

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

The Passion of the Christ

Context. There is much that occurs between the entry gospel on Palm Sunday and the gospel proclaimed during the Mass. If one wanted to give a moniker to what falls between it may be best described as a “conflict between the kingdoms.” The passages (11:12 – 13:37) between include:

- Arguments surrounding the authority of Jesus, taxes to Caesar, the Resurrection, the greatest commandment, and the nature of the Messiah
- The parable of the vineyard and the widow's mite
- The Markan discourse of the things to come and the end time.

The readings on “Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion” move from the triumphal entry (Mark 11:1-11) directly into the lair of Jesus' antagonists – the “*chief priests and scribes.*” (Mark 14:1)

The Conspiracy Against Jesus

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to take place in two days' time. So the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to arrest him by treachery and put him to death. They said, “Not during the festival, for fear that there may be a riot among the people.” (Mark 14:1-2)

At this point in the narrative Jesus' reputation is well known to Jerusalem authorities who were not only responsible for ensuring orthodox practice and beliefs, they were also responsible to the Roman authorities that the religious practices of Judaism were not the cauldron of resistance against the rule of Rome. There was already a history of would-be Messiahs coming to Jerusalem at Passover with a resulting response from the many pilgrims who came to the Holy City. The response ranged from unrest, to riot, to outright revolt.

Within and among the disciples Jesus has already predicted his death and persecution three times. Those words moved closer to realization as the leaders actively plot to put Jesus to death. None of this should come as a surprise. Jesus was quite clear:

They were on the way, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went ahead of them. They were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, he began to tell them what was going to happen to him. “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and put him to death, but after three days he will rise.” (Mark 10:32-34)

Mark gives us a point of reference for time: “*The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to take place in two days' time.*” There are some scholars who speculate that since so many things have happened since Jesus entered the Holy City in Mark 11:11, that perhaps Jesus has been in and around the city for weeks. Be that as it may, we now have a time marker. Not necessarily a perfectly clear marker, but one nonetheless. William Lane [The Gospel of Mark, 489-90] offers:

In this context “the Passover” designates the festival of redemption celebrated on the 14th of the month Nisan (April/May) and continuing into the early hours of the 15th (between sunset and midnight; cf. Exod. 12:6–20, 48; Num. 9:2–14; Deut. 16:1). This was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 15th–21st days of the month (Exod. 12:15–20; 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:1–8). In popular usage the two festivals were merged and treated for practical purposes as the seven-day “feast of the Passover.” The distinction between the two phases of the feast found in verse 1 is rarely attested in first-century Jewish sources but reflects OT practice (Lev. 23:3f.; Num. 28:16f.; 2 Chron. 35:1, 17; Ezra

6:19–22). Since the day on which the paschal lambs were sacrificed (the 14th of Nisan) was sometimes loosely designated “the first day of Unleavened Bread,” it is difficult to determine whether the two days should be reckoned from the 15th or the 14th of Nisan. It is probable that the combined phrase indicates the 15th of Nisan, and that the reference here is to some time on the 13th of that month.

Whatever the case, Mark’s assertion that the preparations for the meal were made on the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread is inaccurate. The Preparation Day does not belong to the feast. The simplest solution is to assume that Mark considers days to begin in the morning, rather than in the evening, as was the Roman custom. Hence the preparations during the day and the Passover meal eaten in the evening belong to the same day. However, the hasty burial of Jesus on the afternoon of the crucifixion indicates that Mark does know that the sabbath begins at sundown. The confusion concerning when the feast began may have been heightened by Mark’s use of the same Greek word (*pascha*) to describe the festival, the slaughtering of the lamb, and the meal that followed. Mark’s references to the *pascha* (vv. 12, 14, 16), however, all refer to the sacrifice or the meal. He reflects the confused usage typical of the first century but primarily thinks of the feast as Passover. [PHEME PERKINS, *The Gospel of Mark*, 697]

The Anointing at Bethany

³ *When he was in Bethany reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head.* ⁴ *There were some who were indignant. “Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than three hundred days’ wages and the money given to the poor.” They were infuriated with her.* ⁶ *Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me.* ⁷ *The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them, but you will not always have me.* ⁸ *She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial.* ⁹ *Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”*

Once Jesus entered the city on “Palm Sunday” it seems Jesus spent nights among unnamed friends in Bethany (cf. Mk 11:11). On this particular evening it was at the house of Simon the leper, a name given only in Mark and Matthew. The Gospel of John 12:1–8 suggests that this was the home of Eliezer (of which ‘Lazarus’ is the shortened Aramaic form), Miriam (‘Mary’) and Martha. Some speculate that it is a reference to a former owner of the house, giving his name to the building even when it passed to subsequent owners. In any case, it is there at meal that Jesus encounters a nameless woman whose gesture reveals that Jesus’ followers still do not grasp the necessity of his passion and death.

There are often attempts to equate the description of the anointing of Jesus in Mark (Mt 26:6-13) with that in Luke 7:36-50 and John 12:1-8. All four have a setting in a house for a meal, a woman, and expensive perfume poured on Jesus, to which someone objects. All except Luke identify Bethany. Matthew and Mark identify the location as the home of Simon the Leper; John does not offer a definitive host or house; Luke says the house of a Pharisee named Simon. John identifies Mary of Bethany, Luke offers only that she is a sinner, which has usually been taken to mean a prostitute. Matthew and Mark just say “a woman”. The oil is poured over the head according to Mark and Matthew; over the feet according to John and Luke with wiping with her hair mentioned in both the latter two accounts. Matthew, Mark and John record very similar words from Jesus about always having the poor with you and the purpose of the action being preparation for burial. These last elements are not in Luke, who instead records comments on hospitality and forgiveness of sins that are not in the other accounts. And what does this all mean? Trying to harmonize the gospels is a sure path to lose the big picture: what is the meaning of the anointing - she is preparing Jesus for death.

Others do not see the end coming and if the ministry is to continue, then the action seems pointless: *There were some who were indignant. "Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than three hundred days' wages and the money given to the poor."* They were infuriated with her. (Mk 14:4-5)

What they miss is that the woman's actions are prophetic and are well aligned with Jesus' own words. The anointing with the expensive oil could have been done with a few drops. Breaking and pouring out the entire vial stands in stark contrast to the cheapness of Jesus' life in the eyes of those who seek to destroy him.

While there is tradition in anointing the head of Kings, Jesus makes clear that the woman's intentions points not to messianic kingship but to Jesus' death. And perhaps there is more at play. As PHEME PERKINS [698] points out, "Her gesture of emptying out the entire contents of a very valuable vial of ointment might also be compared with that of the widow at the Temple treasury (12:41–44). The willingness of both women to give all of what they have raises doubts about the behavior of the others." The disciples have failed to understand Jesus' words about his death. But now a woman has recognized the truth without such instruction. She will be remembered wherever the gospel is preached (14:9) – and the gospel will be preached everywhere.

Perkins [699] goes on to note: "The tension between those at the table with Jesus, who only see wasted ointment, and the woman's acknowledgment that Jesus is "the anointed" reminds us of the mystery of faith. Those at table with Jesus are so irritated by the woman's behavior that they do not even consider the honor that she is giving Jesus. Instead, they attempt to frame the woman as someone who wastes what is valuable rather than contributing the same amount to help the poor. Perhaps, that false religious excuse masks embarrassment over failure to treat Jesus with the respect he deserves, as a related story in Luke 7:36–50 suggests. Jesus points out that the Law (Deut 15:11) makes everyone responsible for helping the poor. If the poor are in desperate need, then this woman's failure to donate the cost of the ointment is neither the cause nor the cure. Jesus is not impressed by the false piety expressed in their excuses. This story raises in haunting fashion a question that perennially faces both individual believers and Christian congregations: How do we—by our actions and our disposal of resources—show honor to Jesus?"

