 24:16.

²⁸ Cf. NIGTC 616–617

²⁹ Cf. SP 424.

³⁰ Cf. NICNT 539.

³¹ Cf. SP 423, and Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 7:5.

The Trial before the Sanhedrin (14:53–72)

the year). Note that it was forbidden by the Law to tear the priestly garments.³² Therefore either he was not in his formal priestly dress and so not following proper protocol; or instead he was and so violated the Law in his zeal to condemn Christ.³³ In either case Mark presents the high priest violating the law in the process of laying down his legal declaration.

14:65: In response to Christ's condemnation, he was treated as one condemned to death with the abuse that often accompanied it. They began to mock Christ seeking a prophecy, but the irony is that in doing so he does prophecy, or at least the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled concerning the third Suffering Servant³⁴ and Christ's own prophecy concerning his death.³⁵

PETER DENIES CHRIST (14:66–72)

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. ⁶⁹ And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." ⁷¹ But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." ⁷² At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

14:66: We have to remember that we only have this story because Peter who was there, told others about it. Peter had this moment recorded for posterity. And so at the same time that the master is on trial and then being assaulted, Peter was just outside keeping warm, concerned with his comfort. He was clearly visible as he sat beside the fire and must have been able to hear the lively discourse coming from just above him. As the legal authorities put the divine lawgiver on trial, Peter is put on trial by a female slave (one who in this time had no legal standing).³⁶ The condemnation, humiliation, and in turn ultimate triumph of Christ above is mirrored by Peter's own condemnation, humiliation, and eventual triumph in martyrdom.

14:67: The servant-girl's opening charge was simple enough. If the leader was condemned for rebellion or blasphemous teachings, then that would also spread to his followers. So, she charged Peter with association with Christ.

14:68: Peter in turn was given the opportunity to suffer with Christ as he had previously sworn, he would do. But instead a person without authority over him questioned him and he denied the charge. In doing so, Peter entered into a passion but an unredemptive passion separated from

³² Cf. Lev 21:10.

³³ Cf. AYB 1008.

³⁴ Cf. Is 50:6.

³⁵ Cf. Mk 10:33–34.

³⁶ Cf. NIGTC 620.

Christ. As a result he left the comfort of the fire and retreated away, towards the darkness of the night. He hoped to become less recognizable, but all he accomplished was to become estranged from himself as those around still recognized him for who he was.

14:69: The woman accused him again, for she recognized him for who he was. She now tried to bring others into her charges. She would need two witnesses after all if she were to present Peter before the Sanhedrin.

14:70: Peter denied the charge again. The first denial was a partial deflection of the question, the mental gymnastics of lying without *lying*. This second denial is presumably a similar response. The problem though is that the woman's aim has been achieved. Another bystander accused Peter and provided further details. One of the bystanders very well may have been among those who arrested Christ, and so eyewitnesses to Peter's recent association. Two witnesses were found. No longer is this a risk of shame but a risk of life.

14:71: And so Peter then swore an oath as if he were on trial. In doing so he perjured himself and blasphemes the name of God (since such oaths would involve swearing upon the Lord's name). Previously he deflected, he denied he associated with Christ, this time he denied knowledge of Christ himself. But that was not enough, he did not stop at just swearing falsely, he also uttered a curse. In this cultural context and given the presented allegations, this meant that he cursed the one with whom he was associated and also assented to the condemnation laid upon Christ.³⁷ Peter has gone beyond denial and into *formal* betrayal of Christ.

14:72: And on cue the cock crowed the second time. This indicates that we have entered the third watch of the night (Midnight – 3 am).³⁸ At this Peter “broke down” (ἐπιβάλλω) which could also mean he cast himself down or threw himself on the ground, which calls to mind Christ in the garden falling to the ground in great anguish over his betrayal. These tears and compunction are what distinguish Peter from Judas. For they both are guilty of formally betraying Christ. But as Augustine says, “As holy David repented for his deadly crimes and still retained his kingship, so the blessed Peter earnestly repented, having denied the Lord, and shed such bitter tears, yet remained an apostle.”³⁹

Repentance is at the heart of Christian discipleship since it is the way by which we receive redemption and reconciliation that Christ himself that wins for us. Mark's unflinching depiction of Peter's complete capitulation serves a) as a warning to all Christians to stay vigilant as directed by Christ in the garden, and b) as hope of restoration for those who are weak.⁴⁰

³⁷ Cf. NIGTC 622.

³⁸ Cf. CCSS 302.

³⁹ Augustine, *Letter 185, to Boniface* in ACCS 210.

⁴⁰ Cf. CCSS 302–303.

THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE (15:1–20)

JESUS BEFORE PILATE (15:1–5)

15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.” ³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.” ⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

15:1: Some time has passed since we left off with Christ and Peter. The Sanhedrin has worked through the rest of the night to presumably draft their formal charges against Christ and to prepare the case which they will present before Pilate. At the end of this process they had a final consultation with the present body to ensure everything was in order before they went to the Roman court.¹

Roman courts opened at the first light of the morning. In a region like Palestine, the local governor presided over the proceedings. He then did so until he took his repose for the day or until some other work called him away. Therefore, on account of it being Passover, the Sanhedrin was in a hurry to get their case first on the docket before Pilate so that this matter would be resolved quickly.²

To accomplish this the Sanhedrin bound Christ (this is the first time we hear explicitly that he was bound) and led him out. This binding is a legal marker that they have a grave charge to bring against him.³ This also mirrors the garden betrayal, but now the betrayal is by the leaders of Jerusalem (of a fellow Jew) to the Roman authorities.⁴

15:2: We do not hear the charges laid before Pilate, but in a summarized way Mark does portray a faithful account of a Roman court proceeding.⁵ For the Romans the key item of contention was the claim to kingship (messiahship). Internationally and locally Herod the Great was called “The King of the Jews.” This charge against Christ then set him against the Hasmonean dynasty which

¹ Cf. CCSS 304–305.

