

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
July | Aug | Sept 2024

THE BOOK OF MARK



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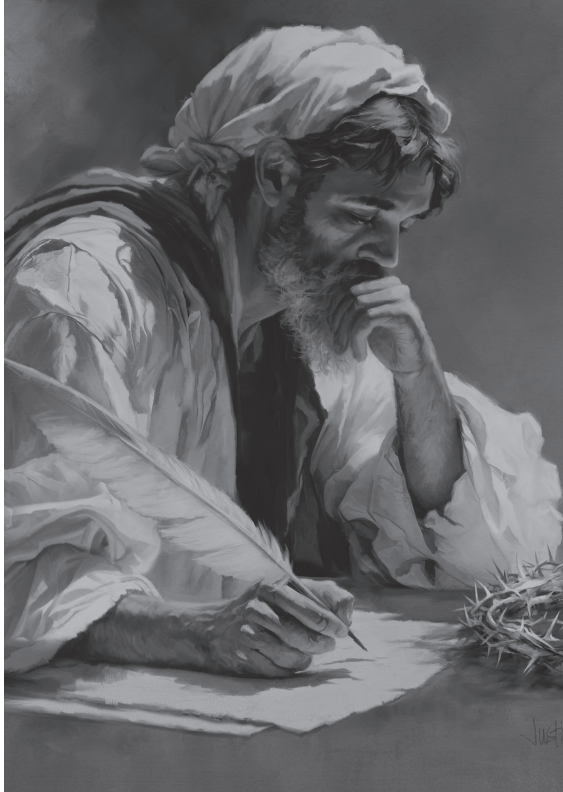
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The Gospel of Mark



From the beginning of Mark, the reader knows who Jesus is—the Messiah, the Son of God (*Mark 1:1*). However, people in the story struggle with understanding just who He is and what He is all about—except for those with demons. They know exactly who He is! The demons recognize Him and wither before His mighty words.

But Jesus rather consistently commands that they keep this information quiet. Why this command for secrecy? Bible students for centuries have mulled over this question. It even has a name in scholarship—the Messianic Secret. Why would a Gospel want us to keep quiet about who Jesus is?

What will become clear in this journey through the Gospel of Mark is that not only is there secrecy in this book—there also is amazing revelation. It can rightly be called the revelation/secrecy motif, and it runs through the Gospel of Mark. Although, at the end of the book, all the secrecy is surprisingly replaced with a powerful revelation of Jesus.

Mark can be divided into two distinct sections—halves, actually. Chapter one through near the end of chapter eight deals with the crucial question, *Who is Jesus?* The answer is displayed in His teachings and His miracles. Again and again He defeats evil, brings hope to the oppressed, and teaches compelling truths that cut to the heart of human existence. All this shouts to the reader that He is the Messiah, the Christ, whom the Hebrew people have long been awaiting.

However, it is not until the middle of the book that someone *not demon-possessed* rightly declares who He is, thereby answering the question of the first half of the book about Christ's identity. And that person is Peter, who declares, "You are the Christ" (*Mark 8:29, ESV*).

The second half of Mark, from Mark 8:31 to the end of the book, answers the question, *Where is Jesus going?* The answer is shocking. He is going to the cross, the most ignominious and shameful manner of death in the Roman world. And it is such an unexpected destination for the Messiah, who His followers think will defeat Rome and establish Israel as a powerful nation.

Jesus' bumbling disciples cannot fathom what He is saying. As the book progresses, they ask less and less about this painful topic until finally they are reduced to silence in the face of the unwelcome truth.

Things look gloomier and gloomier when Jesus confronts the religious leaders who plot His demise. The disciples, hopeful of a glorious kingdom, are shocked by an arrest, trial, and crucifixion that defies their expectations.

But through all this, Jesus keeps a clear and consistent message of where He is going and what it means that He will die and rise again. The bread and cup of the Last Supper will represent His body and blood (*Mark 14:22–25*), and He will become a ransom for many (*Mark 10:45*).

This does not mean He went to the cross in stoic calmness. In Gethsemane He struggles with the decision (*Mark 14:32–42*), and on the cross He cries out in despair, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (*Mark 15:34, NKJV*). The Gospel of Mark shows us the darkness that Christ experienced, the cost of our salvation. But the cross is not the end of the journey. After His resurrection, He plans a meeting with His disciples in Galilee—and, as we know, the Christian church began.

It is a most remarkable story, told in a terse, fast-moving style with little commentary from the Gospel writer himself. He simply tells the story and then lets the words, the deeds, the actions, speak for themselves regarding the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Gospel of Mark shows us the darkness that Christ experienced, the cost of our salvation.

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The Beginning of the Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 13:1–5, 13; Acts 15:36–39; Mark 1:1–15; Isa. 40:3; Dan. 9:24–27.*

Memory Text: “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel’ ” (*Mark 1:14, 15, NKJV*).

Who wrote the Gospel of Mark, and why was it written? No Gospel lists the name of the author. The one that comes the closest is John, with reference to the beloved disciple (*see John 21:20, 24*).

However, from early times, each of the canonical Gospels has been associated with either an apostle (Matthew, John) or with a companion of an apostle. For example, the Gospel of Luke is linked with Paul (*see Col. 4:14, 2 Tim. 4:11, Philem. 1:24*). The Gospel of Mark is linked with Peter (*see 1 Pet. 5:13*).

Though the author of Mark never gives his name in the text, early church tradition indicates that the author of the Gospel of Mark was John Mark, a sometime traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas (*Acts 13:2, 5*) and later an associate of Peter (*1 Pet. 5:13*).

The first step this week will be to learn about Mark as reported in Scripture, to see his early failure and eventual recovery. Then the study will turn to the opening section of Mark with a look forward to where the story is headed and a look backward at why a failed and then restored missionary would write such a text.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 6.

The Failed Missionary

Read Acts 12:12. How is Mark introduced in the book of Acts?

It seems probable that John Mark, the most likely author of the Gospel of Mark, was a young man when the events in Acts 12 occurred, probably in the A.D. mid-40's. He is introduced in verse 12 as the son of a woman named Mary. She was evidently a wealthy supporter of the church and held the prayer meeting at her home, made famous in Acts 12. The story of Peter's escape from prison and the subsequent actions and then the death of Herod are replete with striking, even humorous, contrasts between Peter and the king. John Mark does not really play any role in the story, but the introduction of him at this point prepares for his later connection with Barnabas and Saul.

Read Acts 13:1–5, 13. How did John Mark get attached to Saul and Barnabas, and what was the outcome?

Acts 13 describes the first missionary journey of Saul and Barnabas, starting about A.D. 46. John Mark is not mentioned until verse 5, and his role is simply as a helper or servant. No other reference is made to the young man until verse 13, where the brief account notes that he returned to Jerusalem.

No reason is given for this departure, and the absence of any description of his feelings or emotions leaves to the imagination what motivated his withdrawal from the missionary effort, which no doubt was filled with peril and challenges. Ellen G. White indicates that "Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord's work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 169. In short, things simply got too hard for him, and so he wanted out.

Recall a time when you backed off from something—or even flat out failed at it—in your Christian walk. What did you learn from the experience?

A Second Chance

Read Acts 15:36–39. Why did Paul reject John Mark, and why did Barnabas give him a second chance?