Sources

PHEME PERKINS, *The Gospel of Mark*, vol. 8 of *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1994) 8:698-99

The New American Bible available on-line at <http://www.usccb.org/bible>

The Betrayal by Judas

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went off to the chief priests to hand him over to them. ¹¹ When they heard him they were pleased and promised to pay him money. Then he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

Mark inserts the beginning of the betrayal into the narrative. It draws a sharp contrast between the selfless devotion of the woman and the treachery planned by the one who was supposedly a friend, confidant, and disciple. Mark tells us the "what" of the betrayal but not necessarily the "why." We know that the chief priest and scribes were seeking "a way to arrest him by treachery and put him to death." (Mk 14:1) But they needed a strategy that would avoid a public scene and the possibility of a riot. The offer from Judas was an opportunity to avoid a public disturbance (or even riot)

But what was Judas' motivation for the betrayal? It is impossible to establish from the narrative what might have led to Judas's action, since Mark never provides an explanation for the treachery. Scholars have advanced theories based on a number of motivations: avarice (*cf.* John 12:5), a messianic

expectation that was highly political leading to the overthrow of the Romans, and even a growing hostility that he was not part of the inner circle (Peter, John, and James?). In the end they are just that: theories.

We do know that Judas chose to remove himself from the family. Jesus has defined his followers as a new family that will be devoted to doing the will of God (3:31–35). The apocalyptic discourse, however, warns disciples that they might be turned in by “brothers, parents, or children” (13:12). Judas’s action exemplifies such behavior. From this point on, the story refers to him only as “the betrayer.”

Sources

William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974) 495-96

PHEME PERKINS, *The Gospel of Mark*, vol. 8 of *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1994) 8:700

The New American Bible available on-line at <http://www.usccb.org/bible>

Preparations for the Passover

¹² *On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?”* ¹³ *He sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. ¹⁴ Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, “Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’”* ¹⁵ *Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there.”* ¹⁶ *The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.*

Mark’s description of the timing of the events is not clear. This chapter of the Gospel opens with a precise designation of time, two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread (v. 1). The next series of events is introduced as occurring on “*the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb.*” (v. 12). These references cause some confusion. Mark presumably intends “Unleavened Bread” as an alternative designation for Passover (cf. Luke 22:1; 2 Chr 35:17). Or Mark may have followed the older tradition in which “Unleavened Bread” was the designation for the seven-day period following the celebration of the Passover meal on 15 Nisan, during which nothing made with leaven could be eaten (Exod 12:8–20). In either case, Mark’s assertion that the preparations for the meal were made on the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread is inaccurate.

Are there indications in the text that what Mark intends to describe is the Passover Meal? William Lane [*Gospel of Mark*, 498; note “M.” indicates *Mishna*] offers:

“There are a number of positive elements in the Marcan narrative which substantiate that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. The return to Jerusalem in the evening for the meal (Ch. 14:17) is significant, for the paschal meal had to be eaten within the city walls (M. Pesachim VII. 9). An ordinary meal was taken in the late afternoon, but a meal which begins in the evening and continues into the night reflects Passover practice (Exod. 12:8; Jubilees 49:12). The reference to reclining (Ch. 14:18) satisfies a requirement of the Passover feast in the first century when custom demanded that even the poorest man recline for the festive meal (M. Pesachim X.1). While a normal meal began with the breaking of bread, on this occasion Jesus broke the bread during the meal and following the serving of a dish (Ch. 14:18–20, 22). The Passover meal was the one occasion when the serving of a dish preceded the breaking of bread. The use of wine was generally reserved for festive occasions and was characteristic of the Passover (M. Pesachim X.1). Finally, the interpretation of the elements of the meal conforms to Passover custom where the haggadah

(or interpretation) is an integral part of the meal. The cumulative evidence supports the claim made in verses 12, 14 and 16 that the disciples prepared a Passover meal and that the external forms of the Passover were observed at the meal itself.”

The episode of the preparation of the paschal meal is parallel in structure to Mark 11:1–7. The commissioning of two disciples for the performance of a task, the precise knowledge of what they would encounter, and the exact response to be given to the responsible party are features familiar from the earlier account. The two incidents are entirely independent but they have been described according to a common scheme.

Clearly, as with the colt, Jesus' instructions indicate that the divine Hand is directing the events. What is often overlooked is the moniker “Teacher” and “disciples.” From what we know of 1st century Passover celebrations (and that is from a late 2nd century Jewish document (*Mishna*)), the celebration was primarily between family members. Jesus will celebrate as a teacher. Given the disciples were all observant Jews, it is not too far a stretch to imagine that Jesus intends to teach something new associated with this Passover observance.

There is one odd element to the pericope: “*a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water.*” Ordinarily only women would carry the water jar; a man might carry a wineskin. Perhaps it is nothing, or perhaps it is a prearranged signal. Since the authorities are looking to arrest Jesus, this might be resorting to a means of recognition which would require no exchange of words in the street. Along this same line of thought, the person providing the room might also want to limit the knowledge that the Galilean preacher would celebrate Passover in his upper room.

Sources

William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974) 597-99

PHEME PERKINS, *The Gospel of Mark*, vol. 8 of *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1994) 8:701

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The Betrayal Announced

¹⁷ *When it was evening, he came with the Twelve.* ¹⁸ *And as they reclined at table and were eating, Jesus said, “Amen, I say to 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 by one, “Surely it is not I?”* ²⁰ *He said to them, “One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish.* ²¹ *For the Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.”*

Unlike the Gospel of John where light and dark have symbolic meaning, here “*it was evening*” sets the stage for the Passover celebration. The Passover meal, which in distinction from ordinary meals began only after sunset and could last until midnight, had to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem. Jesus therefore returned to the city after sundown, with the Twelve, to share the paschal feast commemorating God's deliverance of his people from bondage. The celebration of the Passover was always marked by excitement and the high hope that it would be fulfilled by God's intervention once more. It was observed as “*a night of watching unto the Lord*” (Exod. 12:42) in the conviction that in that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed in the future. Jesus came to the city fully aware that he was to accomplish the Passover in his own person.

William Lane [501-2] provides a description of the Passover prayers which provides a much needed context for what will unfold in vv.17-26

The meal was framed within a liturgy whose core was the Passover prayer of the family head and the recitation of the Hallel psalms (Ps. 113–118). When those participating had taken their places, the head of the house began the celebration by pronouncing a blessing, first of the festival and then of the wine (*M. Pesachim X. 2*).⁴¹ Then the paschal company drank the first cup of wine. After this the food was brought in, consisting of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, greens, stewed fruit and roast lamb (*M. Pesachim X. 3*). The son then asked why this night, with its special customs and food, was distinguished from all other nights (*M. Pesachim X. 4*). The family head responded by recalling the biblical account of the redemption from Egypt. This instruction led naturally into the praise of God for the salvation he had provided and the anticipation of future redemption: “So may the Lord, our God, and the God of our fathers, cause us to enjoy the feasts that come in peace, glad of heart at the upbuilding of your city and rejoicing in your service ... and we shall thank you with a new song for our redemption” (*M. Pesachim X. 4–6*). The new song was the first part of the ancient Hallel (Ps. 113–115), after which a second cup of wine was drunk. Then the head of the house took bread and pronounced over it the blessing of “the Lord our God, Sovereign of the world, who has caused bread to come forth out of the earth” (*M. Berachoth VI. 1*). He then broke the bread in pieces and handed it to those who were at the table, who ate it with the bitter herbs and stewed fruit. Only then did the meal really begin with the eating of the roasted lamb, and this was not to extend beyond midnight (*M. Pesachim X. 9*). When the meal had been completed, the head of the family blessed the third cup with a prayer of thanksgiving. There followed the singing of the second part of the Hallel (Ps. 116–118) and the drinking of the fourth cup, which concluded the Passover (*M. Pesachim X. 7*).

Mark concentrates the reader’s attention upon two incidents which marked the meal: the moment of the dipping of the bread and the bitter herbs in the bowl of stewed fruit when Jesus spoke of his betrayal (vv.18–21), and the interpretation of the bread and the third cup of wine following the meal itself (vv.22–25). The celebration of the meal takes a rapid turn when Jesus solemnly proclaims “*Amen*” announcing that one of those sharing the intimacy of the table-fellowship will betray him. The explanatory words “*one who is eating with me*” set the pronouncement in the context of Ps. 41:9, where the poor but righteous sufferer laments that his intimate friend whom he trusted and who ate his bread had “lifted his heel” against him.

The “woe” pronounced against the betrayer (*see Notes below*) is a lament. There is no condemnation; there is no vindictiveness in the pronouncement. There is a recognition that the approaching death of the Son of Man is in harmony with Scripture serves to set the result of Judas’ treachery within the context of God’s design. The heinousness of Judas’ action, however, is not excused. While the Son of Man goes to his death in accordance with the divine plan, on the other hand it were better for his betrayer had he never been born. The purpose of Jesus’ poignant warning is not primarily to affirm the fate of Judas but to underscore his own assurance of vindication. Nevertheless, the betrayer is morally responsible for his action and for the horrible character of its consequences, both for Jesus and for himself.