² Cf. NICNT 549.

³ Cf. NIGTC 627.

⁴ Cf. CCSS 305.

⁵ Cf. NICNT 550.

was directly supported by the Romans.⁶ And Pilate and other Roman officials had dealt with previous pretenders to the throne brutally.⁷

Christ was cagey in response to Pilate, maybe since Pilate would not be able to understand what it meant for him to be the messiah (and so a return to the Messianic Secret). Christ's response implied a "yes, but..." indicating that there is a political nuance to what it meant for him to be the King of the Jews.⁸ This ambiguous answer though opened Christ to further questioning as Pilate will show that he recognized Christ's affirmation with reservations. At the same time, Pilate is not convinced that the "yes" constituted political rebellion since the prosecution continued instead of Pilate passing a judgement then and there.⁹

15:3: The priests recognized that their evidence was not sufficient to end the case directly, while they also recognized in Christ's answer an opening. They brought forth many other charges, presumably the charge against the temple and a smattering of other things which were brought forth at the high priest's house. That it was the priests who are speaking shows that this is primarily a matter of religious dispute and not political.¹⁰ From the moment that the chief priest stood after the accusations against the temple in the pre-trial, the priests have been in charge of the prosecution.

15:4: Pilate following court proceedings gave Christ a chance to respond. This further indicated that he is not convinced by the priests' arguments. He had the power to sentence Christ to death at any point once the charge was brought forward. Yet, the case that the Sanhedrin has brought forward is not convincing enough for him (who had no problems executing Jewish rebels) to end the trial.

15:5: Christ though did not respond to Pilate just as he did not to Caiaphas. Was Pilate amazed at his apparent arrogance? Or was he amazed at the nobility of Christ in the face of these overly earnest accusations? Seeing Pilate's skepticism, Christ's testimony could quite possibly have demonstrated his innocence.¹¹ Christ knew that he was innocent and what was going through Pilate's mind. He knew if he spoke the truth, if he would have been set free, which would have frustrated his messianic purpose. Just as before the high priest it was only Christ's testimony that a charge was able to be brought forth, so now before Pilate it was only Christ's lack of testimony that the charge can go forward.

⁶ Cf. AYB 1027.

⁷ Cf. SP 431. Pilate himself is remembered by contemporary sources as cruel and at times misunderstanding of the socio-religious fault lines. Cf. AYB 1026–1027.

⁸ Cf. NIGTC 628.

⁹ Cf. NICNT 551.

¹⁰ Though one should not strictly separate the two since they are intimately intertwined. Instead it is a matter of emphasis in this situation.

¹¹ Cf. NIGTC 629.

PILATE HANDS JESUS OVER TO BE CRUCIFIED (15:6–15)

⁶ Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷ Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸ So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹ Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” ¹⁰ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹² Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” ¹³ They shouted back, “Crucify him!” ¹⁴ Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

15:6: The origins of this Paschal Pardon are unclear; however, in the ancient world it was not uncommon to grant clemency or pardon on high holy days.¹² So it is not unreasonable for something like that to have happened. There are also echoes of this practice in the earliest layers of the Midrash dating to the first century.¹³ Further the Romans used such releases as a political tool to win and influence political favor among the local peoples.¹⁴ As a result, since Pilate was not convinced of Christ’s guilt, he may have been attempting to use Christ’s popularity (assuming he had heard reports on Christ’s reception into Jerusalem and actions in the temple) to set Christ free through the Paschal Pardon without having to act overtly against the Sanhedrin.¹⁵

That this happened on Passover and in the Roman praetorium provides two important background images. The first is the Passover event itself, where the people were set free from slavery and saved from the Angel of Death. The prisoner then in their person experiences the Passover event themselves.¹⁶ Further, the crowd’s selection of who lives and who dies in this Roman gathering space echoes the gladiatorial fights where the crowd chose who lived and died.¹⁷

15:7: How the crowd knew their options to set free is unclear. Pilate may have proposed, or the crowd may have spontaneously selected. Here we are simply introduced to Barabbas. He was probably a well-known and public “hero” since he had led a revolt against the Romans. As a result he could draw support for himself this morning.¹⁸

The name Barabbas comes from Bar Abbas, which means Son of the Father, and was a last name. In Matthew 27:16 we learn that his first name was Jesus. His full name then in English was Jesus Son of the Father. And so we have two Jesuses associated with the title Son of the Father. One sought to establish the earthly kingdom by violence and force the fulfillment of the messianic

¹² Cf. SP 432.

¹³ Cf. NICNT 553, and Mishnah, *Pesachim* 8:6.

¹⁴ Cf. NIGTC 629–630.

¹⁵ Cf. NICNT 552.

¹⁶ Cf. SP 432.

¹⁷ Cf. NIGTC 630.

¹⁸ Cf. NIGTC 630–631.

Pilate Hands Jesus over to Be Crucified (15:6–15)

promises. The other established the heavenly kingdom by his own blood and fulfilled the messianic promises.

15:8: The arrival of the crowd could indicate that a new group has arrived, or it could be a literary device to shift the focus from the chief priests to the whole assembly. Up to this point presumably a crowd had come with the Sanhedrin. Now if a new crowd has arrived, Pilate may have thought that this new crowd was here in support of Christ. But it could also have been a crowd coming to petition for the release of Barabbas. It most likely was not the pilgrims that had welcomed Christ into the city.¹⁹ Further given the size of the space in the praetorium it would not have taken many (a few dozen) to constitute a crowd. This means that the quorum of the Sanhedrin alone would have appeared a crowd in this space. In comparison to the size of the city, especially one swollen with pilgrims for Passover, this group can hardly represent the city.²⁰

15:9: Pilate addresses the crowd seemingly trying to give favor to Christ, which would make sense if he thought supporters of Christ had just arrived or that most present actually supported Christ. Unfortunately, he misread the crowd and in using the title King of Jews he alienated them, turning them further against Christ, since it is in part Christ's claim to the title Messiah (King of the Jews) that has led them to hand him over.²¹

15:10: Though Pilate misread the crowd's sentiment, he did properly read that the chief priests were using this for their own purposes, and as such were trying to get Pilate to do their dirty work.²² This only adds to the tragedy, since Pilate in his political calculations will hand over to death one that he thinks to be innocent. This echoes the martyrdom of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas, who also handed over one he thought innocent out of political expedience,²³ and highlights that Christ's reign is not of this world, and that the (political) wisdom of God's kingdom transcends worldly wisdom.

