



## **The Gospel According to Mark**

### **Lesson 7**

**Lesson 7 Commentary**      **Mark 14:1–15:47**  
**Lesson 8 Questions**      **Mark 16:1–16:20 and Recap**

### **Introduction**

I do not know if you can feel it, but the movement in Mark starts to slow down. In the beginning, Jesus was moving quickly from place to place, from miracle to miracle. In the Gospel, Mark uses the word “immediately” twenty-seven times. Mark only uses the word four times after the entry into Jerusalem. After the entry, we seem to slow down to thinking in terms of days. Now, as we move to the actual Passion of Christ, it will slow down to hours!

Chapter 14, in the NRSVCE, has ten sections.

- The Plot to Kill Jesus
- The Anointing at Bethany
- Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus
- The Passover with the Disciples
- The Institution of the Lord’s Supper
- Peter’s Denial Foretold
- Jesus Prays in Gethsemane
- The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus
- Jesus before the Council
- Peter Denies Jesus

Chapter 15, in the NRSVCE, has six sections.

- Jesus before Pilate
- Pilate Hands Jesus over to be Crucified
- The Soldiers Mock Jesus
- The Crucifixion of Jesus
- The Death of Jesus

- The Burial of Jesus

We could spend days on many of these topics. They are all very familiar. The chief priest and the scribes plot to kill Jesus. He celebrates Passover with his Apostles and the Sacrament of the Eucharist is instituted. Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asks his Father for the cup to pass but the Father's will be done, not Jesus' human will. Jesus is betrayed, tried, mocked, crucified and buried. We know the story all too well.

What I want to do is to concentrate on two events. One is pivotal to understanding why we see Jesus, the Son, as the second person of the Trinity. The other is an often-misunderstood event related to some of the last words that Christ utters on the cross.

### **Jesus before the Council (Mark 14:53 – 65)**

I want to recap a few things that we have discussed earlier, because we have been building to this point for most of our study of Mark. I have told you in the past to remember certain things for when we get to Chapter 14. Now we are at Chapter 14! Remember back in lesson 3 when we talked about the healing of the paralytic? Setting the scene, four friends bring a paralytic to Christ for healing:

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? *But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*"—he said to the paralytic - "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this (Mark 2:5-12, emphasis added)!"

So, Christ forgave sins, a characteristic attributed only to God. More importantly, Christ identifies himself with the "Son of Man." In lesson 3 we cited Daniel 7:13 – 14.

*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14, emphasis added)."*

While the Nation of Israel was monotheistic (remember the *Shema* in lesson 6), it was a complicated issue. Clearly, the son of man in Daniel 7:13-14 is human and shares in the glory of the “Ancient of Days,” the God of Israel. Daniel 7 is not the only place where someone shares the throne of God. Psalm 110:1 says, “The LORD says to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.” Again, while the Nation of Israel was monotheistic, there seems to be a belief that someone else will be sharing in God’s glory. Daniel Boyarin, who we cited in lesson 3, says, “the idea of a second God as viceroy to God the Father is one of the oldest of theological ideas in Israel.”<sup>1</sup>

Returning to the cited scripture, note how the scribes were thinking, “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” They did not respond with blasphemy regarding the claim of being the “Son of Man.” They only spoke of blasphemy regarding the forgiving of sins.

What constitutes blasphemy? Hahn states:

Speech, thought, or action that entails contempt for God. Blasphemy may also involve the contemptuous ridicule of saints, sacred objects, or the Church; it is directly opposed to the second commandment (CCC 1031, 2148, 2162). The gravity of the sin is made manifest in biblical law, where *blaspheming the divine Name is a capital crime punished by stoning* (Lev 24:10–16; John 10:33).<sup>2</sup>

God, himself, told Moses how blasphemers were to be treated:

The LORD said to Moses, saying: Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and let all who were within hearing lay their hands on his head, and let the whole congregation stone him. And speak to the people of Israel, saying: Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin. One who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer (Lev 24:13-16, emphasis added).

So, if anyone were to blaspheme the name of God, the punishment would be death.

Now let’s return to the two stories related to Jesus stilling the storms. We made the point (also in lesson 3) that the wording of Mark 4:35 – 41 were very similar to Psalm 107:23 – 30. However, in Psalm 107, the “calmer of the storm” was YHWH, the God of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 44.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 2009), 121.