Again William Lane [504] has a good insight to the scene – which also carries a warning for us not to conflate Gospel accounts, but rather to let each gospel stand alone that the sacred author’s intent may be better understood”

“It is remarkable that Judas is not mentioned by name in the account. He is not introduced as one who asked “is it I?” nor is he identified as the betrayer by Jesus (cf. Matt. 26:25), and there is no reference to the fact that he left the room before the interpretation of the significance of the meal (cf. John 13:26–30). In Mark the stress falls rather upon the violation of the paschal fellowship by the presence of a traitor who must bear the onus of responsibility for his act, and upon Jesus’ knowledge that he will be betrayed by one of the Twelve and that his death is certain.”

Notes

Mark 14:21 woe: In the modern American hearing, “woe” is often taken as a condemnation – it is the evangelical, hell-fire preaching that has conditioned us to understand it as such. The word *ouai* is used as an interjection expressing pain, lament, and sorrow [EDNT 5:540]. When Jesus says, “*but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.*” It is best understood as a lament rather than condemning the betrayer.

Sources

Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 5:540

William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974) 500-4

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The Lord's Supper

²² *While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body.”* ²³ *Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.* ²⁴ *He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.”* ²⁵ *Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.* ²⁶ *Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

The actions and words of Jesus are expressed within the framework of the Passover meal but also point to and indicate a transition to a new covenant that is sealed in the shedding of blood – as are all covenants (cf. Ex 24:1-8; Heb 9:19-21; 10:9-30). But as Jesus has been predicting, he will be the sacrificial offering and it will be his blood that will be shed as part of his passion and death. There are strong allusions to the rite described in Exodus 24:4-8 and thus indicates the new community that the sacrifice of Jesus will bring into being (Matthew 26:26–28; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25).

The Passover liturgy was normally conducted by the head of the household. In this setting, Jesus has already been labeled as “Teacher” (v.14) with his disciples for the celebration of the Passover. One wonders what will be taught. The role of the leader of the Passover was to give an interpretation of detailed elements in the meal that were a fixed part of the Passover liturgy. This occurred after the meal had been served but before it was eaten.

Each of the elements of the meal was introduced in the context of Israel's experience in bondage. The bitter herbs served to recall the bitterness of slavery, the stewed fruit, which possessed the consistency and color of clay, evoked the making of bricks as slaves, while the paschal lamb provided a reminder of God's gracious “passing over” of Israel in the plague of death that came to Egypt. While the wording of Jesus' paschal devotions has not been preserved, it is evident that the disciples were prepared for understanding the significance of the words of institution preserved in verses 22–24 by the manner in which Jesus interpreted the components of the meal.

When explaining the element of bread, Jesus would have lifted the platter of unleavened bread explaining: “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let everyone who hungers come and eat; let everyone who is needy come and eat the Passover meal.” But explaining the element of bread is not necessarily the same as blessing the bread. The blessing of God for the gift of bread immediately preceded the meal itself: “Praised be Thou, O Lord, Sovereign of the world, who causes bread to come forth from the earth” (*M. Berachoth VI. 1*). Those present identified themselves with the blessing by saying “Amen.” The family-head then broke for each person present a piece and gave it to him, the bread passing from hand to hand until it reached all the guests. The distribution normally took place in silence,

for the explanation of the elements belonging to the Passover devotions, not to the grace before the meal. Contrary to paschal custom, Jesus broke the silence by interpreting the significance of the bread in terms of his own person: *“Take it; this is my body.”* (v.22) The brief formula associated with the bread looks back to the betrayer’s dipping his bread in the common dish. The gesture of handing the bread/body to the disciples may be an invitation to participate in Jesus’ suffering (8:34).

Many have noted that it is interesting that Jesus does not interpret the significance of the lamb in terms of his own person. But then again, “Lamb of God” is a Johannine feature, but still the Passover lamb being slaughtered and Jesus’ being crucified would not be a compassion easily missed. Many have also pointed out that what we know about the Passover celebration and what St. Paul mentions in 1 Cor 11:25 is that the cup of wine was “after supper.” In effect what we have is the primary element of Catholic Eucharist as bookends to the Passover meal and yet framing the narrative of Israel’s freedom from the bondage of slavery.

Jesus’ word about the cup looks away from the betrayal to the divine necessity that brings him to make this sacrifice. The association between wine and the blood of a covenant sacrifice shed for the people (Exod 24:8; Zech 9:11) makes the symbolism of the cup more significant than that of the bread as the soteriological significance of the Eucharist is bound to the words associated with the cup: ²³ *Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.* ²⁴ *He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.* It is in the pouring of the blood that the covenant is formed – and that is clearly done via the body of Jesus shown in the bread. Yet it is the blood of Jesus, shed in death, that is the foundation of the new covenant between God and humanity.

The cup symbolism takes on a further eschatological meaning by anticipating the wine of the banquet that Jesus will celebrate with his followers in the kingdom of God (v. 25; cf. Isa 25:6–8; 55:1–2; 65:13–14). Like the earlier resurrection and parousia predictions, this notice reminds the reader that the death of Jesus is not the end of the story. Jesus’ sacrificial death is part of the divine plan that brings the kingdom into existence. This celebration anticipates the meal that will take place when the messianic king and priest come to establish God’s rule over the elect. *Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.*” Although the Christian meal looks forward to the heavenly banquet with the Lord, it remains focused on the sacrificial death of Jesus. Paul tells the Corinthians that the celebration, *“proclaim the death of the until he comes”* (1 Cor 11:26).

Notes

Mark 14:22 *took...blessing...broke...gave*: This is the same sequence in the feeding of the multitudes (6:41). Mark is identical to the other synoptic gospels save one respect. Where Mark and Matthew use *eulogeo* (bless), Luke uses *eucharisteo* (give thanks). Luke’s narrative is closer to the Pauline description in 1 Cor 11:24 than is Mark’s account.

Mark 14:23 *this is my body...this is my blood*: It is beyond the scope of this commentary to begin to unpack (and debate) the meaning of the words on a sacramental basis – that is for other studies. The historical reconstruction of Mark alone is complex enough without trying to harmonize the other traditions – while similar are certainly not exact: Consider – (*placed in likely chronological order from oldest on*)

- **1 Corinthians 11:** ²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, **took bread**, ²⁴ and, after he had **given thanks, broke** it and said, “This is MY BODY that is for you. *Do this in remembrance of me.*” ²⁵ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in MY BLOOD. *Do this*, as often as you drink it, *in remembrance of me.*” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, *you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.*

- **Mark 14:** ²² While they were eating, he **took bread**, said the **blessing**, **broke** it, and **gave** it to them, and said, “Take it; this is MY BODY.” ²³ Then he **took a cup**, **gave** thanks, and **gave** it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, “This is MY BLOOD of the covenant, which will be shed for many.
- **Matthew 26** ²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus **took bread**, said the blessing, **broke** it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is MY BODY.” ²⁷ Then he **took a cup**, gave thanks, and **gave** it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is MY BLOOD of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.
- **Luke 22:** ¹⁷ Then he **took a cup**, **gave** thanks, and said, “**Take** this and **share** it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you (that) from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ Then he **took the bread**, **said the blessing**, **broke** it, and **gave** it to them, saying, “This is MY BODY, which will be given for you; *do this in memory of me.*” ²⁰ And likewise the **cup** after they had eaten, saying, “This **cup** is the new covenant in MY BLOOD, which will be shed for you.
- **John 13:1-30** - The above "words of institution" are not narrated in John, but replaced with the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. Yet the setting is clearly Jesus' last meal before his death, as mentioned in vv. 4, 12, and 26-30. The "Eucharistic teaching" of John's Gospel is found earlier, at the end of the "Bread of Life Discourse" (6:22-59; see below)

The text above (NAB translation) highlight the common “took, blessed, broke, gave” language, emphasizes with all caps the common reference to MY BODY and MY BLOOD, while also noting the similar “bread” and “cup” – even though there is variations in the Greek for these last two.