15:11: Unfortunately, there was no support in the crowd for Christ. The priests used their political acumen as they stirred up the crowd against Christ. They may not have previously cared about Barabbas, but they sensed that they could use him as a pawn in their plans, which they deftly did.

15:12: Pilate was clearly thrown aback by the crowd's response. He questioned the crowd asking what should be done to Christ. He may have hoped that they would ask for a lesser punishment, or maybe he did not want to be responsible for whatever sentence they would ask for. He did remind them that they were the ones who called Christ the King of the Jews after all. Much like Adam blaming Eve in the Garden, Pilate is already laying the groundwork to blame the Jews if there is any blowback for what happens in this trial.

¹⁹ Cf. CCSS 307, and NIGTC 631.

²⁰ Cf. NIGTC 631.

²¹ Cf. NIGTC 632, and SP 433.

²² Cf. NICNT 544–555.

²³ Cf. SP 433.

The Trial before Pilate (15:1–20)

15:13: And at this point Pilate had lost control of the legal proceedings. Pilate asked them to sentence and so they did, they sentenced Christ to crucifixion. Crucifixion was the penalty for political rebels, not for blasphemy, and so it was the proper penalty for a pretender to the Jewish throne.²⁴ This also highlights the shift of emphasis from the trial at night to now. The core charge seemed to be theological, the charge of blasphemy. Now it is clearly one of politics.

15:14: Pilate’s response was an implicit acknowledgement that Pilate finds Christ not guilty.²⁵ But this implicit decree was overruled by the crowd’s response which acted as a legal “acclamation” ratifying the popular decree of crucifixion.²⁶ Pilate’s attempt to appeal the sentence had failed, the high court of the crowd has overruled him, Christ was to be put to death by crucifixion.

15:15: Pilate caved to the public pressure and presented it as doing them the “favor” of *taking care* of Christ and of releasing Barabbas.²⁷ His political pragmatism returned and since he has done them such a favor (the execution of an innocent political figure), he may have hope to leverage this against the chief priests at some future time.

Christ was then “flogged” (that is scourged) as was the Roman custom before crucifixion. This was a brutal event that could kill. Josephus spoke of bones and visceral becoming visible as flesh was torn off in the process.²⁸ It is unclear if this happened in the public court or in another location. Given that it was Passover, and the blood could make them unclean, the crowd probably was not witness to the scourging or at least was not near the scourging.

THE SOLDIERS MOCK CHRIST (15:16–20)

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

15:16: This new location is a private location separate from the location of Christ’s trial. A cohort is one tenth of a legion, or around six hundred men. In this case Mark does not mean a literal cohort, but all the soldiers that were accompanying Pilate.²⁹ These soldiers would have been non-

²⁴ Cf. NIGTC 633–644.

²⁵ Cf. SP 434.

²⁶ Cf. NICNT 556.

²⁷ Cf. NIGTC 634.

²⁸ Cf. NICNT 557.

²⁹ Cf. SP 435. We use military unit designation in a similarly imprecise way when we speak of squads, regiments, and battalions. Few know the actual numbers involved in these military divisions, but we use them to simply indicate groupings of soldiers. Mark is doing the same thing.

The Soldiers Mock Christ (15:16–20)

Jewish inhabitants of Palestine.³⁰ This scene then parallels with the mocking before the Sanhedrin, but this time it is the gentiles.

15:17: Though it was not explicitly stated previous when Christ was scourged, he would have been stripped naked for it to happen. Now in his nakedness they clothed him. In the first century it was not illegal for non-royalty to wear purple, but instead it was simply very expensive to buy clothing dyed in a high-quality purple.³¹ And so the purple robe that they placed upon Christ was probably a well-worn military cloak. The term for clown (στέρφανος) indicates that it was a wreath and was not in itself necessarily royal. It more commonly indicated an atmosphere of rejoicing or athletic victory.³²

That being said, Hellenistic vassal kings were given purple robes and gilded wreaths as crowns.³³ The spikes of the wreath would ape the imperial Roman crown which had the rays of the sun coming out it, and which symbolized that divine kingship of Caesar.³⁴ It is clear that all these symbols were mocking that Christ was charged as a pretender to the Jewish throne.

15:18: The royal mockery continued in their salute of Christ, “Hail, King of the Jews,” which mimicked the salute of Caesar, “Ave, Caesar” (Hail, Caesar).³⁵

15:19: This abuse was quite similar to what occurred with the Sanhedrin with the added mock worship. It was normal practice for the soldiers to behave in this way towards the condemned. The whole purpose of crucifixion was to as completely as possible humiliate and break down the person. This treatment was part of accomplishing the sadistic purpose of crucifixion.

15:20: After the soldiers had finished their abuse, they reclothed him. Normally the condemned carried the crossbeam of the cross naked and were scourged as they went to the place of crucifixion. Since Christ was already scourged, they redressed him.³⁶ They may have also redressed him so as to not offend Jewish sensibilities, particularly on this high holy day.³⁷

It is interesting that Mark only mentions the cloak being removed but says nothing about the crown. It is uncertain in the Gospels what happened to the crown. Soldiers in general were not allowed to mock the Jews and so may have removed the crown. Or they may have left the crown on since Christ was condemned and so the object would not have offended the Jews.³⁸ Since Mark is clear that the soldiers struck Christ’s head, and the crown was throned, it is also reasonable that the crown had become lodged in Christ’s head. As a result the soldiers may have left the crown on

³⁰ Cf. NICNT 559.