Some may contend that certain Old Testament characters controlled the sea. Moses separated the waters to allow the Israelites to cross on dry land. Joshua separated the Jordan for the Israelites to cross. However, in each of these cases, Moses and Joshua needed assistance. In Exod 14:16, one sees God saying to Moses, “Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea.” Moses had his rod which, throughout the Exodus, was “powered” by God. In addition, in Josh 3:15-16, one reads (emphasis added):

Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, *and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still*, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

The waters are stopped by the entrance of the ark of the covenant, not by the actions of Joshua. In Mark 4, when Jesus utters, “Peace! Be still!,” the seas calm *without any other assistance*.

In lesson 4, we covered Mark 6:45-52 when Jesus walks on water. Remember that when Jesus entered the boat, the winds ceased, just as in Mark 4. Remember, also, that Jesus calms them by saying, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.” The Greek term used for “it is I” is *ἐγώ εἰμι* (transliterated *ego eimi*). This term is the same term used when Moses asks YHWH his name in Exod 3:14.

We now turn to Jesus’ trial before the council. This brings the arguments together from the other Markan texts to support the conclusion that Mark believed that at least two persons were present in the one God of Israel. Setting the stage, Jesus has been arrested and has been taken before the Council. They had witnesses saying that Jesus said He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Yet, their testimony did not agree and was therefore not enough for any type of conviction. The high priest became frustrated that Jesus would not respond to any of these charges. There was no indication that these charges alone would have resulted in the death penalty that eventually occurred. Then the crucial exchange was set in motion. “Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One (Mark 14:61b)?” There were others that had claimed or had been thought to be the Messiah. Others were titled the “son of God,” like the Davidic Kings. Answering “yes” would probably not have been considered blasphemous.

But Jesus did not answer “yes.” He answered, “*ἐγώ εἰμι*,” (“I AM”). According to David Stern, a Jewish New Testament scholar:

“Here, in response to the direct question of the *cohen hagadol* [high priest] Yeshua [Jesus] does not hesitate; moreover, he uses the very word “*Adonai*” [the

God of Israel] used to identify himself to Moses at the burning bush. . . Thus Yeshua not only affirms that he is the Messiah, the Son of God (see Mt 4:3N), but hints that he is to be identified with *Adonai* himself.”<sup>3</sup>

Then Jesus follows up by claiming to be that “second” divine figure found in Daniel 7 by saying, “and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). This last part clearly invoked Daniel 7:13, combined with Psalm 110:1. It is only after this point that the high priest tears his clothes and accuses Jesus of blasphemy. In the mind of the unbelieving Council, they had no choice but to invoke the punishment of Leviticus 24. “Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death.” Mark clearly sees Jesus as the second person of the one God of Israel, God the Son. He forgives sins. He controls nature. He identifies himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7.

### **My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? (Mark 15:33 – 37)**

Let’s begin by reading the cited verses:

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 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?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” 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.” Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

The title of this section represents the last words spoken by Christ before giving up his spirit! Without knowledge of the source of these words, one might immediately jump to the conclusion (as many scholars have) that the human nature of Christ is crying out in anger, frustration, disbelief or despair to a God that has turned his back at the very moment that Christ, His Son, needed Him most. How could that be? Wasn’t Jesus without sin? Despair, or completely giving up, is definitely a sin! In Psalm 22:1, these exact words are uttered by the Psalmist. Interestingly, Psalm 22 is alluded to, in some form or fashion, throughout the New Testament, from the Gospels to the Epistles to the book of Revelation. Many parts of the final moments of Christ’s life show the prophetic nature of this Psalm. While other Psalms are cited in the various Passion narratives, none appear as many times as Psalm 22. “Thirteen (perhaps seventeen) Old

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<sup>3</sup> David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*, electronic ed. (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), Mk 14:61 [explanations added].

Testament texts appear in the passion narrative of the Gospels. Some are quotations, some allusions. Of the thirteen, eight come from the Psalms. Five come from Psalm 22, two from Psalm 69, and one from Psalm 31.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1997, Gregory Vall, wrote an essay related to Psalm 22. In that essay, Vall came to the conclusion that Psalm 22 was, in fact, a Psalm of thanksgiving – a *Tôdâh* Psalm.