The reason for Paul's rejection of the young man is given in Acts 15:38. Mark had withdrawn from them and had not continued in the work of ministry. Paul's attitude is understandable, if blunt. Missionary life, particularly in the ancient world, was rough and demanding (*compare with 2 Cor. 11:23–28*). Paul depended on his fellow missionaries to help carry the burden of such challenging work and conditions. In his perspective, one who deserted so quickly did not deserve a place in a missionary team fighting hand to hand against evil forces.

Barnabas disagreed. He saw potential in Mark and did not want to leave the young man behind. Such a deep dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark that they parted ways. Paul chose Silas to go with him, and Barnabas took Mark.

Acts does not explain why Barnabas chose to take Mark with him. In fact, this passage is the last place that the two men appear in Acts. But interestingly, it is not the last place Mark is mentioned in the New Testament.

Read Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon 24, and 1 Peter 5:13. What details about Mark's recovery do these verses suggest?

An amazing transformation seems to have occurred in Mark. In these passages, Paul indicates the value of Mark to him and to ministry. Paul counts him as one of his fellow workers and wants Timothy to bring Mark with him. The book of 1 Peter indicates that Peter as well had a close relationship with Mark. These books by Paul and Peter were written likely in the early A.D. 60s, some 15–20 years after the experience in Acts 15. Mark clearly recovered from his failure, almost certainly through the trust that his cousin, Barnabas, placed in him.

Consider a time when you or a friend failed and were given a second chance. How did that experience change you and those who helped you? How did it modify your ministry to others?

The Messenger

Read Mark 1:1–8. Who are the characters in these verses, and what do they say and do?

These verses have three main characters: Jesus Christ, referred to in Mark 1:1; God the Father, implied in the words of Mark 1:2; and John the Baptist, the messenger and preacher who is the main subject of the last section of this passage.

Mark 1:2, 3 contains a quotation from the Old Testament that Mark presents to describe what will happen in the story. What Mark quotes is a blending of phrases from three passages: Exodus 23:20, Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1.

Read Exodus 23:20, Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1. What do these three passages have in common?

Exodus 23:20 refers to an angel that God will send before Israel to bring them to Canaan. Isaiah 40:3 speaks of God appearing in the wilderness with a highway prepared before Him. Malachi 3:1 speaks of a messenger going before the Lord to prepare His way. All three of these passages speak of a journey.

The text in Isaiah has many ties with the ministry of John the Baptist and also focuses on the *Way of the Lord*. In the Gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus is on a journey. The fast-moving narrative enhances the sense of this journey, a journey that will lead to the cross and to His sacrificial death for us.

But much must happen before He reaches the cross. The journey is just beginning, and Mark will tell us all about it.

In keeping with the quotation from the Old Testament in Mark 1:2, 3, John the Baptist calls for repentance, a turning away from sin, and a turning back to God (*Mark 1:4*). Clothed like the ancient prophet Elijah (*compare with 2 Kings 1:8*), he speaks in Mark 1:7, 8 about the One coming after him who is mightier than he. His statement that he is not worthy to loosen a strap of the Coming One's sandals shows the exalted view he has of Jesus.

Jesus' Baptism

Read Mark 1:9–13. Who is present at the baptism of Jesus, and what happens?

John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River. As Jesus comes up out of the water, He sees the heavens being torn open and the Holy Spirit descending on Him like a dove. He hears the voice of God from heaven, “ ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’ ” (*Mark 1:11, ESV*).

These events point to the importance of Jesus' baptism. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present, together affirming the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The importance of this event will find its echo at the scene of the cross in Mark 15. Many of the same elements of the story will recur in that scene.

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. The word “drove” is from the Greek word *ekballō*, the common word used in the Gospel of Mark for driving out demons. The Spirit's presence here illustrates the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life. The Lord is already starting the journey of His ministry, and He immediately confronts Satan. The sense of the struggle in the scene is displayed by the reference to 40 days of temptation, the presence of wild animals, and the angels ministering to Jesus.

An unusual characteristic of the opening scene of the Gospel of Mark is that Jesus is presented as a character with both divinity and humanity. On the side of divinity: He is the Christ, the Messiah (*Mark 1:1*), the Lord announced by a messenger (*Mark 1:2, 3*), mightier than John (*Mark 1:7*), the beloved Son on whom the Spirit descends (*Mark 1:10, 11*). But on the side of humanity, we see the following: He is baptized by John (not the other way around, *Mark 1:9*), He is driven by the Spirit (*Mark 1:12*), tempted by Satan (*Mark 1:13*), with wild animals (*Mark 1:13*), and ministered to by angels (*Mark 1:13*).

Why these contrasts? This points to the amazing reality of Christ, our Lord and Savior, our God, and yet also a human being, our brother and our example. How do we fully wrap our minds around this idea? We can't. But we accept it on faith and marvel at what this truth reveals to us about God's love for humanity.

What does it tell us about the amazing love of God that, though Jesus was God, He would take upon Himself our humanity in order to save us?

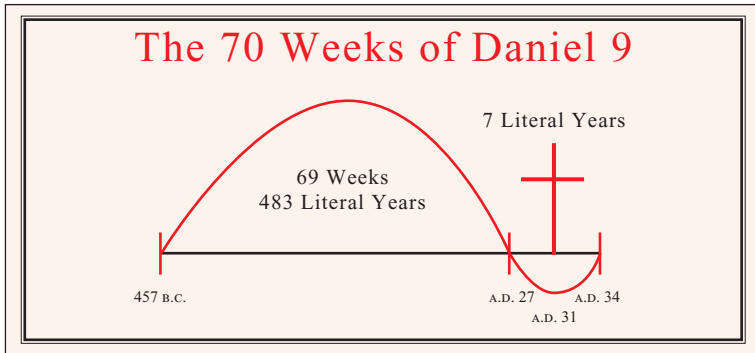
The Gospel According to Jesus

Read Mark 1:14, 15. What are the three parts of the gospel message that Jesus proclaimed?

Mark summarizes here the simple and direct message of Jesus. Its three parts are illustrated in the following table:

Category	Content
Time Prophecy	The time is fulfilled.
Covenant Promise	The kingdom of God is near.
Call to Discipleship	Repent and believe the gospel.

The time prophecy to which Jesus refers is the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. This prophecy finds fulfillment in the baptism of Jesus, where He is anointed with the Holy Spirit and begins His ministry (*Acts 10:38*). The amazing 70-week prophecy is illustrated in the following chart:



In this prophecy, one day stands for one year (*Num. 14:34, Ezek. 4:6*). The prophecy began in 457 B.C. with the decree issued by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, completing the work of restoring Jerusalem (*see Ezra 7*).

Sixty-nine prophetic weeks would extend to A.D. 27, the time when Jesus was baptized and anointed with the Holy Spirit at the commencement of His ministry.

His crucifixion would take place three and a half years later.

Finally, the completion of the seventieth week would occur in A.D. 34 when Stephen was stoned and the gospel message started going to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

When was the last time you studied the 70-week prophecy? How can knowing this prophecy help increase your faith not only in Jesus but in the trustworthiness of the prophetic Word?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Voice in the Wilderness,” pp. 97–108, in *The Desire of Ages*; and “Heralds of the Gospel,” pp. 166–176, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

How fascinating that Revelation 14:6, 7, the first angel’s message, parallels the gospel message of Jesus in Mark 1:15.