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The New American Bible available on-line at <http://www.usccb.org/bible>

Peter's Denial Foretold

²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will have your faith shaken, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be dispersed.’” ²⁸ But after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.” ²⁹ Peter said to him, “Even though all should have their faith shaken, mine will not be.” ³⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times.” ³¹ But he vehemently replied, “Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all spoke similarly.

The meal concludes with a hymn before Jesus and the disciples leave for the Mount of Olives. As they depart, Jesus warns the disciples that they will desert him (v. 27). Like the prediction about betrayal, this warning takes the form of a citation from Scripture (Zech 13:7). In this OT passage, God commands that the shepherd be struck down that the sheep may be scattered as an integral part of a refining process which will result in the creation of a new people of God. This action is associated with the opening of a fountain for the cleansing of sin on behalf of “the house of David and Jerusalem” (Zech. 13:1).

Desertion is not the last word, however, as Jesus immediately promises to “go before” the disciples to Galilee after his resurrection (v. 28). The verb used for “go before” (*proagō*) is the same word Jesus uses as part of the prediction of his passion as he goes before them to Jerusalem (10:32). Even in the midst of this dire prediction of desertion, it clear that restoration of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples

is intended. The fear that takes hold of them during the passion will be overcome. Once again, the events surrounding the crucifixion are not the last word.

Peter boldly insists that even if everyone else deserts Jesus, he will not. He almost gets this part right. Peter will not run away with the others in Gethsemane, but his attempt to follow Jesus will lead to something worse: denial that he even knows Jesus (v. 30). When Jesus predicts Peter's denial (v. 30), Peter again protests, this time insisting that he will die with Jesus rather than deny him (v. 31). The other disciples agree. But Jesus knows what will come to pass.

As PHEME PERKINS points out, the apostles did speak some truth. In the end all but John die a martyr's death. In the end they did not abandon Jesus. They did not deny him.

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The Agony in the Garden

³² Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. ³⁴ Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." ³⁵ He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; ³⁶ he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." ³⁷ When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." ³⁹ Withdrawing again, he prayed, saying the same thing. ⁴⁰ Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open and did not know what to answer him. ⁴¹ He returned a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Mark's account of Jesus' agony in the garden consists of two scenes. In the first (vv. 33–36), Mark's readers witness Jesus' profound humanity, as he is overwhelmed by fear and sadness at the prospect of his imminent death (i.e., the cup of v. 36). They also recognize in his final acceptance of his Father's will the ultimate act of his loving humanity, i.e., his choice to give up his life for the Father and for all people.

The second scene (vv. 37–42) focuses the readers' attention on the disciples who fall asleep as Jesus struggles in prayer. Mark hopes that his readers will face life and choose to be human like Jesus, not like the disciples. The profundity of Jesus' choice to take the cup can be grasped, ironically, only by certain readers of Mark's Gospel — that is, only those who have come as close to despair as Jesus did in the garden can really identify with him. Mark hopes that Jesus will be for them a realistic (truly human) model of trust and love in their painful "hour" (v. 41) of Christian and human life.

Scene One

The Eucharistic account of the Last Supper has made clear that the Kingdom will be established, not by the warrior king messiah, but by the blood of the covenant. From the upper room, Jesus and his disciples move to the "place called Gethsemane."

Separating himself from the other disciples, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him as he did when he restored Jairus's daughter to life (5:37) and at the transfiguration (9:2). Mark likely intends us to recall the latter scene, in which Moses and Elijah appear from heaven and the divine voice pronounces that Jesus is God's beloved Son, as they witness Jesus' prayer to his Father. Readers who remember the transfiguration know that God will not abandon Jesus but will exalt him to a position of heavenly glory greater than that of Elijah and Moses.

Jesus' outlook was clear – and expressed to his disciples – “*My soul is sorrowful even to death...*” (v.34) The unusually strong language indicates that Mark understood Gethsemane to be the critical moment in Jesus' life. It is here and now that the full meaning of his submission to the Father confronts him. Jesus had spoken repeatedly and in detail to the disciples about his passion; he had set his face toward Jerusalem with a resolve that flummoxed his disciples and made them afraid (10:32). The earlier reference to his baptism and his cup (10:38) implies an awareness of the cost of submission to the will of God. – and doubtless Jesus had seen other men crucified. Yet we will read that his demeanor moving forward is absolute calm. How are we then to understand his prayer in sorrow unto death? Is it an expression of fear before the coming physical suffering, pain, and death? Or is it something more chilling? William Lane [516] suggests that “It is rather the horror of the one who lives wholly for the Father at the prospect of the alienation from God which is entailed in the judgment upon sin which Jesus assumes.”

The imagery of Jesus praying echoes the psalm of lament by a righteous person suffering affliction: expression of deep sorrow (v. 34); acknowledgment of God's power to save (v. 36a); and acceptance of what comes from the hand of God (v. 36b). Typical of laments, which often include reference to abandonment by friends, the sleeping disciples effectively abandon Jesus in his suffering. But unlike many laments, which conclude with words of praise for God's deliverance, in this case both Jesus and Mark's readers know that God will not deliver Jesus by taking away the cup of suffering. The conclusion of the prayer—“Not what I will, but what you will” (v. 36b)—reminds readers that Jesus has been devoted to doing the will of God from the beginning. Those who belong to Jesus' new family must have a similar commitment to doing the will of God (3:35).

Scene Two

Jesus' instructions were simple, “*Remain here and keep watch.*” The failure of the three disciples to obey even these simple commands to stay awake and watch (v. 34) recalls the general warning at the end of the discourse on the end time: “*Keep awake!*” (13:37). These three disciples were privileged to participate in Jesus' cup (v.36) – yet when Jesus returns from prayer Jesus finds Peter, James and John asleep

Earlier in the narrative, Peter, James, and John play a particular role in scenes concerning the passion. Peter has denied Jesus' prediction about the passion (8:31–33), a denial followed by Jesus' teaching on discipleship as taking up one's cross (8:34–38). On the way to the Mount of Olives, Peter again denies another prediction by insisting that he will never desert Jesus, even if the others do (14:29), prompting Jesus to reply that Peter will deny him three times that very night. James and John have requested the highest places of honor when Jesus comes into his kingdom (10:37). Jesus' warning that they will indeed “share the cup” that he is about to drink (10:39) again evokes an image of suffering. When the rest of the disciples become indignant, Jesus reminds them that the Son of Man came as a suffering servant to give his life as ransom “for many” (10:45; in the eucharistic formula, Jesus announces that his blood is poured out “for many”). Now, by being brought close enough to witness how Jesus prays, the three disciples have the opportunity to participate in Jesus' “cup.” Instead, despite their earlier boasting, they fall asleep and fail to watch with Jesus—not just once, but three times (vv. 37, 40, 41). This scene is a stunning portrayal of the failure of Jesus' most prominent disciples to understand his suffering and glory.

After praying, Jesus finds the disciples sleeping. He rebukes Peter for not being strong enough to stay awake even for an hour (v. 37). Peter's boast that he would even die with Jesus (v. 31) suddenly seems very distant. Jesus commands all three disciples (v. 38 uses the plural “you”) to pray lest they enter into

the “*the test*” (*peirasmos*), recalling the account of Jesus’ testing by Satan (1:13), which used the corresponding verb. The exhortation also parallels the final petition of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:13; Luke 11:4).⁶¹² Hebrews 5:7–10 indicates that there was an early Christian tradition of Jesus’ struggle to accept the Father’s will. But, they do not pray.

Earlier in the narrative, Jesus’ disciples were unable to cast out a demon, which required prayer (9:29). Now they again fail to pray. Jesus goes to pray for the third time without waking the disciples (vv. 39–40), rousing them from sleep only when the betrayer arrives. Their separation from Jesus is evident when they have nothing to say in reply to him (vv. 41–42). Jesus announces the hour of the passion, “*The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners.*” (14:41).

Notes

Mark 14:34 *my soul*: *estin psychē* can be translated as “I am” or “My soul.” In the Septuagint (LXX; Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) *psychē* is usually the translation of the Hebrew *nepeš*. It is the *nepeš* makes a person into a breathing and thus living being and “signifies that which is vital in man in the broadest sense” (Von Rad, *Theology* I, 153). It is simultaneously *vital power* and *life*, the *person* himself or herself, capable of feeling and emotion.