³¹ Cf. AYB 1039–1040.

³² Cf. 1 Cor 9:25, and NIGTC 638.

³³ Cf. NICNT 559.

³⁴ Cf. CCSS 311.

³⁵ Cf. CCSS 311.

³⁶ Cf. NICNT 560.

³⁷ Cf. NIGTC 639.

³⁸ Cf. NIGTC 639.

The Trial before Pilate (15:1–20)

since they could not be hassled to remove it. All totaled, it is most likely that the crown was not removed from Christ's head.

This all finished, the soldiers led Christ like a lamb led to the slaughter. Christ takes up the wood of the Cross as Isaac had carried the wood of sacrifice millennia before and began his journey to the Mount of Calvary.

THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF THE MESSIAH (15:21–47)

THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE CHRIST (15:21–32)

²¹ They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²² Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

15:21: Simon was not coming in from the country as if he was coming from working in the fields since it was still the morning when people normally entered the city.¹ Instead he was coming into the city for Passover, either as a pilgrim from Cyrene or from some other place nearby the city.² The place they were leading Christ would have been public and well known location, and a place well traveled in order for the purpose of crucifixion to be accomplished.³ Therefore, it is reasonable that the Simon was entering by a main gate, and happened to run into the procession of the cross. The Romans in turn (by happenstance) pressed him into temporary service which they could do by law.⁴

This sudden forced service by Simon must have been revolting (particularly within the Passover time), and yet in time, how must this intimate encounter with the suffering Lord had transformed his heart?⁵ Simon did not know it, nor was he seeking Christ, but Christ had been seeking him as the prophet Isaiah said, "I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to

¹ It is earlier than 9 o'clock since we read a few verses later that it is 9 o'clock when Christ is crucified. (Mark 15:25) And so it is reasonably around 8 o'clock in the morning. Far too early for Simon to have been finishing work in the fields.

² Cf. SP 441.

³ Cf. SP 441.

⁴ Cf. Mt 5:41, and CCSS 31.

⁵ Cf. NB 142.

be found by those who did not seek me.” (Is 65:1) In this moment Simon shared in the essence of discipleship by taking up Christ’s own cross.⁶ It was not James or John, nor is it Peter, it was none whom “sought” the cross, but the one who did not that became the exemplar in this moment.

The effects of this encounter with the Lord spread throughout Simon’s life. His sons Alexander and Rufus are mentioned. They were probably known individuals in the community that Mark is writing to.⁷ This family in the decades to follow had become a foundation stone of the Church; their witness to Christ in his passion is part of the bedrock of our religion to this very day.

It is quite telling that Christ needed help to carry the cross. Through Christ is traditionally depicted carrying the entire cross, historical Roman practice differed. (And the Gospels and Tradition do not clarify the matter.) In Roman practice, the condemned carried the crossbeam to the place of crucifixion, where the vertical post was already fashioned (particularly when the Romans used common execution grounds as may be the case with Christ). Then the condemned were fixed to the crossbeam and hoisted up into place on the vertical post. Therefore it is most likely that Christ only carried the crossbeam.⁸ This though further drives home how weakened Christ was. He was a carpenter by trade, he would have carried such sized beams as part his ordinary work without trouble. Yet, after the ordeal he had been through, he cannot even carry the crossbeam.⁹

15:22: “They brought Jesus,” can have two meanings. First, it could mean they literally carried Christ to Golgotha. Christ could have been so weakened that he had to be carried. If this were the case, not pardon or delay would have been given, but he would have been carried, and the execution would have continued.¹⁰ Second, it could simply mean they led Christ to the place of crucifixion, and this serves as a transitional phrase to restart the narrative motion after introducing Simon last verse.

The exact place with “absolute proof” to which Christ was led is impossible to determine; however, there are no firm grounds for placing the location of calvary anywhere else other than in the Holy Sepulcher.¹¹ This location was outside the city at the time and along a main road into the city. In the early second century Origen spoke of the location of Christ’s crucifixion as a defined location and one which was handed on to him, which indicates it was an even earlier identification.¹² Through the written and archeological tradition there was no dispute until a much later date.¹³ The consensus is that the Holy Sepulcher is the best answer for the location of Calvary.

⁶ Cf. Mk 8:34.

⁷ See also Rm 16:13 where Paul writing to the Romans like Mark mentions a Rufus in the community.

⁸ Cf. NIGTC 640–641.

⁹ Cf. CCSS 311–312.

¹⁰ Cf. AYB 1041–1042.

¹¹ Cf. NIGTC 642.

¹² Cf. Origen, *Commentariorum in Matthaem* in PG 13:1777.

¹³ Cf. AYB 1042.

The Crucifixion of the Christ (15:21–32)

15:23: The offering of a drug laden drink appears to have been a common Jewish practice during executions. The Book of Proverbs for example says, “give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.” (Prov 31:6–7)¹⁴ Myrrh was added to the wine in an attempt to ease the suffering of Christ. It is somewhat unclear what effect the myrrh was supposed to have. A first century Roman military physician, Dioscorides Pedanius, observed that myrrh did have sedative effects.¹⁵ Other studies though are uncertain of this effect but instead posit the myrrh made the wine more palatable, and so the wine itself eased the suffering.¹⁶ In either case, Christ rejects the offer and so chose to remain conscious and aware to the last moments. This sacrificial offering is a pure oblation to the Father.

There is some doubt as to who offered the wine. Grammatically it makes the most sense for the soldiers to be the ones offering the mixed wine. But since the drink has the purpose of dulling the pain, that does not fit with their motivations in crucifying Christ or their general behavior of abusing Christ.¹⁷ Though, since Mark shows Pilate hesitant to condemn Christ, maybe Pilate attempted to ease Christ’s suffering and had ordered the mixed wine to be given to him.¹⁸ The other possibility is that one of the women who had accompanied Christ to this point had offered wine.¹⁹ This seems to be the most likely case.