The first angel brings the everlasting gospel to the world in the last days in preparation for the Second Coming. Just like the message of Jesus, the angel’s end-time gospel has the same three elements as illustrated in the table below:

Mark 1	Category	Revelation 14
Time Fulfilled (<i>Daniel 9</i>)	Time Prophecy	Judgment Hour (<i>Daniel 7, 8</i>)
Kingdom Near	Covenant Promise	Everlasting Gospel
Repent, Believe	Call to Discipleship	Fear, Glorify, Worship God

The first angel’s message announces the beginning of the pre-Advent judgment, which began in 1844 and was predicted in the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14. The judgment brings the kingdom of God to His persecuted people (*Dan. 7:22*). The first angel’s call to fear, glorify, and worship God is the call to discipleship, issued to the world in the last days as the beast powers of Revelation 13 present a false god to fear, glorify, and worship.

Just as Jesus’ message in Mark 1 is intimately tied to the prophecies of Daniel at the beginning of the gospel proclamation, so the first angel’s message is as well tied to Daniel at the close of earth’s history.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Compare and contrast John the Baptist and Jesus in Mark 1:1–13. What special lessons do you learn from the way they are presented?
- ❷ Consider the meaning of baptism. Read Romans 6:1–4 and John 3:1–8, and compare them with the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–13. What parallels and contrasts do you see? How does this help you understand more clearly the meaning of baptism?
- ❸ Compare and contrast the gospel according to Jesus in Mark 1:14, 15 and the first angel’s message in Revelation 14:6, 7. How does understanding these messages help you see better your mission for today?

Bewildered Shaman, Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father was the most prominent person in his small town in Nepal. Everyone sought his help. Townspeople believed that his animal sacrifices could cure any disease. Father came from a long line of shamans, and he became the shaman after the death of his father, who also was a shaman.

Father believed that his rituals wielded great power in the spirit world, so he was puzzled when he couldn't help the person whom he loved most—his wife. He couldn't cure her or even diagnose her illness. He sacrificed a chicken, but her pain remained. He gave money to another shaman, but she lost weight. He took her to a physician, but she grew weaker.

Father's bewilderment grew when his adult daughter, Divya, returned home to help her mother. He came home one day and couldn't find Mother or Divya. Searching the house, he finally found them in an upstairs room, kneeling on the floor and talking to someone he couldn't see.

Father was astonished. He suspected something was terribly wrong. But he quietly slipped out of the room so as to not disturb them. He wondered whether his daughter had secretly become a shaman like him.

When he saw Divya later, he asked what she and Mother had been doing.

"We were praying to my God to heal Mother," Divya said.

"Which God?" Father asked. He worshiped many gods.

"To my God, Jesus," she said. "I have left our family religion. I have found a new God in Jesus." She explained that her God created the heavens and the earth. "If I pray, He will hear and heal Mother," she said.

Father didn't believe it. He didn't see how this God could be any more powerful than any of the family gods.

When Divya needed to return to her home in another town, she asked to take Mother with her. "She is sick, and you don't have time to take care of her because you are working," she said. "I'll take her with me."

Father, who worked both as a shaman and a construction worker, agreed. He was unable to help Mother, and he doubted that she would last long.

"She is your mother," he said. "If she dies, let me know."

Six months passed before Father saw Mother again. He traveled to Divya's house and was surprised to find Mother healthy. He was full of questions.

"Why is Mother well?" he asked. "What medicine did you give her?"

Divya replied that she had only prayed to God. "God heard my request," she said. "Now Mother is well and happy and goes to church with me."

Father didn't believe it. He laughed. He had never heard of such a God who healed without an animal sacrifice or another ritual.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups." For more information, go to the website: IWILLGo2020.org.

A Day in the Ministry of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 1:16–45, John 1:29–42, Mark 5:41, Luke 6:12, Leviticus 13.*

Memory Text: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men’ ” (*Mark 1:17, NKJV*).

Each Gospel introduces the beginning of Jesus' ministry in a particular way. Matthew presents Jesus as calling disciples and then preaching the Sermon on the Mount.

Luke tells the story of Jesus' inaugural sermon on a Sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth.

John recounts the calling of some of the early disciples and the wedding at Cana, where Jesus performs His first *sign*.

The Gospel of Mark recounts the calling of four disciples and describes a Sabbath in Capernaum and what followed.

This “Sabbath with Jesus” at the beginning of Mark gives the reader a sense of who Jesus is. In the entire section for this week's lesson, there are very few of His words recorded: a brief call to discipleship, a command to a demon, a plan to visit other locations, and the healing of a leper with instructions to show himself before a priest to be clean. The emphasis is on action, particularly healing people. The Gospel writer likes to use the word *immediately* to illustrate the fast-action movement of Jesus' ministry.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 13.

“Follow Me”

Read Mark 1:16–20. Who were the men Jesus called as disciples, and what was their response?

Mark 1 does not have many of Jesus’ words recorded. However, Mark 1:17 does have His words to two fishermen, Simon, who will later be called “Peter,” and his brother, Andrew. The two men are standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, casting a net.

There is no mention of a boat or other fishing paraphernalia, which may suggest that the two men are not well off financially. In Mark 1:19, 20, James and John are in a boat with their father and servants, which suggests that they were better off financially than Peter and Andrew. Luke indicates that Peter does have a boat and that, in fact, James and John were partners of Peter and Andrew (*see Luke 5:1–11*). But the Gospel of Mark may be presenting a contrast between the two sets of brothers, and in order to illustrate that difference, Jesus calls to discipleship both those who have less resources and those with more.

Jesus’ call to these men is simple, direct, and prophetic. He calls them to follow Him—that is, to become His disciples. He indicates that if they will respond to His call, He will take on the task of making them fishers of men.

Ponder why these men would immediately (*Mark 1:16–20*) leave everything and follow Jesus.

The Gospel of John fills in the picture more fully (*see John 1:29–42*). It seems that the brothers were followers of John the Baptist and heard his proclamation that Jesus was “ ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (*John 1:29, ESV*). They met Jesus and spent time with Him near the Jordan River. Consequently, their acceptance of Jesus’ call to ministry was not some lark or escapade. They had thought this through.

But why does Mark not fill in more details? Likely, it is to emphasize the power of Jesus. He calls, and willing fishermen answer, and their lives, and the world itself, are never the same.

What have you been called to give up in order to follow Jesus? (Think about the implications of your answer, especially if you can’t think of anything.)

An Unforgettable Worship Service

Read Mark 1:21–28. What unforgettable experience happened in the Capernaum synagogue, and what spiritual truths can we take from this account?

Most Christians have some unforgettable moments in their Christian walk—the decision to follow Jesus; the day of their baptism; a powerful sermon during which they deeply felt the presence of God. Some of these moments might not only be unforgettable but be life-changing, as well.

So it might have been for some people in Capernaum on the Sabbath described in Mark 1. “And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (*Mark 1:22, NKJV*). As Jesus was teaching, a demon-possessed man, no doubt impacted by the power of Jesus’ teaching, shouted, “ ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God’ ” (*Mark 1:24, ESV*), and Jesus cast out the demon.

Think of the implications of these words from the demon.