Mark 14:36 *Abba, Father*: an Aramaic term, here also translated by Mark, Jesus’ special way of addressing God with filial intimacy. The word *abba* seems not to have been used in earlier or contemporaneous Jewish sources to address God without some qualifier. Cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6 for other occurrences of the Aramaic word in the Greek New Testament.

***this cup*:** The reference to “this cup,” which in the light of 10:38 implies the specter of death and of God’s judgment that Jesus takes from the Father’s hand in fulfillment of his mission. The thought that the cup could be removed may have come from Isa. 51:17–23 where God, in a proclamation of salvation, summons Jerusalem to arouse from its drunken stupor and to recognize that “the cup of staggering” has been taken away. Yet Scripture also speaks of those who “did not deserve to drink the cup [but] must drink it” (Jer. 49:12). The tension between these alternate expressions of grace and judgment, respectively, seems to be reflected in Jesus’ prayer with its confession of God’s ability (“*all things are possible to you*”; cf. 10:27) and the firm resolve to submit to God’s sovereign will. The metaphor of the cup indicates that Jesus saw himself confronted, not by a cruel destiny, but by the judgment of God. [William Lane – 517]

***What I will...what you will*:** Some other translations substitute “want” for the NAB’s “will.” The Greek *thelō* supports both translations. Note the complete obedient surrender of the human will of Jesus to the divine will of the Father; cf. Jn 4:34; 8:29; Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8.

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The New American Bible available on-line at <http://www.usccb.org/bible>

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

⁴³ Then, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴ His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, "The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely." ⁴⁵ He came and immediately went over to him and said, "Rabbi." And he kissed him. ⁴⁶ At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷ One of the bystanders drew his sword, struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ Jesus said to them in reply, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs, to seize me? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me; but that the scriptures may be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ And they all left him and fled. ⁵¹ Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, ⁵² but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.

Passover was the one time in the year when the Roman governor came to Jerusalem. The ruling seat of provincial Roman rule was Cesaera Maritime on the cool Mediterranean coast. But Jerusalem was the place where sedition and revolution formed and fermented. The Roman political leaders as well as the Jewish religious leaders were well aware of these possibilities. Rome wanted peace. The Jewish leaders wanted to avoid another false messiah leading the people to ruin. Jesus of Nazareth would be problematic for both interest.

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to take place in two days' time. So the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to arrest him by treachery and put him to death. They said, "Not during the festival, for fear that there may be a riot among the people." (14:1-2)

Judas provided the means for their arrest by knowing where Jesus could be found away from the witness of the people

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went off to the chief priests to hand him over to them. ¹¹ When they heard him they were pleased and promised to pay him money. Then he looked for an opportunity to hand him over. (14:10-11)

Now that Jesus has made the decision to give himself up to his Father's will (v. 36), the other pieces of the passion account quickly fall into place. The warrant for Jesus' arrest had been issued by the Sanhedrin, implied by the comprehensive designation "*the chief priests, the scribes and the elders.*" That the Jewish authorities initiated the measures taken against Jesus is corroborated by the detail that he was taken directly to the house of the high priest (v.53). The leaders were accompanied by *a crowd* (v.43). Given the desire of secrecy and that the crowd was armed, these are not likely members of the general public. In addition to the Temple police, who were Levites, the Sanhedrin had at its disposal auxiliary police or servants of the court who were assigned the task of maintaining public order beyond the Temple precincts. They were authorized to make arrests, lead accused persons to the court, guard prisoners and carry out sentences imposed by the court. The arresting crowd in Gethsemane likely consisted of armed court attendants.

With all pieces in place, Judas begins the Passion with a kiss, the token of homage with which disciples customarily greet their rabbi. Ironically, both the title "Rabbi" and the kiss declared Judas' respect for Jesus, while his act of betrayal was anything but.. There is little interest in Judas in the account apart from the essential fact that Jesus was handed over to the Sanhedrin through his agency. He is not mentioned in Mark's Gospel after this point

As Jesus was unarmed and offered no resistance, he was quickly apprehended. Some scholars speculate upon the grounds through which Jesus was arrested. Charges of blasphemy (2:7), violation of the Sabbath (2:24; 3:2-6), or the practice of magic and sorcery (3:22) had been previously levied – but gospel records none of these reasons.

Jesus' remark, "...that the scriptures may be fulfilled" (v. 49), indicates that his arrest by a crowd is part of the divine plan, although Mark does not indicate which passage of Scripture he has in mind. Isaiah 53:12 describes the suffering servant as one who "was numbered with the transgressors." Some interpreters take the reference to apply to the flight of the disciples (v. 50), which Jesus has already predicted by alluding to Scripture (Zech 13:7, cited in v. 27). And indeed the disciples run away

PHEME PERKINS [710] offers a cogent explanation into the last verses:

"The Gethsemane scene ends with the account of a young man who flees naked (vv. 51–52). This peculiar episode has generated many farfetched explanations, including the legend in an apocryphal fragment known as the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, in which Jesus raises a young man from the dead and is in the process of initiating him into the mysteries of the kingdom when he is arrested, or the view that the young man represents a "cameo" appearance of the author. Others have noted a parallel to Joseph's flight from Potiphar's wife, leaving his garments in her hand (Gen 39:12–13; later tradition presumed that he had fled naked). Since Mark has used the detail about the sword to illustrate the violence of the situation (v. 47), this episode probably continues that motif: The disciples have all fled, so when the young man attempts to follow Jesus, he is in danger of being dragged off by the mob, and he escapes only because he is wearing a linen toga-like garment, which comes off in their hands as he flees. His flight shows that the disciples are in grave danger as well"

Lane [527] adds that "Mark designates young men who are exceptionally strong and valiant, or faithful and wise. This observation invites attention to Amos 2:16, where the prophet describes a day of judgment so terrible that even those who are "*stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day.*" The arrest of Jesus invites the crushing judgment announced by Amos, and not even the valiant shall be able to withstand that day.

The scene concludes with Jesus being led away. The Passion begins

Notes

Mark 14:46 *they laid hands on him*: The body of men who seized him were authorized to do so by the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court in the land. If a written warrant for the arrest was required by law (cf. Acts 9:2), it may be assumed that one had been prepared and was in the possession of the leader of the task force. In the Roman provinces, the enforcement of the civil code, and to a large degree criminal law, among the non-citizen classes was normally relegated to the local authorities. A provincial suspect of a crime could be arrested by the Sanhedrin in virtue of the autonomous police powers which this body possessed even under the procurators. [Lane 507]

Mark 14:47 *cut off his ear*: Mark records a single feeble attempt at resistance by an unnamed disciple who struck off the ear of the servant of the high priest with his sword. According to Jn. 18:10, the assailant was Peter, whose action seems to have been impulsive, and the servant he wounded bore the name Malchus.

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Jesus before the Sanhedrin

⁵³ They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance into the high priest's courtyard and was seated with the guards, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they found none. ⁵⁶ Many gave false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷ Some took the stand and testified falsely against him, alleging, ⁵⁸ "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands and within three days I will build another not made with hands.'" ⁵⁹ Even so their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰ The high priest rose before the assembly and questioned Jesus, saying, "Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?" ⁶¹ But he was silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him and said to him, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" ⁶² Then Jesus answered, "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 At that the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further need have we of witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as deserving to die. ⁶⁵ Some began to spit on him. They blindfolded him and struck him and said to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards greeted him with blows.

It was the custom and by the Torah to arrest and try on the same day. There was no provision for "pre-trial detention." Couple this with the desire to keep this away from the public eye (*cf.* 14.1) and the nighttime arrest in Gethsemane. The assembling of "*the high priest, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes*" certainly points to a gathering of the Sanhedrin, the court of religious law in 1st century Israel. Jesus is led from Gethsemane directly to the house of the chief priest, Caiaphas. Again there seems to be an action that is designed to keep the proceedings out of the public's view. The normal meeting place would have been in one of the market halls.

There may also be a simple expediency in play: (a) there is rabbinic precedent that Jesus should be tried and condemned immediately after his arrest. (b) If the Sanhedrin is indeed seeking the death penalty, then the case must be concluded in Jewish court, and then heard before Pilate and the "Roman court" – for only they had the authority to execute anyone. (c) Lastly, the execution must be held and concluded before sundown because of the approaching Sabbath. (See Note on 14:53 below).