15:24: It was Roman custom that the executors divided whatever the condemned had on their person. Normally this was simply the basic clothing the person had been wearing at the moment of execution. As a result (if the condemned were not already naked while being scourged along the way) the condemned were nude upon the cross. It is uncertain though if Christ (and the others) was stripped bare or given a loincloth in deference to Jewish sensibilities.²⁰

The casting of lots calls to mind Psalm 22:

For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots. (Ps 22:16–18)

¹⁴ See also in the Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 43a:10.

¹⁵ Cf. Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica* I:64, and NICNT 564.

¹⁶ Cf. CCSS 313, SP 442.

¹⁷ NIGTC 642–643. Further it was not Roman practice to offer the wine, but Jewish practice, and as we noted earlier the soldiers would have specifically been *non-Jewish* to minimize their sympathies with the Jews when they had to do cruel things like crucify political rebels claiming to restore the ancient Jewish kingdom.

¹⁸ AYB 1043.

¹⁹ Cf. Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 43a:10.

²⁰ Cf. Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 6:3, and SP 442.

The Crucifixion and Death of the Messiah (15:21–47)

The whole of Psalm 22 can be prayed as prefiguring Christ’s suffering, death, and triumphant resurrection.

15:25: It was only nine o’clock. It has been maybe twelve hours since Christ was arrested in the garden, tried by the Sanhedrin, presented before Pilate, scourged, carried his cross through the city, and was now crucified. So much had happened in such a short period of time. This three-hour block of time will continue throughout the following events. This cosmic harmony shows the guiding providence behind all that happened.²¹

15:26: The headboard is an attested Roman practice and read out the reason for the persons condemnation. The charge, “King of the Jews,” had a double political meaning: a) it was a jab at the Jewish authorities for crucifying their king, and b) a reminder to all of what happens if you claim this title.²²

15:27: The term used for “bandit” (ληστής) can mean a simple bandit or robber. It can also mean “revolutionary” or “freedom fighter.” In the following decades it will take on the technical meaning of “freedom fighter,” but at this moment the word is more broadly defined. That being said, the particular legal context of the trial with Barabbas (a freedom fighter) and the charge against Christ favors the later meaning of the word.²³ Further in Roman law, simple theft (*furtum*) and violent theft (*rapina*) did not in themselves merit capital punishment.²⁴

It is more likely that the two crucified alongside Christ were revolutionaries. They were even probably companions of the Barabbas who was released.²⁵ It is likely that Pilate had already planned to crucify Barabbas and two of his companions this day, and his followers knowing this showed up seeking the Paschal Pardon for him.²⁶ This also explains why Barabbas was so conveniently at hand to exchange for Chris and why the Romans were so prepared to do this execution.

And so we find that one Jesus *Son of the Father* had been released, and now another Jesus *Son of God* was crucified. Christ was enthroned in *glory* but has two zealots alongside him.²⁷ James and John had sought these seats in their zeal, but instead two men of blood *sat* alongside Christ. And in doing so Christ fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah:

Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,

²¹ Cf. CCSS 314–315.

²² Cf. CCSS 315.

²³ Cf. NIGTC 646.

²⁴ Cf. NICNT 568.

²⁵ Cf. NIGTC 631.

²⁶ See our discussion earlier on Mk 15:6–8.

²⁷ Christ and the other two literally may have been *sitting* since the Romans would at time place a small board to support the weight of the condemned body. This was no act of sympathy by them. The purpose was to prolong the agony, since the person died most often through the effects of the body hanging unsupported.

The Crucifixion of the Christ (15:21–32)

and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors. (Is 53:12)

15:28: This verse is omitted in all modern critical editions the original text and translations since it is missing in the best original manuscripts. It is only later manuscripts that have this verse. It appears that this verse was included by a later scribe as a gloss of Luke 22:37 and Isaiah 53:12. The Vulgate though included the verse which is why it is numbered.

15:29: “They derided” (βλασφημέω) Christ, which can also be translated, “they blasphemed” him. Since they did not believe him to be God, they were mocking, but since he is in fact God, they were truly committing blasphemy. Whatever support Christ had in the city, it seems to have evaporated.²⁸ There were just a few women that remain. His crucifixion had thrown into question his whole *project*.

As the crowds passed by, they brought forth his *threat* against the temple (ναός) as they had done before the Sanhedrin, and yet they did not realize he was doing what they claim he was not doing. In this sacrifice he is bringing to completion the sacrifice of the temple and so the temple itself. He is building a new temple in the destruction of this *earthly* temple. For in him and through him the perfect worship of the Father is completed and perpetuated throughout the whole of the cosmos.

15:30: They continued to misunderstand just who Christ is and who the Messiah is. To save himself would have been to forfeit saving us, it would have been to forfeit his mission, to forfeit the title, “King of the Jews.” Instead it was his love for us that kept him upon the cross, it was his love for those who abused him.

15:31: As the crowds moved past, the members of the Sanhedrin arrived and gloated over their victory. How easy it was to gloat then given the shambolic nature of their prosecution. They gloated in a victory that was only possible through the testimony of Christ gave to them and the withheld testimony of Christ before Pilate.

15:32: Just as Christ’s ministry began with temptation by Satan, now it ended in temptation by man. Here the great temptation was that if he did not come down from the cross, then they would not believe, but if he did then they would believe in him. That is, they claim that if he comes down, they will then accept him as Messiah, meaning he will be accepted by the people as the Messiah. They even broadened the title from the King of the Jews (Judeans) to the King of Israel. The promised unity between the two kingdoms, the long awaiting reunion of the Jewish people would be accomplished if he just came down from the cross. Christ is torn between fulfilling the messianic promises according to his Father’s will or according to our will.

²⁸ Cf. NIGTC 646–647.