First, the demon recognizes Jesus as “ ‘the Holy One of God.’ ” He acknowledges that Jesus is the holy emissary of God, in contrast to the unclean, unholy hosts of Satan. In a worship setting, one expects holy things and individuals, not unholy and unclean things. Thus, in this story there is a sharp contrast between the forces of good and the forces of evil. We can see here the reality of the great controversy. People might not yet know who Jesus is, but the demon certainly does and publicly acknowledges it, as well.

Next, the command to come out of the man is understandable, but why the command, “ ‘Be quiet’ ” (*NKJV*)? Beginning here in Mark, a remarkable motif appears: Jesus’ call for silence regarding who He is. Scholars call this the “Messianic Secret.”

Jesus’ call for silence makes good sense because of the political overtones of Messianic expectations in His time. It was risky to be a messiah. Yet, mixed with the calls for silence are the unmistakable revelations of who Jesus is. What will become clear over time is that Jesus’ identity cannot be hidden, and the truth of who He is becomes the center of the gospel message. People need not only to know who Jesus is but then to make a decision about how they will respond to His coming and what it means for them.

In seeking to witness to others, when might it be prudent not to present all that we believe regarding “present truth”?

More Sabbath Ministry

Read Mark 1:29–34. How did Jesus help Peter’s family, and what spiritual lessons can we draw from this account?

After the amazing synagogue service, Jesus retires with His small band of disciples (Peter, Andrew, James, and John) to Peter’s home, evidently to spend the rest of the Sabbath day in a friendly meal and fellowship.

But a note of concern overspreads the scene: Peter’s mother-in-law is ill with a fever, which back then meant you either got better or died. They tell Jesus of the sickness, and He takes Peter’s mother-in-law by the hand and raises her up. She immediately begins to serve their needs. What a powerful example of the principle that those who have been saved, healed, by Jesus will minister to others as a result!

Throughout Mark it is often the case that Jesus heals by touching the affected person (*see Mark 1:41; Mark 5:41*), though other times no touch is mentioned (*see Mark 2:1–12, Mark 3:1–6, Mark 5:7–13*).

Jesus was not done with ministry that day. After sunset many came to Peter’s house for healing, no doubt from seeing what happened at the synagogue that day or from hearing about it. The fact that the Gospel writer does not tell his readers that people delayed because of the hours of the Sabbath indicates that he expected his readers to know about the Sabbath. This feature of Mark is consistent with his readers being Sabbath keepers.

Mark says that the entire city was gathered at the door that evening (*Mark 1:33*). It would have taken some time for Jesus to help all those people.

“Hour after hour they came and went; for none could know whether tomorrow would find the Healer still among them. Never before had Capernaum witnessed a day like this. The air was filled with the voice of triumph and shouts of deliverance. The Saviour was joyful in the joy He had awakened. As He witnessed the sufferings of those who had come to Him, His heart was stirred with sympathy, and He rejoiced in His power to restore them to health and happiness.

“Not until the last sufferer had been relieved did Jesus cease His work. It was far into the night when the multitude departed, and silence settled down upon the home of Simon. The long, exciting day was past, and Jesus sought rest. But while the city was still wrapped in slumber, the Saviour, ‘rising up a great while before day, . . . went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 259.

The Secret of Jesus' Ministry

Read Mark 1:35–39. What important lessons can be taken from what Jesus did here?

Jesus arose before sunrise and went out to a quiet, deserted location to pray. Mark 1:35 emphasizes prayer as the focus of Jesus' action. All the other verbal forms in the sentence are in summary form—He got up, went out, and departed (all in the aorist tense in Greek, signifying completeness). But the verb “to pray” is in the imperfect tense, a form used to express, particularly here, an ongoing process. *He was praying, He kept on praying.* The text also emphasizes how early it was when Jesus went out, implying that His time of prayer alone was extensive.

Throughout the Gospels, we meet Jesus as a man of prayer (*see Matt. 14:23, Mark 6:46, John 17*). This appears to be one of the key secrets in the power of Jesus' ministry.

Read Luke 6:12. What does this teach about Jesus' prayer life?

Many Christians have set times for prayer. This practice is good and right, but it also can become a routine, almost something done by rote. One way to break out of a set mold is to change the time of prayer occasionally or to pray longer than usual at times. The point is not to lock yourself into some kind of formula that can never change.

Peter and his companions did not accompany Jesus to the place of prayer. Perhaps they knew of the location because they did find Him. Their note that everyone was looking for Jesus suggested that He followed up the exciting experience of the previous day with more healing and teaching. Surprisingly, Jesus demurs and points to a wider field of service to other locations. “But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth’ ” (*Mark 1:38, NKJV*).

If Jesus Himself needed to spend so much time in prayer, what about ourselves, and how much time should we spend in prayer? What does Jesus' example say to us?

Can You Keep a Secret?

Read Mark 1:40–45. What does this teach us about Jesus and how He related to the marginalized in society?

Leprosy as described in this passage, and throughout the Old Testament as well, did not refer only to what is known today as Hansen's disease (bona fide leprosy). The biblical terminology would be better translated as a "dreaded skin disease" and could include other epidermic ailments, as well. Hansen's disease may have come to the ancient Near East about the third century B.C. (see David P. Wright and Richard N. Jones, "Leprosy," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 [New York: Doubleday, 1992], pp. 277–282). Hence, the leper referred to in this passage could well have had Hansen's disease, though we don't know for sure exactly what the man suffered from, only that it was bad.

The leper places faith in Jesus that He can cleanse him. According to Leviticus 13, a leper was ritually unclean and had to avoid contact with others (see *Lev. 13:45, 46*).

Jesus, however, is moved with compassion toward the man and touches him. "Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed' " (*Mark 1:41, NKJV*). This action should have defiled Jesus until the evening, when He would be required to bathe to become ritually pure again (*compare with Leviticus 13–15*). But Mark is clear that Jesus' action of touching the sick man cleanses him of his leprosy. Thus, Jesus was not defiled by touching the man.

Jesus sends the man to a priest with the instruction to offer the sacrifice Moses commanded for such cases in Leviticus 14. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, Jesus stands as a defender and supporter of what Moses taught (see *Mark 7:10; Mark 10:3, 4; Mark 12:26, 29–31*). This view stands in sharp contrast to the religious leaders, who in the passages in Mark 7, 10, and 12 are subverting the original intent of the teachings given through Moses. These details explain Jesus' command in Mark 1:44 to silence the man. If he were to tell of his cure by Jesus, it might prejudice the decision of the priest in bias against Jesus.

But the cleansed leper does not seem to understand this, and in disobedience to Jesus' command, he spreads the news far and wide, making it impossible for Jesus to enter towns openly for His ministry.

How can we be careful not to do things that could hamper the spread of the gospel, no matter how good our intentions?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “At Capernaum,” pp. 252–261; “Thou Canst Make Me Clean,” pp. 262–266, in *The Desire of Ages*.

What picture of Jesus does Mark 1 present? Jesus has authority to call disciples, and they respond. He is holy in contrast to unclean spirits under Satan. A great battle is going on between good and evil, and Jesus has more power than the demons. Jesus has compassion for sick people and helps them, touching them when perhaps no one else would.

“Jesus in the synagogue spoke of the kingdom He had come to establish, and of His mission to set free the captives of Satan. He was interrupted by a shriek of terror. A madman rushed forward from among the people, crying out, ‘Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art; the Holy One of God.’