The proceedings run into immediate difficulty. By Jewish law, capital cases require two witnesses who agree in all detail (v.59) – and that seems to have been a problem for the leaders (*cf.* vv.56-59). "Because the hearing of witnesses did not secure the desired result, Caiaphas, as the presiding justice, was determined to interrogate Jesus himself. He arose and stepped into the middle of the assembly where the accused was seated. Jesus was required by law to answer the accusations brought against him, and his failure to do so frustrated the council. By his steadfast silence he deprived the court of exploiting, for its purposes, the evidence that had been given against him. This brought the proceedings to a deadlock, and prompted the high priest to seek a decision by direct means. Although disqualified as admissible evidence, the utterance about destroying the Temple and rebuilding another in its place was messianic in tone, because Judaism anticipated a renewal of the glory of the Temple when the Messiah should come.¹³¹ Perhaps for that reason Caiaphas asked Jesus pointedly if he claimed to be the Messiah." [Lane 635]

The high priest rose before the assembly and questioned Jesus... "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" Judaism expected the Messiah to provide proof of his identity. At this point there is a bit of a conundrum. A Messiah imprisoned, abandoned by his followers, and delivered helpless into the hands of his foes represented a false messiah in the minds of the Sanhedrin. Anyone who, in such circumstances, proclaimed himself to be the Messiah could not fail to be a blasphemer who dared to make a mockery of the promises given by God to his people. Moreover, there is some rabbinic evidence that God alone had the right to announce and enthrone the Messiah, so that one who claimed the messianic

dignity before God had crowned him could be regarded as having infringed the majesty of God. For these reasons, Caiaphas' question is decisive, and demands a forthright "Yes" or "No."

It is a good question. *Then Jesus answered, "I am."* Jesus then offers the required proof of his claim to being the Messiah: *'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.* (cf. Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13). The meaning is clear to all. Jesus is offering that the day will come, when those who now judge him will see him with unmistakable clarity enthroned at God's side, invested with power and majesty, and assigned the task of the eschatological Judge. By tearing his garments, Caiaphas expressed symbolically the fact that he regarded Jesus' declaration as blasphemous (vv.63-64) – the penalty for blasphemy was death. All present agreed as to the charge and the punishment (v.64; cf. 10:33)

Notes

Mark 14:53 lead Jesus away to: "Serious objections, based on rabbinic legal prescriptions, have been urged against the credibility of Mark's account of the proceedings before the Sanhedrin. These may be considered within the framework of the commentary, but two deserve particular mention. It has been argued that the condemnation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin on the night of the Passover is historically improbable because of the prohibition of capital trials on feast days (cf. M. Yom Tob V. 2; Tos. Yom Tob IV. 4; Philo, Migration of Abraham § 91). Pentateuchal law (Deut. 13:12; 17:13; 21:21), however, required that in the case of particularly serious offenses, the execution should serve as a deterrent so that "all Israel should hear it and fear" (Deut. 17:13). In early Tannaitic exegesis this was taken to mean that the offender should be punished on one of the pilgrimage feasts (Tos. Sanhedrin XI. 7). To carry out this provision in the case of Jesus it was necessary that he should be tried and condemned immediately after his arrest. The objection that if Jesus was sentenced to death by the Sanhedrin for blasphemy he would have been stoned, when in fact he was crucified by the Roman procurator, is based upon the assumption that the Sanhedrin possessed the competence to execute a capital sentence. The evidence, however, is overwhelming that the power of the sword was the most jealously guarded prerogative in Roman provincial administration, even in a center like Alexandria where there was no question of the disloyalty of the people to Rome. In Judea, where a spirit of revolt constantly simmered just beneath the surface, there can have been no concession on this sensitive point. *De jure* the competence of the Sanhedrin remained intact, but *de facto* the governor alone possessed the capital power. Jesus was sentenced by the Sanhedrin on the charge of blasphemy, but it was necessary to prepare a political charge *ad hoc* in order to secure the execution of the death sentence by the provincial praefect. The essential historicity of the Marcan account should be accepted" [Lane 529-30]

high priest, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes: The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy members and the ruling high priest who presided over its deliberations (M. Sanhedrin I. 6; cf. Josephus, Antiquities IV. v. 4.; War II. xx. 5; Tos. Sukka IV. 6). According to Josephus, this description is the exact makeup of the Sanhedrin. The "*elders*" represented the most influential lay families in Jerusalem, and seem to have been primarily wealthy landowner

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Peter's Denial of Jesus

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the high priest's maids came along. ⁶⁷ Seeing Peter warming himself, she looked intently at him and said, "You too were with the Nazarene, Jesus." ⁶⁸ But he denied it saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." So he went out into the outer court. (Then the cock crowed.) ⁶⁹ The maid saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰ Once again he denied it. A little later the bystanders said to Peter once more, "Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean." ⁷¹ He began to curse and to swear, "I do not know this man about whom you are talking." ⁷² And immediately a cock crowed a second time. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times." He broke down and wept.

The Apostle Peter was last seen as Jesus was escorted into the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, for the trial before the Sanhedrin: ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance into the high priest's courtyard and was seated with the guards, warming himself at the fire. The part of the narrative taking place outside the trial setting is resumed in vv.66-72. The construction of the narrative lets the reader know that while Jesus is "on trial" in the house, his follower Peter is "on trial" out in the courtyard. Both are interrogated; the results, however, are quite different. At the precise time when the court entourage was mocking Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, the prophecy that Peter would deliberately deny him was being fulfilled (v.30). The most plausible source for this narrative is Peter himself.

Peter's three denials before the cock crows twice demonstrate that another of Jesus' prophetic statements have come true (14:30). Each accusation of being one of Jesus' followers brings a more vehement denial: Peter claims not to understand what the servant girl is talking about (v. 68); denies being one of Jesus' followers (v. 70); swears an oath that he does not know the person they are talking about (v. 71). The oath, a curse against himself if he is lying, introduces the explicit denial that he does not know Jesus.

The Denials

The maid (v.66) remarks "You too were with the Nazarene Jesus." Some scholars hold this to a scornful observation calculated to embarrass and unsettle the one addressed. But in the NT, Nazarene most frequently describes a person from Nazareth (AYBD: 1049); I would suggest, at this point, it is just an implied question indicating that she already knows the answer. Peter does not reply, "Sorry, you have the wrong person" but he denied her statement, using the form common in rabbinical law for a formal, legal denial. The first denial is followed by the cock's crowing (v. 68) – although Peter gives no indication of having taken notice of the crowing.

It is at this point Peter leaves the "courtyard" (*aulē*) for the "outer court" (*proaulion*). The movement indicates his desire to escape. Yet he does not immediately leave the area. The second denial is reported indirectly. The same maid (or possible a second maid) makes the accusation to others standing around. It is easy to see how it might well be the same maid, knowing Peter is lying, wondering why he is so vehement about denying it and thus wants to make her case in a more public manner – so she follows him. With a listening crowd her words are perhaps more pointed and accusatory: "This man is one of them." One can almost imagine the venom in the expression, "one of them." Peter again denies her charge but by using the imperfect tense of the verb for "deny," Peter is now repeatedly denying being a follower of Jesus. His denials earned him only a brief respite, for the bystanders sensed his discomfort and refused to leave him alone.

Some time passes between the denials to the maidservant and the charge by one of the bystanders that Peter must be one of Jesus' disciples because he is a Galilean (v. 70). The confident challenge, "Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean," provoked Peter to maintain vehemently and formally that he had no knowledge of the Nazarene. The statement that he began to invoke a curse is intentionally left without an object in the Greek text to denote both that he cursed himself if he is lying and those

present if they insist on asserting that he is a disciple. Peter's avoidance of the name of Jesus ("*this man about whom you are talking*") is deliberate and exposes the Lord to the contempt envisioned in Mark 8:38 ("*ashamed of me and of my words*").

Peter apparently did not notice the first crowing, but the second reminds him of what Jesus had said. "*He broke down and wept*" (v. 72).

Notes

Mark 14:68 [*Then the cock crowed*]: found in most manuscripts, perhaps in view of Mk 14:30 and 14:72 but omitted in others. The verse is not needed to establish the number of times the cock crowed since v.72 provides that information.

Mark 14:70 Galilean: The Galileans are often mentioned in the Talmud because of their dialect (e.g. *TB 'Erubin 53b; Megillah 24b*). They were unable to distinguish between the several guttural sounds that are so important an element in Semitic languages. Peter's speech showed him to be a Galilean and his presence among the Judeans in the courtyard invited the deduction that he was a follower of the heretic Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth.