The Crucifixion and Death of the Messiah (15:21–47)

In reality though, as in all temptations, there was no miracle which Christ could do to make them believe, since God's ways transcends our. Christ had already prayed to his Father concerning this exact moment, but there was no other way for this chalice to pass, since the Messiah had to suffer.

THE DEATH OF THE CHRIST (15:33–41)

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

15:33: Noon marks the beginning of a new time period in Christ's passion, one of great darkness. Mark notes that "the whole land" was covered. This could mean the whole Earth was in darkness or just this region. It is unclear which Mark means and scholars are divided between themselves. It is clear that there was not an eclipse on this day since it was the full moon, and an eclipse can only occur with a new moon. There are no recorded physicalist explanations (like a dust cloud). This was a divine event outside of the scope of natural causes.

It is important that this happened at noon, the height of the Sun's brightness and power. When the natural world should have been seen in its clearest light, instead it was veiled in shadows. All creation descended into darkness as the Light of the World was entering into true darkness. In this moment, the whole cosmos mourned in fulfillment of the prophet Amos:

On that day, says the Lord God,
I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on all loins,
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son,
and the end of it like a bitter day. (Amos 8:9–10)

The feast of Passover, the commemoration of divine victory over the land of darkness, had become one of mourning. The great irony is that the cosmos, which is devoid of its own proper logos recognized the anguish of her king; yet the pinnacle of creation, they who are a microcosm and have their own logos, did not recognize their perishing lord.

The Death of the Christ (15:33–41)

The darkness on that day calls back also to the people in Egypt. For the people of Egypt were cast into darkness as the final plague, the final warning before the fulfillment of God's judgement. Following the Egyptian irrepentance came the Angel of Death, he who struck down the first-born of the Egyptian. Here once more, during the Passover of Passovers, darkness covered the land in expectation of the death of the only begotten Son of God, *the first born of all creation*.²⁹

15:34: At three o'clock Christ entered into the next phase and cried out in anguish. This was the hour of sacrifice in the temple, and Christ cried out as he took on the sin of the people as their divine victim. The strength of Christ's cry on the cross is shocking when compared to his weakness in carrying the cross.

After hanging upon the cross for six hours, Christ cried out citing Psalm 22:1. Many have attempted to make sense of such a striking cry by Christ. It is true that by citing the first version of Psalm 22 he also implied the rest of the psalm which ultimately ends in triumph; however, that does not explain away edge of Christ's quotation, since he chooses this verse of this psalm. However we resolve Christ quoting this verse we must not blunt the biting edge of his citation.³⁰ At the core, this act of Christ must, "be understood in the perspective of the holy wrath of God and the character of sin, which cuts the sinner off from God."³¹ But at the same time the despair of Christ is matched with the centurion's declaration of him as the Son of God a few verses later. The whole context must be kept in balance. Christ is truly God in this cry, and he is truly human experiencing the full wait of the wages of sin: abandonment of God.

On account of this duality of natures, Christ experienced all that humans experience. St. Ambrose reflecting on this passage stated:

As human he doubts. He experiences amazement. It is not his divinity that doubts, but his human soul. He had no difficulty being amazed because he had taken humanity fully to himself. In taking upon himself a human soul, he also took upon himself the affections of a soul. As God he was not distressed, but as a human he was capable of being distressed. It was not as God he died, but as man. It was in human voice that he cried: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" As human, therefore, he speaks on the cross, bearing with him our terrors. For amid dangers it is a very human response to think oneself abandoned. As human, therefore, he is distressed, weeps, and is crucified.³²

Christ experiences the full terrors of sin, the full weight of punishment due to sin. "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor 5:21) The core effect of sin is abandonment by God, this is what Hell is. Christ in his humanity takes on this abandonment, so that we might take on the righteousness of his divinity.

²⁹ Cf. Col 1:15.

³⁰ Cf. NICNT 573.

³¹ NICNT 573, and see Is 59:2.

³² Ambrose, *On The Christian Faith* 2.7.56 in ACCS 222.

The Crucifixion and Death of the Messiah (15:21–47)

In this weakness Christ also showed the limitations of the Law. It could not bring about true righteousness, instead something more had to be given. St. Augustine reflecting on the delayed response of God stated:

He is doubtless forsaken in the sense that his plea was not directly granted. Jesus appropriated the psalmist's voice to himself, the voice of human weakness. The benefits of the old covenant had to be refused in order that we might learn to pray and hope for the benefits of the new covenant. Among those goods of the old covenant which belonged to the old Adam there is a special appetite for the prolonging of this temporal life. But this appetite itself is not interminable, for we all know that the day of death will come. Yet all of us, or nearly all, strive to postpone it, even those who believe that their life after death will be a happier one. Such force has the sweet partnership of flesh and soul.³³

In the face of utter destruction, complete death on account of humanity's sin, a new covenant is sealed and prepared as the old covenant and creation comes to an ignoble end. This current life is completely destroyed, and, in the resurrection, a new creation is born.

15:35: The response of the bystanders is not obvious at first glance. Eloi and Elijah are not similar sounding to native Aramaic (or Hebrew) speakers but could be confused by non-native speakers. It is also possible that Christ in his cry was not perfectly articulate and so those nearby heard something that sounded vaguely like Elijah. There also was a folk tradition that Elijah would arrive at the aid of the righteous in their time of trial and would be of particular assistance to the Messiah.³⁴ This helps explain why they were prepared to hear Elijah.

15:36: Who it is that ran to get the sour wine, we do not know. It could be a soldier, a random bystander, the person that earlier had offered the mixed wine, one of the women, or someone else entirely. The sour wine mentioned is almost certainly not vinegar as is commonly supposed. Instead it is probably either young wine or watered down wine. In the Old Testament sour wine was spoken of as a refreshing drink.³⁵ In the Greco-Roman world it was the common drink of soldiers and laborers. They drank it as a refreshing drink.³⁶ The person probably got the wine from the soldiers, since they reasonably would have brought some along with them to drink as they guarded the crosses.