“All was now confusion and alarm. The attention of the people was diverted from Christ, and His words were unheeded. This was Satan’s purpose in leading his victim to the synagogue. But Jesus rebuked the demon, saying, ‘Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.’ . . . He who had conquered Satan in the wilderness of temptation was again brought face to face with His enemy. The demon exerted all his power to retain control of his victim. To lose ground here would be to give Jesus a victory. . . . But the Saviour spoke with authority, and set the captive free.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 255, 256.

Meanwhile, our Lord carried on a busy ministry, moving from place to place, almost constantly in touch with many people. How did He maintain a calm and steady approach to ministry and people? It was doubtless through His daily experience of prayer.

Think about what might be a workable schedule for you in regard to time for prayer and study of the Scriptures. Find what works for you, and take that time to develop a peaceful spirit, guided by the Spirit and the Word of God.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Talk in class about the question of prayer and why it is so important in the Christian life. What are some of the questions people have about the purpose and efficacy of prayer?
- ② In class, talk about cases in which it might be best, at certain times, not to say too much about our faith. When might that be the prudent thing to do, and yet, how can we do that without compromising our witness?
- ③ Who are the “lepers” in your culture today? How could your church reach out and “touch” these individuals to bring the gospel to them?

Bewildered Shaman, Part 2

By ANDREW McCHESNEY

Father rested for several days at the house of his daughter, Divya, in Nepal. He was exhausted from his jobs as construction worker and shaman.

Father watched with interest when the Seventh-day Adventist pastor of Divya's church came to visit and brought several church members with him. He listened as they sang several songs about his daughter's new God, Jesus.

Then the pastor opened a Bible and read Jesus' invitation, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (*Matt. 11:28, NKJV*). Father felt a yearning in his heart to know this God. He wanted rest. Then the pastor read John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Father's heart was touched. He had never heard of a God who had given His only Son to save humanity. He realized that there was no need for animal sacrifices because God sent His Son as the ultimate sacrifice for all time.

After the pastor left, Father asked Divya for a Bible. He wanted to read those two verses for himself. But when he looked, he couldn't find them. Divya also couldn't find them, so she called the pastor. He showed how to find the verses. Father was delighted, and he began to read the Bible daily. On Sabbath, he went to church with Divya and his wife, who had been cured of her mysterious illness after Divya prayed. Father didn't understand anything at church or in the Bible. But he took the Bible when he left Mother with Divya and returned home to a neighboring town a short time later.

At home, he resumed work as a shaman and construction worker during the day. At night, he read the Bible. As the months passed, his desire to worship spirits vanished. He decided to leave the shaman profession.

"My life is different," he told the townspeople. "I don't want to do these rituals."

The townspeople were furious when they learned that Father had become a Christian. They accused him of betraying his ancestors. Father didn't mind. He was sure that he had found the one and only God.

Today, Father and Mother are active Seventh-day Adventists. Father, whose full name is Krishna Lama, is 66 years old and a deacon.



"I used to think that my home was where my ancestors lived," he said. "But now I feel like the church is my home. With Jesus, my future is bright."

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.

Controversies



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Mark 2:1–3:6, Micah 6:6–8, 1 Sam. 21:1–6, Mark 3:20–35, Luke 12:53, Luke 14:26.*

Memory Text: “And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.’ ” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV*).

Mark 2:1–3:6 contains five stories that illustrate Jesus’ teaching in contrast to the teaching of the religious leaders. The stories are in a specific pattern in which each successive story links to the one before via a topical parallel. The final story circles around and reconnects with the first one.

Each one of these stories illustrates aspects of who Jesus is, as exemplified by the statements in Mark 2:10, 17, 20, 28. The lessons for Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday will delve deeper into the meaning of these accounts and Christ’s statements in them.

Mark 3:20–35 is the subject for study on Wednesday and Thursday.

What we will see, too, is an example of a technique the Gospel writer uses that is called “sandwich stories.” This narrative pattern appears at least six times in Mark. In each case some important aspect of the nature of Jesus and His role as Messiah, or the nature of discipleship, is the focus.

This week, we will read some accounts about Jesus and see what we can learn from them.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 20.*

Healing a Paralytic

Read Mark 2:1–12. What was the paralytic looking for when he was brought to Jesus, and what did he receive?

The man was paralyzed; his four friends, therefore, had to carry him to Jesus. After they tore through the roof and let the man down into Jesus' presence, Mark 2:5 notes that Jesus *saw* their faith. How can faith be visible? Like love, it becomes visible in actions, as the persistence of the friends openly illustrates.

The man's obvious need was physical. However, when he comes into Jesus' presence, the first words Jesus pronounces refer to forgiveness of sins. The man speaks not a word during the entire scene. Instead, it is the religious leaders who object (in their minds) to what Jesus has just said. They consider His words blasphemous, slandering God, and taking on prerogatives that belong only to God.

Jesus meets the objectors on their own ground by using a typical rabbinic style of argumentation called "*lesser to greater*." It is one thing to say that a person's sins are forgiven; it is another thing to actually make a paralyzed man walk. If Jesus can make the man walk by the power of God, then His claim to forgive sins finds affirmation.

Read Micah 6:6–8. How does this text explain what was happening between Jesus and the leaders?

These religious leaders lost sight of what really mattered: justice, mercy, and walking humbly before God. So obsessed with defending their understanding of God, they were blinded to God's working right before their eyes. Nothing indicated that the men changed their minds about Jesus even though He gave them more than enough evidence to know that He was from God, not only by letting them know that He could read their minds (no simple feat in and of itself) but also by healing the paralytic in their presence in a way that they could not deny.

How can we be careful to avoid the same trap that these men fell into: being so obsessed with the forms of religion that they lost sight of what really mattered in true religion (see James 1:27)?

Calling Levi and the Question of Fasting

Read Mark 2:13–22. Who was Levi, the son of Alphaeus, and why would there be an objection to him becoming a disciple of Jesus?

Tax collectors in Jesus' day were civil servants under the local or Roman government. They were unpopular among the Jewish population in Judea because they often exacted more than required and became rich off their countrymen. A Jewish commentary on religious law, the *Mishnah* tractate *Tohoroth* says, "If taxgatherers entered a house [all that is within it] becomes unclean."

Thus, it is not surprising that the scribes inquire disapprovingly, "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

How did Jesus respond to their question? He doesn't reject it. Instead, He turns it on its head, indicating that people who are sick, not who are healthy, need a doctor. He thereby claims the moniker of spiritual doctor, the One who can heal the sin-sick soul. And should not a doctor go where the sick are?

Mark 2:18–22 picks up a new theme. It is the central story of these five stories dealing with controversy. Where the previous section included a feast provided by Levi, this next story revolves around the question of fasting. It consists of a query as to why Jesus' disciples do not fast when John the Baptist's and the Pharisees' do. Jesus responds with an illustration or parable in which He compares His presence to a wedding feast. It would be an extremely odd wedding if the guests all fasted. But Jesus does predict a day when the bridegroom will be taken away, an allusion to the Cross. There will be plenty of time for fasting then.

Jesus continues with two illustrations that highlight the contrast between His teaching and that of the religious leaders—unshrunk cloth on an old garment and new wine in old wineskins. What an interesting way to contrast the teaching of Christ and the religious leaders. It shows just how corrupted the ways of the teachers had become. Even true religion can be turned into darkness if people are not careful.

Who are those who today might be looked upon as the tax collectors were in Jesus' day? How do we adjust our thinking regarding them?