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Jesus before Pilate (Mark 15)

¹ As soon as morning came, the chief priests with the elders and the scribes, that is, the whole Sanhedrin, held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." ³ The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ Again Pilate questioned him, "Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of." ⁵ Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. ⁶ Now on the occasion of the feast he used to release to them one prisoner whom they requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was then in prison along with the rebels who had committed murder in a rebellion. ⁸ The crowd came forward and began to ask him to do for them as he was accustomed. ⁹ Pilate answered, "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he knew that it was out of envy 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 again said to them in reply, "Then what (do you want) me to do with (the man you call) the king of the Jews?" ¹³ They shouted again, "Crucify him." ¹⁴ Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Crucify him." ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

In the narrative of Jesus' trial by the Roman prefect Pilate, Mark was not concerned to produce a detailed report of the proceedings but to sketch a course of events significant for the salvation of mankind. Parallel to the account in Mark 14:53–65, the tradition clusters around the interrogation, condemnation and subsequent mockery of Jesus. Yet between the two narratives there are profound differences. While Jesus was prosecuted under the Jewish law and condemned for blasphemy by the Sanhedrin, he was tried before

Pilate under the Roman law governing *lèse majesté* or high treason. Other details in the two accounts correspond to this fundamental distinction. Thus Jesus is mocked by the attendants of the Sanhedrin as a messianic prophet, while the rude treatment he received from the Roman soldiery showed contempt for his pretensions to kingship. What is of utmost significance to Mark is that both the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor consigned Jesus to die *as the Messiah*, and that this course of events conformed to the will of God expressed forcefully in the solemn passion prophecy of Mark 10:33–34.

In handing Jesus over, the Sanhedrin has relinquished the direct control of the events, but can only now serve as accusers – not of blasphemy, a charge that would not concern Pilate – but of treason. It was necessary for the Sanhedrin to bring its business to Pilate as soon after dawn as possible because the working day of a Roman official began at the earliest hour of daylight. Legal trials in the Roman forum were customarily held shortly after sunrise. If the chief priests had delayed until morning to examine Jesus and then sought to bring him before the governor, they would have arrived too late and interrupted Pilate in the carefully organized leisure of a Roman gentleman. This offers a significant reason why the Sanhedrin conducted its own proceedings throughout the night.

As Pheme Perkins notes: “It is difficult to determine what Jesus’ exchange with Pilate is intended to convey to Mark’s reader. His silence in the face of many charges (vv. 4–5) continues Jesus’ earlier action before the Sanhedrin (14:60–61a). Jesus’ answer to Pilate’s question, which contains a possible christological title “King of the Jews,” is more ambiguous than that given in the earlier trial (v. 62a). Jesus has neither denied nor accepted the assertion outright. Nor does Mark explain what amazed Pilate about Jesus’ conduct at the proceedings (v. 5). Readers may be intended to associate Jesus’ conduct with Pilate’s conclusion that the case was brought out of envy (v. 10). No one would expect the Roman governor to consider anything but Roman interests in dealing with such a case.”

A crowd appears seeking the release of a prisoner as was the custom (v.8) on the occasion of the feast (v.7). Pilate is perhaps looking for a way out of sentencing Jesus and so offers the rebel Barabbas. As Lane [555] writes:

“Pilate had failed to consider that the populace, who were incensed about a Roman presence in Jerusalem, would never align themselves with him if they were asked to choose between a solution he proposed and one supported by the leaders of the Sanhedrin. Moreover, it is probable that the crowd had already agreed to seek the release of the freedom fighter Barabbas, whose bold actions seem to have won popular support. In Judea it was customary to confront the Roman authorities with as large and boisterous a delegation as could be mustered (cf. Acts 24:1; Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII. viii. 4). With the encouragement of the chief priests the noisy crowd emphatically rejected Pilate’s offer and clamored for the release of Barabbas (cf. Acts 3:13f.). This tragic decision is best explained by the fact that Jesus had been formally condemned by the Sanhedrin as a violator of the law who deserved to die. There was no reason for the people, who openly regarded Jesus as a threat to the release of their man, to dispute this sober fact as represented by the spokesmen for the Jewish court who urged them to persist in their acclamation of Barabbas. That alone seems to account for their calloused response when Pilate inquired what should be done with Jesus.”

The tactical blunder of deferring to the riotous crowd in the matter of the paschal amnesty created the dangerous situation in which the point of control had passed from the magistrate to the excited people. On the ground of political expediency Pilate decided that he had no choice but to yield to the determined will of the now fanatical mob. In order to placate the people he released Barabbas and gave orders for Jesus to be scourged

Notes

Mark 15:1 matters of jurisdiction: The city of Jerusalem, together with the province of Judea which was under its jurisdiction, was designated “subject territory” in the time of the procurators. This signified that matters of legislation, the administration of justice, and government were subject to the supervision of the Roman provincial authorities. Generally speaking, however, the Romans permitted even the subject territories to retain their own legislation, administration of justice, and local government, and there is considerable evidence that Jewish authorities in Judea were allowed a great measure of self-government. The Sanhedrin exercised not only civil jurisdiction according to Jewish law but also a certain degree of criminal jurisdiction. Under certain circumstances it could pronounce a death sentence, but there is no definite proof that it could legitimately execute capital sentences. The “right of the sword” was reserved to the Roman magistrate as sole bearer of the full imperial authority (*imperium*). This was one of the most carefully guarded prerogatives of the Roman government and permitted no concessions. [Lane 547]

Mark 15:7 Barabbas....rebellion: Nothing is known of this person or rebellion outside of the gospels

Mark 15:8 as he was accustomed: The historicity of the paschal amnesty has been disputed often, primarily because the Jewish historian Josephus offers no evidence that such a custom ever existed. There is, however, a parallel in Roman law which indicates that an imperial magistrate could pardon and acquit individual prisoners in response to the shouts of the populace. Moreover, a provision in the Mishnah tractate Pesachim VIII 6a (“they may slaughter for one ... whom they have promised to bring out of prison ...”), which is judged to belong to the earliest strata of the Mishnah, implies that the custom of releasing one prisoner or several at the Feast of the Passover must actually have existed in Jerusalem in the first century.

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The Passion of the Christ

¹⁶ *The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort.* ¹⁷ *They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him.* ¹⁸ *They began to salute him with, “Hail, King of the Jews!”* ¹⁹ *and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage.* ²⁰ *And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him.* ²¹ *They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.*

²² *They brought him to the place of Golgotha (which is translated Place of the Skull).* ²³ *They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but he did not take it.* ²⁴ *Then they crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots for them to see 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 *With him they crucified two revolutionaries, one on his right and one on his left.* ^{28,29} *Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,* ³⁰ *save yourself by coming down from the cross.”* ³¹ *Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes, mocked him among themselves and said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.* ³² *Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him.*

The horrific events of the passion quickly unfold. After Jesus is scourged (v. 15), he is dressed “*in purple*” and “*crowned*” with thorns by the Roman soldiers, who mockingly call him “*King of the Jews*” (vv. 16–20). Through all the spitting and the beating he receives, Jesus remains silent. Mark’s readers would certainly recognize in this the fulfillment of the Isaian prophecy concerning the Messiah: “*I gave my back to those who beat me My face I did not shield from buffets and spitting*” (Isa 50:6).

The climax of the Markan drama comes in Jesus’ crucifixion. The readers of Mark’s Gospel will notice that some familiar details are missing as they read Mark’s account of the way of the cross. For example, the lamenting women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27–31) do not meet him on the way. Likewise, both of the men who are crucified with Jesus join the passers-by in taunting Jesus (vv. 27–32), unlike what is recorded by Luke in the memorable exchange between Jesus and the “good thief” (Luke 23:40–43). Consequently, Mark’s readers are left with the starkest of pictures. Their Lord hangs alone on the cross, exposed to the mockery of the people he came to save.