Mark though is clearly alluding to Psalm 69, "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Ps 69:21) This would give a cynical view of this person's actions. In this reading, the person does not think that Elijah will in fact come and save Christ, and so wanted to add to Christ's suffering to prove the point that God had abandoned him.

³³ Augustine, *Letter 140, To Honoratus* 6 in ACCS 222.

³⁴ Cf. NICNT 573.

³⁵ Cf. Ruth 2:14.

³⁶ Cf. NICNT 573–574.

The Death of the Christ (15:33–41)

If we view this gesture as an honest attempt to aid Christ, then the person may genuinely have hoped that Elijah would appear and rescue Christ. In this case the person desired to help Christ so that he might hold on a little long so that the Lord can save him.

15:37: Christ remained alert to the very end. This is odd, normally one died from crucifixion slowly and while unconscious. As the event dragged on the person became less alert and utterly exhausted until they slip unconscious and die.³⁷ Not only did he remain alert, but he also determined when he died. He did not slip into the darkness of death but chose the moment. He is Lord over life and death and showed that in this moment.

15:38: There were two curtains in the temple, one at the entrance to the sanctuary (visible to those in the main courtyard) and one inside the sanctuary into the Holy of Holies (visible only to the priests that entered the sanctuary). It is unclear which was torn. The tearing of the first allows more people to view the event than if the second was torn; however, the second would have more profound theological significances (as is taken up in the Letter to the Hebrews). It is more likely that Mark intended the first, outermost curtain.

The temple of Jerusalem and the temple of Christ's body are intimately linked. The one prefigured the second, and so they both are broken together. The tearing also mirrors God in Genesis when he divided the air (heavens) and water, the fundamental elements of creation. It also reflects Christ's baptism where the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended upon Christ.

15:39: The Centurion was probably a gentile. His reaction is to the final cry and death of Christ, not to the tearing of the curtain (since he would not have been able to see the curtain in the temple from Calvary). The classical world associated celestial events with divine and royal portents. These events would indicate that something profound and world spanning had happened. The centurion would also have witnessed many crucifixions and would have overseen all the events of this crucifixion. As such he was prepared to read the signs of these events. He did not see this final cry as one of defeat (as a coarse reading of Christ's citation of Psalm 22:1 would say), but instead saw in this death a manifestation of divine action.³⁸ And so he declared that Christ is the Son of God.

Now, it is hard to know what he meant by this declaration, since he would have had no issue as a gentile understanding Christ as *a* son of *a* god like many of the great classical heroes. This is the most direct answer. Mark probably means it as a profession of Christian faith, that Christ is *the* Son of God. However, Mark omits the article (specifying neither a definite nor indefinite article) which leaves it open to both options. This ambiguity though highlights the reality of all believers. In our profession of true faith, our understanding of the faith does not exhaust the

³⁷ Cf. NICNT 547.

³⁸ Cf. NICNT 575–576.

The Crucifixion and Death of the Messiah (15:21–47)

reality professed in it. The Centurion can express true faith that this was God's son while still awaiting a perfection of his understanding of the content of this profession.

For in his profession the Centurion read the fact of what just happened correctly. Christ had finished his Messianic mission, and now he was recognized as the Son of God. The content of his revelation as a suffering Messiah was completed, now all that waited was the revelation of the glorified Messiah in the resurrection.

But even further, the Messiah came to reconcile all to God, to bring a return of all humanity, just as Christ said in the Last Supper when speaking of his blood poured out for many. And so the mission to open the way of reconciliation with God to all has been accomplished as this gentile made this proclamation. From the moment of the fall to this moment the great arc of salvation has tended towards ushering humanity back into the single divine fold. Now this has been accomplished, now has history been fulfilled.

15:40: Turning from the Centurion we find another group, a group of women that have accompanied Christ. Who exactly they are, we do not know. Mary and Salome are estimated to be the name of half the women at this time in this region.³⁹ Nevertheless, it was common for family and friends to gather near and accompany those crucified.⁴⁰ That they were there in person, provided the eyewitness testimony that under pins the Christian claim that our religion is grounded in historical fact. These women saw with their own eyes these things and then reported it to the disciples and the Church more broadly.

That they are the ones that must have reported it to the *apostles* throws into stark relief the apostles cowardness. After making such bold claims of suffering with Christ, of receiving afflictions upon their bodies, where are they now? Instead it was these women that have suffered with Christ. They may have even offered him wine the two times earlier. They were there.

15:41: These women had ministered to Christ in Galilee and in their presence, they continued their ministry to him and provided for his need. They satisfied Christ's need to pour out his salvation, for their to be someone to receive his love. They were there to actively receive his great gift. The apostles in their high station had been so focus on the proper administration of their office, that they forgot how to receive from Christ. In there strength they had fled, but these women in their meekness stood strong.

THE BURIAL OF THE CHRIST (15:42–47)

⁴² When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the

³⁹ Cf. AYB 1059–1060.

⁴⁰ Cf. NICNT 576.

The Burial of the Christ (15:42–47)

centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time.⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.⁴⁶ Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

15:42: Mark clearly notes that it is Friday. We are now approaching evening which means that Christ died a bit after three o'clock. This means that Joseph probably approached Pilate around four o'clock. The Sabbath would then begin around six o'clock.⁴¹ Christ will have been buried within twenty-four hours of his last meal. Around this time yesterday his disciples were preparing for the last supper meal. Less than twenty-four hours ago they had entered the garden. Around twelve hours ago the trial before the Sanhedrin had finished. And around twelve hours after the trial before Pilate Christ is buried.

Joseph pushed through this marathon of a day because by Jewish law bodies could not be left on a tree over night, this also applied to crucifixions.⁴² Further the preparations for a burial were considered work, and so he has to complete this before sunset.