The Lord of the Sabbath

In Mark 2:23, 24, the Pharisees accuse the disciples of breaking the Sabbath. According to Jewish tradition, 39 forms of labor were forbidden on the Sabbath, which, in the Pharisees' minds, included what the disciples had done.

Read Mark 2:23–28. How does Jesus counter the charge brought by the Pharisees?

Jesus responds with the story of David's eating the sacred shewbread (*1 Sam. 21:1–6*). The shewbread was removed on the Sabbath; so, David's journey may well have been an emergency escape on the Sabbath. Jesus argues that if David and his men were justified in eating the shewbread, then Jesus' disciples are justified in plucking and eating grain.

Jesus further indicates that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity, not the other way around, and that the basis for His claim is that He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Read Mark 3:1–6. How does this story illustrate Jesus' point that the Sabbath was made for humanity?

Again Jesus faces controversy with the religious leaders over the Sabbath. (Notice, however, that the controversy is never over the Sabbath day itself.) The religious leaders want to accuse Jesus if He heals on the Sabbath. Jesus does not shy away from confronting them. He sets up a contrast between doing good or doing harm, saving life or killing. The answer to His question is obvious; doing good and saving life are much more appropriate as Sabbath activities.

Jesus proceeds to heal the man, which angers His opponents, who immediately start to plan His demise. The irony of the story is that those looking to catch Jesus in Sabbath breaking were themselves breaking the Sabbath by plotting His death that same day.

What principles of Sabbath keeping can you take away from these accounts and the challenges that we face in the modern age in keeping Sabbath?

Sandwich Story: Part 1

Read Mark 3:20–35. What connection do you see between the two stories intertwined in this passage?

This passage is the first “sandwich story” in Mark, where one story is begun and then is interrupted by another story, with the first story completed only afterward.

The outer story is about Jesus’ relatives setting out to take charge of Him because they think He is out of His mind (*Mark 3:21*). The inner story is about the scribes from Jerusalem charging Jesus with being in collusion with the devil. (Today’s study focuses on the inner story found in Mark 3:22–30.)

In Mark 3:22, the scribes bring the charge that Jesus’ healing power comes from the devil. Jesus responds first with an overarching question: “How can Satan cast out Satan?” It does not make sense that Satan would work against himself. Jesus proceeds to speak about division within a kingdom, a house, and Satan himself, showing how absurd such division would be for their success. But then the Lord turns the tables and talks about binding a strong man in order to plunder his house. In this last example, Jesus is the thief entering Satan’s house, binding the prince of darkness to set his captives free.

Read Mark 3:28–30. What is the unpardonable sin, and what does that mean?

The unpardonable sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit, calling the work of the Spirit the work of the devil. Notice that in Mark 3:30 the reason Jesus makes His statement in Mark 3:28, 29 is because the scribes are saying that He has an unclean spirit when in reality He has the Holy Spirit. If you call the work of the Holy Spirit the work of the devil, then you will not listen to the Holy Spirit because no one in his or her right mind wants to follow the devil’s guidance.

Why does the fear that you might have committed the “unpardonable sin” reveal that you have not committed it? Why is the fear itself evidence that you haven’t?

Sandwich Story: Part 2

Read Mark 3:20, 21. What experience led Jesus' family to consider Him out of His mind?

A charge of mental instability is quite serious. Typically this arises from experiences where a person is a threat to his or her own safety. Jesus' family felt this way about Him because He was so busy that He did not take time to stop to eat. They set out to take charge of Him, and that is where the outer story of the sandwich breaks off, interrupted by the inner story about the scribes charging Jesus with collusion with the devil.

A strange parallel exists between the outer and inner stories of this sandwich story. Jesus' own family seems to have a view of Him parallel to that of the scribes. The family says He is crazy. The scribes say He is in league with the devil.

Read Mark 3:31–35. What does Jesus' family want, and how does He respond?

This scene may seem strange. If your mother or other family members come to see you, should you not meet with them? The problem was that Jesus' family at the time was not in tune with the will of God. Jesus recognized that truth, and in this passage He redefines family. Those who do the will of God are His brother, sister, and mother. He is the Son of God, and those who align themselves with the will of God become His family.

The two stories of this Markan sandwich story together contain a deep irony. In the inner story, Jesus says that a house divided against itself cannot stand. At first glance, it seems that in the outer story, Jesus' own house—His family—is divided against itself! But Jesus resolves this conundrum by His redefinition of family. His real family are those who do the will of God along with Him (*see Luke 12:53, Luke 14:26*).

Many times throughout history, Christians have found themselves alienated from their own relatives. It is a difficult experience. This passage in Mark reveals that Jesus went through the same trouble. He understands what it is like and can comfort those who feel this often painful isolation.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Levi-Matthew,” pp. 272–280; “The Sabbath,” pp. 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“When questioned, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?’ Jesus answered, ‘What man shall there be among *you*, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days.’ Matt. 12:10–12.

“The spies dared not answer Christ in the presence of the multitude, for fear of involving themselves in difficulty. They knew that He had spoken the truth. Rather than violate their traditions, they would leave a man to suffer, while they would relieve a brute because of the loss to the owner if it were neglected. Thus greater care was shown for a dumb animal than for man, who is made in the image of God. This illustrates the working of all false religions. They originate in man’s desire to exalt himself above God, but they result in degrading man below the brute. Every religion that wars against the sovereignty of God defrauds man of the glory which was his at the creation, and which is to be restored to him in Christ. Every false religion teaches its adherents to be careless of human needs, sufferings, and rights. The gospel places a high value upon humanity as the purchase of the blood of Christ, and it teaches a tender regard for the wants and woes of man. The Lord says, ‘I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.’ Isa. 13:12.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 286, 287.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What strategies or practices help you and your local church stay sensitive to silently suffering people like the paralytic in Mark 2?
- ❷ Think about how blinded by hatred, tradition, dogma, and religion in general the religious leaders who rejected Jesus had become so that even His miracles didn’t open their minds to Him. How can we as a people be careful that something similar doesn’t happen to us?
- ❸ How can your local church become “family” for those whose immediate genetic family may have rejected them over their faith?
- ❹ Dwell more on the question of the “unpardonable sin.” In class, discuss what it means and how we can be sure not to commit it.

“Except by Fasting and Prayer”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Fourteen-year-old Payel changed after a 14-year-old friend committed suicide. Once outgoing, she sat quietly in the corner. Then she began to scream, shiver, and shake for no apparent reason. Terrified, she confided that she was being visited by someone who looked like her dead friend.

“Come with me,” the apparition told her. “I want to take you with me.”

Twice Payel tried to leap off a balcony, but her parents stopped her.

In desperation, the parents called Rustam for help. Rustam was a Global Mission pioneer who had planted a church in a previously unentered area of their Asian city. No one in Payel’s family was a Christian except an aunt, and she had told the parents about Rustam. Rustam explained that Payel was not seeing her dead friend but an evil spirit.

“We need to pray to Jesus,” he said.

Rustam took four church members to Payel’s home to pray. But Payel wouldn’t sit still. She screamed, flung her hands up and down, and stomped her feet. The visitors sang hymns, but every time they mentioned the name of Jesus, she shrieked, “Stop! I can’t breathe! Someone’s suffocating me!”