Mark has arranged the taunting so that everyone rejects Jesus. Those who happen to pass by shake their heads at him (cf. Ps 22:8) and repeat the false charge that Jesus had promised to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days (v. 29), echoing the testimony of false witnesses in the Sanhedrin trial (14:58). Members of the Sanhedrin participate in the mockery by renewing the challenge to Jesus to save himself and adding the peculiar charges that they had formulated to serve as grounds for execution, “Messiah, King of Israel” (v. 32a). They actually taunt Jesus with the challenge to save himself from the cross by claiming that if he did so they “would see and believe” (v. 32b). Mark’s reader, knowing that even Jesus’ disciples had difficulty “seeing and believing,” cannot consider that remark anything other than vicious sarcasm. Finally, Mark adds the note that the men crucified with Jesus also mock him (v. 32c).

One of the last cries of mockery (v. 32: “Let the Messiah, ‘the King of Israel,’ come down now from the cross that we may see and believe”) becomes for Mark a profound challenge to his readers’ faith. Will they believe in Jesus precisely because he did not come down from the cross? Will they be able to see meaning in their own inexplicable suffering in the light of the absurd suffering of their Messiah and King?

Notes

Mark 15:16 *the praetorium*: the residence of the Roman governor. His usual place of residence was at Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast, but he went to Jerusalem during the great feasts, when the influx of pilgrims posed the danger of a nationalistic riot. It is disputed whether the praetorium in Jerusalem was the old palace of Herod in the west of the city or the fortress of Antonia northwest of the temple area. ***The whole cohort:*** normally six hundred soldiers.

Mark 15:21 *They pressed into service...Simon, a Cyrenian*: a condemned person was constrained to bear his own instrument of torture, at least the crossbeam. The reference to Simon of Cyrene suggests that he is familiar to the reader, who would be expected to recognize Alexander and Rufus as well (v. 21). Mark may have used this reference to Simon’s sons to provide a reliable witness to the events that occur at the crucifixion, since Jesus’ male disciples have all fled.

Mark 15:22 *Golgotha*: Golgotha is the Aramaic term for “skull.” The more popular name, “Calvary,” comes from the Latin term for skull, *calvaria*

Mark 15:24 *they divided his garment*...The clothing of an executed criminal went to his executioner(s), but the description of that procedure in the case of Jesus, found in all the gospels, is plainly inspired by Ps 22:18.

Mark 15:25 *It was nine o’clock in the morning*: literally, “the third hour,” thus 9 am. It should be noted that this is difficult to reconcile with St. John’s account which says he was crucified at the sixth hour

Mark 15:26 *the inscription...the King of the Jews*: the political reason for the death penalty falsely charged by the enemies of Jesus.

Mark 15:28 *an omitted verse*: This verse, “And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘And he was counted among the wicked,’” is omitted in the earliest and best manuscripts. It contains a citation from Is 53:12 and was probably later introduced from Luke 22:37.

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The Death of Jesus

³³ At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ And at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ³⁵ Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “Look, he is calling Elijah.” ³⁶ One of them ran, soaked a sponge with wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to take him down.” ³⁷ Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” ⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ These women had followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him. There were also many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

The Burial of Jesus

⁴² When it was already evening, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was amazed that he was already dead. He summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ And when he learned of it from the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ Having bought a linen cloth, he took him down, wrapped him in the linen cloth and laid him in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses watched where he was laid.

At noon, the sun at its zenith, was marked by an eclipse that rendered the land dark. In Mark's narration this covers the time from Jesus' crucifixion until his death. It is objected that solar calculations show such an eclipse was not possible in Palestine during Passover in those days. This leaves the miraculous or the symbolic: Amos prophesied darkness at noon in the eschatological context of the Day of the Lord, where the darkness expresses “the mourning for an only son” (Amos 8:9f.). Philo spoke of a supernatural eclipse of the sun or the moon as signifying “either the death of kings or the destruction of cities” (*De Providentia* II. 50). The darkening of the sun marks a critical moment in history and emphasizes the eschatological and cosmic dimensions of Jesus' sufferings upon the cross. This symbolic significance is already apparent in the Marcan time scheme: the darkness fills the interval between the crucifixion and the moment of Jesus' death.

But about three o'clock in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice those shattering words borrowed from Ps. 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This is the only saying from the cross recorded by Mark, and it is one of the most difficult to interpret. In Ps. 22 the initial cry is an urgent appeal for God to intervene on behalf of the righteous sufferer. Jesus, on the cross, was living out the

situation described in this eschatological psalm of suffering. He instinctively expressed his feelings in biblical language, imploring the help of God in a confident invocation and an anguished plea.

There are many scholarly opinions on the meaning of Jesus' use of the words from the Psalm. I would offer mine. The psalm expresses the spiritual desolation of a man who continues to trust and to appeal to God in spite of the fact that his ungodly opponents mock and persecute him with impunity. The cry does not imply collapse of faith in what he had already prophesied; "*my God*" implies continuing trust

In the end, the psalm turns to joyful thanksgiving for deliverance in vv. 22–31, and some interpreters have suggested that it is the latter part of the psalm that Jesus has in mind as well as its traumatic beginning, so that this is in effect a shout of defiant trust in the God whom he fully expects to rescue him. The modern reader, who knows the whole story, can rightfully think of Psalm 22 as an outline of the whole cross/resurrection salvation-event, which leads to the Gentile mission. This is reading a lot between the lines. Consider Gethsemane where Jesus has accepted that he must drink the cup to the full: he did not expect to be rescued. There is a modern tendency to soften Jesus' words to keep them more divine. But in doing that the "divine" Jesus ends up being pictured as merely reciting the opening line for an outline of salvation history.

The "human" Jesus meanwhile is dying with a cry of anguish and abandonment on his lips, and yet not of despair. In the darkness and pain, he still addresses his lament to God, and as "my God." Yet Jesus is also participating in humanity's ultimate alienation from God in experiencing the pain of death. There is less "reading between the lines" if the words Jesus chose to utter are those of desolation, yet not without Hope and Trust even as he was dying.

³⁷ *Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.* ³⁸ *The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.* A loud cry signals Jesus' death. Mark's juxtaposition of the loud cry with the notice that the Temple veil is torn leads some interpreters to treat the cry as an apocalyptic sign that causes the veil to tear. The text does not make clear what is symbolized by this event or which veil was torn. There were in fact two hangings in the Jerusalem Temple. An outer curtain separated the sanctuary from the forecourt (cf. Exod. 26:37; 38:18; Num. 3:26), while the second, or inner, veil partitioned the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies to which the high priest alone was admitted on the Day of Atonement (cf. Exod. 26:31–35; 27:21; 30:6; Lev. 16:2, 12–15, 21, 23; 24:3; 2 Chron. 3:19). It is not at once apparent whether Mark's reference is to the inner or the outer veil. A tearing of the exterior curtain would have the character of a public sign, comparable to the darkness that covered the land. The rending of the interior veil would be visible, presumably, only to a few priests and could have been concealed from public knowledge by the Jewish authorities. The detail "*from top to bottom*" suggests an actual and irreversible occurrence which coincided with the moment of Jesus' death. The reference then is to the magnificent curtain which in Herod's Temple hung before the entrance and was visible from the forecourt when the doors were opened during the day (cf. Mt. 27:51, 54). This conclusion is supported by the fact that Jewish and Jewish-Christian traditions, which are divergent but clearly refer to the same event, speak of an astonishing happening at the entrance to the sanctuary, not at the partition between the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies

Other interpreters think that for Mark the torn veil foreshadowed the destruction of the Temple. The *Gospel of the Nazarenes* replaced the torn veil with the collapse of a large lintel, evidently an alternative symbol of the Temple's destruction. Still other exegetes think that the torn Temple veil is a cosmological sign. If the outer veil, embroidered with signs of the zodiac, is meant, then the torn zodiac and the darkened sun remind Mark's readers of the cosmic signs that will herald the coming of the Son of Man (13:24–26); darkened sun, stars falling, and disturbed heavenly powers were traditionally associated with the prelude to a divine theophany

The centurion's confession is likewise appropriate to such a divine manifestation: "*Truly this man was God's Son!*" (v. 39). This centurion's confession recalls the two earlier examples of that identification,

both spoken by the divine voice (1:10; 9:7). At Jesus' baptism, the heavens were "opened" (*schizomenous*) just as the veil of the Temple is now "torn" (*eschisthē*). Both Moses and Elijah were present at the transfiguration, a clear sign to Mark's reader that Jesus will be taken up into heavenly glory. In this case, a human being speaks the words of the heavenly voice. The centurion's confession has led scholars to ponder what it was that he saw that evoked this response.

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