15:43: Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin and a wealthy upstanding member of Jewish society. This placed him as a member of the very group that condemned Christ to death. He was not publicly seen as a follower of Christ. Mark himself does not designate him a disciple, but simply notes that he was awaiting the *Kingdom of God*. Just as the scribe too was close to the kingdom but not a disciple,⁴³ so also Joseph had a proper expectation for the arrival of the Messiah. This is what motivated his actions.

But was this a new understanding of Christ? Was he always awaiting the kingdom, or have these past hours changed his heart? Since he was part of the Sanhedrin he very well may have been at the council in the night. Mark says *all* voted to condemn Christ. Joseph may have been one of them. Or Mark may have exaggerated for rhetorical force in saying all, and so he had not voted against Christ. Or maybe, since more members arrived throughout the night, Joseph simply was not there either for the vote or at all. Either way we now see him seeking to pay due honor and respect to the Lord. As the women had ministered to Christ in life, so did Joseph now minister to him in death.

His request of Pilate was out of place. By Roman law, those condemned to death forfeited all rights, including the right to a proper burial. One could request permission to bury someone executed, but it was only by the clemency of the local magistrate that the release of the body was granted. This was granted regularly enough to family members; unless the condemned was guilty of high treason.⁴⁴ Joseph's boldness was that Christ was condemned for high treason, and he was

⁴¹ Cf. SP 453.

⁴² Cf. Dt 21:22–23.

⁴³ Cf. Mk 12:34.

⁴⁴ Cf. NICNT 577–578.

not family of Christ. By no accounts of legal precedent should Pilate have released the body to Joseph.⁴⁵ Even further Joseph was putting his entire reputation on the line in doing this. But it is likely that it was exactly because of his reputation as a respected member of the Sanhedrin and that he was not a (public) disciple of Christ, that Pilate releases the body to him.⁴⁶ In doing so Pilate then did not have to worry about the disciples seeking out the body, a member of the Sanhedrin surely would not permit them access.

15:44: Pilate was naturally amazed at the news that Christ was already dead. It normally took longer than six hours to die from crucifixion, and Christ was presumably a fit man when we arrived that morning. Pilate summoned the centurion that over saw the crucifixion to confirm Christ's death. Pilate specifically asked if Christ, "had been dead for some time," since it would be a normal occurrence for people to enter a comatose state on the cross and die some time later. Pilate wanted to make sure Christ was truly dead.

15:45: Once the centurion confirmed that he was in fact dead, then Pilate released the body. Here Mark says that Pilate released the body (πῶμα) which more literally means corps. There was not doubt about Christ's death. In doing so Pilate granted (δωρέομαι) the body to Joseph, which indicates that he was doing this as a favor to him.⁴⁷ On one hand there was the magisterial favor of clemency in releasing the body, but on the other, there was also the favor of releasing it in such irregular circumstances. That Pilate released the body at all adds credence to the idea that Pilate was not convinced by the charges brought against Christ.⁴⁸

15:46: Through out the burial Mark only explicitly says that Joseph was acting. In reality it would have been impossible to do all these actions alone, let alone in as little time as he had. It is probably that his servants did most of the work both to get everything done in time and so he can maintain ritual purity. The linen cloth was probably a broad sheet which they wrapped the body in and then tied tight. Such a piece of cloth was expensive and shows Joseph's wealth. The process was done hastily and does not have the customary anointing of the body with fragrant oils.⁴⁹ Mark also does not mention the washing of the body. This rite though was so essential to the Jewish funerary rite it is quite unlikely that Christ's body was not washed before being wrapped in linen (particularly given the bloodied state of the body).⁵⁰

Christ's body was then placed in a recently hewed tomb. These tombs were normally designed for a family and so had many niches. Christ would have been placed in one of these.⁵¹ This would also explain why the women, when they returned to anoint Christ, had to look for his niche. They had remained outside and just saw into which tomb he was placed, but not which niche

⁴⁵ Cf. NICNT 579.

⁴⁶ Cf. SP 454.

⁴⁷ Cf. SP 454.

⁴⁸ Cf. NICNT 579.

⁴⁹ Cf. CCSS 325.

⁵⁰ Cf. NICNT 580.

⁵¹ Cf. NIGTC 668–669.

The Burial of the Christ (15:42–47)

in the tomb. Then a large stone was rolled over the entrance. The stone protects the body from desecration, particularly by animals. Most tombs around Jerusalem had square or rectangular stones. Only a few had round stones. Given Joseph's apparent standing, it is reasonable that he had a more *advanced* round stone for this tomb.⁵²

15:47: Once more we have eyewitnesses to these events, and both of whom were also at the crucifixion. They have now witnessed Christ's crucifixion, death, and burial. They also bear witness to the location of Christ's burial. As a result they can come on Sunday to finish the proper burial ritual of anointing. It is striking though that the key chain of eyewitnesses to these most central events are women. There may have been a few men (like Joseph) that have witnessed all these things, yet Mark names these women. This is notable because women could not give legal testimony in Jewish courts.⁵³ The prominence of these women in the chain of testimony to these events shows a shift in Christianity, and the reconciliation of the sexes just as the centurion shows the reconciliation of the gentiles. The fundamental rupture of our original fall was between the sexes. The first fruits of Christ's universal recreation have already blossomed in the expectation of the coming springtime of the resurrection.

⁵² Cf. AYB 1072.

⁵³ Cf. Mishnah, *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1:8.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE MESSIAH (16:1–20)

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST (16:1–8)

16 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

THE SHORTER ENDING OF MARK

And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

JESUS APPEARS TO MARY MAGDALENE (16:9–11)

⁹ Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰ She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

JESUS APPEARS TO TWO DISCIPLES (16:12–13)

¹² After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

JESUS COMMISSIONS THE DISCIPLES (16:14–18)

¹⁴ Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. ¹⁶ The one who believes and is baptized will

The Ascension of Jesus (16:19–20)

be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS (16:19–20)

¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

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