Rustam understood that Payel was possessed. He opened a Bible and read about Jesus casting out demons. He prayed. Then Payel became calm. She sat down, talked, and drank water. Rustam hoped that the spirit had left.

But later that night, the aunt called him at home. “Payel has started screaming and says she sees her friend again,” she said.

Rustam was puzzled. What had gone wrong? Then he remembered the Bible story in which Jesus’ disciples had been unable to cast out a spirit. When they asked why, Jesus replied, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (*Matt. 17:21, NKJV*). Rustam called several Global Mission pioneers, and they fasted and prayed for two days. Then he returned to Payel’s house with a group that included a Seventh-day Adventist pastor.

When Payel saw the visitors, she tried to flee. It took four people to hold her down. But they couldn’t keep her quiet. She screamed as the visitors sang hymns for 30 minutes. Then she slipped into unconsciousness as the pastor preached about the power of Jesus from the Bible. Rustam sprinkled water on her face until she woke up. Someone gave her water to drink.

Since that visit, Rustam has returned to worship and pray with Payel and her family every two weeks. Payel has not seen the apparition again. She has returned to her old self.

“We were not ready the first time we visited her,” Rustam said. “We only were ready the second time because Jesus teaches, ‘This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.’”

Thank you for your prayers for Global Mission pioneers who, like Rustam, face huge challenges planting churches among unreached people groups around the world. Learn more about Global Mission pioneers on the Adventist Mission website: bit.ly/GMPioneers.

Parables



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 4:1–34, James 1:21, Isa. 6:1–13, Ps. 104:12, Dan. 4:10–12.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to them, ‘Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.’ ” (*Mark 4:24, 25, NKJV*).

This week's study is on the parables in Mark 4. The Gospel of Mark has the fewest parables of any of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

For many years scholars have argued over the meaning and interpretation of Jesus' parables: How to interpret what they mean, why Jesus used them, what kind of lessons they were intended to reveal, and how literally they were to be taken, or whether they were purely allegory, and so forth.

Obviously we are not going to solve all these issues in this week's lesson. Instead, we are going to look at them and, by God's grace, come away with an understanding of the points Jesus made through these parables.

Mark 4 has just five parables—the sower, the lamp, the measure, the growing seed, and the mustard seed. The majority of the chapter revolves around the parable of the sower. This parable is told first, followed by the reason for parables, and then the interpretation of the parable. This three-step pattern will be the focus of the studies for Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Then the other parables will be the subject of study on Wednesday and Thursday.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 27.

The Parable of the Sower

Read Mark 4:1–9. What are the different soils like, and what happens to the seed that falls on them?

When reading the parables of Jesus in the Gospels, people often want to jump quickly to the interpretation. After all, is that not the point of these stories—to teach some spiritual truth for Christian life? Yes, but sometimes, other than in brief comments such as “The kingdom of God is like,” or “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” Jesus does not explain the parable.

Consequently, it is good to slow down and simply analyze the story itself in order to catch the direction its various narrative characteristics point toward. Doing this with the parable of the sower yields a variety of ideas. The seed is the same in each case but falls on four different types of soil. The type of soil greatly influences the outcome for the seed. Instead of one continuous story, the parable is actually four individual stories told to completion in each setting. The length of time for completing the story lengthens with each successive story.

The seed that falls on the road is eaten immediately by the birds. “ ‘And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it’ ” (*Mark 4:4, NKJV*).

The seed that falls on the rocky ground takes a few days or weeks to reach its failed outcome, which included being scorched by the sun.

The seed that falls on the weedy soil takes longer still to reach its unproductive end, choked as it was by thorns.

The seed that falls on the good soil takes the longest of all, presumably an entire growing season, as is the normal pattern for a crop.

Three of the stories are about failure; only the last is about success, a good abundant crop. The length of the stories, the longer and longer period of time for each successive story, and the fact that only one story is about success, all point to the risk of failure but the abundant outcome of success.

The parable seems to point to the cost of discipleship and the risks involved, but it also highlights the abundant reward of following Jesus.

What are some other spiritual lessons that we can learn from nature?

Jesus' Interpretation

Jesus was done with the parable and gave no immediate explanation. According to the text (*Mark 4:1*), Jesus spoke it before “a great multitude.” Only later, with a smaller group (*Mark 4:10*), did He explain what the parable meant.

Read Mark 4:13–20. How did Jesus interpret the parable of the sower?

Jesus interprets the parable by identifying the items external to the story that a number of the details in the story stand for. The interpretation indicates that the story is a loose allegory with references to the real world, not necessarily a reference for every single detail.

Jesus identifies the seed as “the word.” This would refer to the Word of God, particularly as preached by Jesus. James 1:21 states, “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (*ESV*).

The different soils are different types of listeners. In Jesus' interpretation, everyone hears the Word; that is, all the types of soil have seed sown on them. But the reception is different. Path soil is hard, and the birds snatch away the seed. Jesus links this to Satan's taking away the truth. Rocky soil has little depth. Jesus links this to people with shallow commitments; they have not counted the cost of discipleship. Weedy soil chokes the seed sown on it. Jesus explains that this stands for the cares of life and riches that choke out the Word. But the good soil stands for those who hear the Word and receive it so that it grows and produces an abundant crop.

The longest explanations are for the rocky ground and the weedy ground. In describing the rocky-ground hearers, Jesus points to contrasting elements—they receive the Word with joy but are temporary disciples. When persecution comes, they fall away. The weedy-ground hearers are a contrast. They do not fall away because of hard times but because of good times—their focus is on the things of the world instead of the kingdom of God. Their cares and concerns revolve around what the world has to offer.

Consider your own life. Are any characteristics of the path, the rocky ground, or weedy ground creeping into your experience? This could happen more subtly than you realize. What choice can you make to change, if need be?

The Reason for the Parables

Read Mark 4:10–12. Why did Jesus teach in parables?

A surface reading of these verses gives the impression that Jesus taught in parables to keep outsiders in the dark. But such a perspective does not fit with Jesus' actions elsewhere in Mark. In Mark 3:5, 6, Jesus is grieved by the hard hearts of the religious leaders. In Mark 3:22–30, Jesus takes the arguments of the scribes seriously and explains in detail why they are mistaken. In Mark 12:1–12, the religious leaders understand that Jesus' parable of the tenants is about them. It is actually a warning of where their plot against Him is heading and the terrible consequences to follow. If He had no concern for them, He would not warn them. Consequently, Jesus' words here in Mark 4 need a closer look in order to recognize what His point is. Jesus is paraphrasing Isaiah 6:9, 10.

Read Isaiah 6:1–13. What happens to Isaiah here, and what is the message he is given to take to Israel?

Isaiah sees a vision of God in the temple and is overwhelmed by God's glory and his own uncleanness. God cleanses him and commissions him with a shocking message. Just like Mark, it sounds out of step with the rest of Isaiah where there is much comfort for God's people.

In Isaiah 6 the message is meant to shock the people awake so they will turn from their evil ways. In Mark the key for understanding Jesus' words is found in Mark 3:35. To understand Jesus' words and teachings, one must do the will of God (*Mark 3:35*). This brings that person into the family of Jesus. Those who have already decided that Jesus is possessed by the devil will not listen.

The point of Jesus' quotation from Isaiah 6 is not that God is keeping people out but that their own preconceived ideas and hardness of heart prevent them from accepting the saving truth.