Before moving on, we need to step back in time into the Old Testament and briefly discuss the sacrifices under the old covenant. In Leviticus 3:1-17 and Leviticus 7:11-36, the Israelites are given instructions on the peace-offerings, a type of sacrifice. “The Levitical liturgy distinguishes three kinds of peace-offerings, or rather three reasons for which peace-offerings are brought: (i) thank-offerings or ‘sacrifices of praise’ ...; (ii) vow-offerings made in fulfilment of a vow...; and (iii) free-will offerings...”<sup>5</sup> It is the first type that we are interested in – the thank-offering (Hb *tôdâh*). Per Saydon:

If it is a thank-offering, the offerer is to bring, besides the victim, unleavened cakes mingled with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil and fine flour well mixed and made into cakes mingled with oil. He shall also bring leavened bread which, however, is not presented on the altar (2:11), but is simply handed over to the priest and is intended for the sacrificial meal. The offerer presents one of each kind of cakes as a contribution to Yahweh which goes to the priest who pours the blood of the victim. The remaining cakes go to the offerer. After the sacrifice has been offered, that is, after the portions reserved to the Lord have been burnt on the altar and the priest has taken his share of the flesh and the cakes, *the offerer together with his relatives and friends sits at meal in the neighbourhood of the sanctuary. The whole of the flesh must be consumed on that day.* (emphasis added)<sup>6</sup>

Note the striking similarities between this offering and the instructions given to the Israelites on the night of Passover (Exodus 12:8 – 10). In fact, Philo says, “And after the feast of the new moon comes the fourth festival, that of the passover, which the Hebrews call pascha, on which the whole people offer sacrifice, beginning at noonday and continuing till evening. And this festival is instituted in remembrance of, and as *giving thanks* for, their great migration which

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<sup>4</sup> James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 105.

<sup>5</sup> P. P. Saydon, “Leviticus,” in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Bernard Orchard and Edmund F. Sutcliffe (Toronto; New York; Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1953), 233.

<sup>6</sup> Saydon, “Leviticus,” in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 233.

they made from Egypt.”<sup>7</sup> It is also striking that Christ, before entering his passion, was celebrating the Passover, a *tôdâh* sacrifice.

Dennis Lindsay discusses how the Psalmist was influenced by the thank-offering (hereafter referred to as “*Tôdâh* Psalms”). He states,

The OT Psalter contains a number of hymns of lament composed in the first person singular. These songs of individuals who are experiencing personal troubles often conclude the vow to present a thank offering to God upon his act of deliverance on their behalf. The Psalter also contains individuals’ hymns of thanks giving which make reference to or include portions of laments. These hymns of lament and thanksgiving, which constitute the bulk of the Psalms, are examples of liturgies for the thank offering.<sup>8</sup>

When one looks at Psalm 22, it becomes clear that it is a *Tôdâh* Psalm. It has the prerequisites – tribulation, vow, sharing of the sacrifice, etc. In Psalm 22:1, the speaker is in tribulation, crying out “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” In Psalm 22:25, the vow is made, “From thee comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.” In Psalm 22:26, the speaker will share the sacrifice with others. “The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied.” Psalm 22 in, in fact, a *Tôdâh* Psalm.

So, what is my point. Jesus was not in despair. He was not angry. He was *giving thanks* that the Father is allowing him to take on the sins of the world. I suspect that the first words were all that the bystanders heard or that Mark recorded. I suspect, like the devout Jews of the time, Jesus recited the entire Psalm before giving up his spirit!

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<sup>7</sup> *Special Laws 2:146* translated taken from Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 582.

<sup>8</sup> Dennis R. Lindsay, “*Todah* and Eucharist: The Celebration of the Lord’s Supper as a ‘Thank Offering’ in the Early Church,” *Restoration Quarterly*, 39/2 (1997): 88.

**QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8 AND RECAP**  
**Mark 16:1–16:20**

**Day 1** – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

**Day 2** – Read Mark 16:1 – 20. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

**Day 3** – Do any of your bibles have any notes between verse 8 and verse 9?

**Day 4** – Do you note any differences in style between verses 1 – 8 and verses 9 – 20?

**Day 5** – How do you think the Apostles are portrayed throughout Mark?

**Day 6** – Write a 5 to 10 sentence recap of Mark