This truth is the overarching concept of the parable of the sower. Each one chooses what type of soil to be. All decide for themselves whether or not they will surrender to Jesus. In the end, we each choose.

Lamp and Measuring Basket

Read Mark 4:21–23. What is Jesus’ special emphasis in the parable of the lamp?

Houses in that part of the world in Jesus’ day varied in size and construction, all depending on location and wealth. The houses came to follow a Greek pattern of being built around a courtyard but with varying levels of sophistication. Or Jesus may be talking about smaller houses of peasants. Big house or small house, the issue is this principle: one day the truth about Jesus will be revealed.

Jesus asks two questions in Mark 4:21. The first one expects a negative answer—“The lamp is not brought to be placed under the basket or under the bed, is it?” The second question expects a positive answer—“It is brought to be placed on the lampstand, isn’t it?” Jesus presents an absurd, almost humorous scenario to make His point. Lamps are for giving light, or they lose their purpose. Mark 4:22 explains the parable by referencing the idea of secrets being made public. Anyone whose email or computer has been hacked understands the possibility of secrets being made public! But what Jesus is talking about is the gospel.

Read Mark 4:24, 25. What lesson is Jesus conveying with the parable of the measuring basket?

In many locations in the world, fresh produce is sold in open markets. Sellers typically have a device for measuring the product they are selling. It is a common practice of such sellers to add just a bit more to a sale to help the buyer feel he or she is being treated fairly. Jesus picks up on how good sellers treat buyers to make a point about openness to the truth. If one is open and follows the light, he or she will get even more. But if he or she rejects the light, even what they had before will be taken away.

How can we better understand the principle that with what measure you use, it will be measured to you? Think about it in all your dealings with others.

Parables of Growing Seed

Read Mark 4:26–29. What is the primary focus of this parable?

Most of the Gospel of Mark has parallels in either Matthew or Luke or both. But that is not the case with this parable. It is unique to Mark. The focus of this brief parable is the growing process. Jesus indicates that this is how the kingdom of God works. Humans have a part to play, but the real growth is the work of God. It is not an endless process. The story comes to an abrupt end with the maturation of the grain. Just so, the return of Christ a second time will suddenly bring an end to our world's history.

Read Mark 4:30–32. What is the important stress of the parable of the mustard seed?

This parable stresses how something very tiny grows into something remarkably large. Mustard seeds measure typically one to two millimeters in diameter (.039 to .079 inches). The plant described here is probably the black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), which has tiny seeds (more than 700 seeds in one gram). While not the smallest seeds in the world, they are quite small, especially in comparison to the plant they produce, which can grow as large as three meters (ten feet) tall. Jesus notes that birds even nest in the branches of the mustard plant. This last reference is an allusion to Psalm 104:12, with an allusion to Daniel 4:10–12, as well. Psalm 104 speaks of God's power in creating the world, and Daniel 4 represents Nebuchadnezzar as a great tree under which all the world finds shade and food.

The point Jesus makes is that the kingdom of God, which began very small, will become large and impressive. People in Jesus' day may have looked down on the dusty itinerant preacher from Galilee with His band of disciples, but time has shown that His kingdom of grace continues to expand throughout the world.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14, NKJV). Consider what the “church” was like when Jesus made that prediction. Why is this such a remarkable and faith-affirming prediction?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Sower Went Forth to Sow,” pp. 33–61, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“True holiness is wholeness in the service of God. This is the condition of true Christian living. Christ asks for an unreserved consecration, for undivided service. He demands the heart, the mind, the soul, the strength. Self is not to be cherished. He who lives to himself is not a Christian.

“Love must be the principle of action. Love is the underlying principle of God’s government in heaven and earth, and it must be the foundation of the Christian’s character. This alone can make and keep him steadfast. This alone can enable him to withstand trial and temptation.

“And love will be revealed in sacrifice. The plan of redemption was laid in sacrifice—a sacrifice so broad and deep and high that it is immeasurable. Christ gave all for us, and those who receive Christ will be ready to sacrifice all for the sake of their Redeemer. The thought of His honor and glory will come before anything else.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 48, 49.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 “Love must be the principle of action. Love is the underlying principle of God’s government in heaven and earth.” How does the Cross reveal this amazing truth to us? In our lives, how can we reflect this kind of love? Why must we?
- 2 How would you respond to someone who insisted that Jesus told parables to keep outsiders in the dark? Why would Jesus, who died for every human being (*see 1 John 2:2*), deliberately keep in the dark people whom He had died on the cross to save?
- 3 A lamp is supposed to be on a lampstand, not under a basket (*Mark 4:21*). Apply this principle to your church’s engagement with your local community. How can you lift the light up higher?
- 4 Consider the parable of the growing seed (*Mark 4:26–29*). What part do humans play in helping the gospel seed to grow, and what part does God play? Though we obviously play a role, how can we still make sure we are totally dependent upon God? Could this attitude of total dependence perhaps be part of what we need to do in order to grow?

Sparks Over the Sabbath

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father wasn't worried when Mother got baptized after attending Seventh-day Adventist meetings at their town schoolhouse in Armenia.

Father wasn't worried when his daughter, Anush, and her sister started going to Adventist summer camps. He even drove them to camp.

Father also wasn't worried when Anush, as a 17-year-old university student, decided to get baptized and join the Adventist Church.

But he was furious when the university called to complain that Anush was skipping classes on Sabbath. Students missed classes for various reasons, and the university didn't mind that Anush wanted to keep the Sabbath. The problem was that other students kept their reasons to themselves, but Anush unabashedly announced her absence as a matter of religious liberty.

"If she doesn't want to go to class, then she doesn't have to go to class," a university administrator told Father. "But why does she have to make a big deal about it? She is hurting the university's reputation."

Father was appalled. He felt like his daughter's faith was reflecting badly on the family. He reprimanded her when she came home.

"Why did you have to announce that at the university?" he asked. "If this is the way that things are going to be, I forbid you from going to church."

He also prohibited her from getting baptized.

"I'm responsible for protecting you," he said. "When you are older, you can make your own decisions. But for now, I'm your guardian."

Anush didn't argue. Armenia is a largely patriarchal society where a father's word is law. But she wondered where the line was between the fourth and fifth commandments. Could she go to church and honor Father at the same time? She had decided before God to get baptized, but she worried that Father might forbid Mother from going to church if she insisted. Mother suggested that Anush wait. She found support for a delay in Numbers 30:3–5, which says if a daughter makes a vow while living in her father's house, and her father approves, then God accepts it. But if the daughter makes a vow that the father overrules, then God releases the daughter from the vow.

"I think God supports the decision to wait to get baptized," Mother said.

Anush waited. It was a difficult four years at the university. She believed that Father was a good man who only wanted the best for her. But she also longed to go to church and get baptized. She found joy in the baptism of a classmate, a woman who had learned about the Sabbath when she refused to study on that day. The classmate became Anush's first soul for Christ.

Part of last quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush's in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Father changes his mind about Anush's baptism.

Miracles Around *the* Lake



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 4:35–41, Ps. 104:1–9, Mark 5:1–43, Num. 27:17.*

Memory Text: “However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you’ ” (*Mark 5:19, NKJV*).

Jesus' ministry was largely focused in Galilee, especially in and around the Sea of Galilee, a lake approximately 13 miles (21 kilometers) long and 8 miles (13 kilometers) wide. It is the largest body of water in the area and was the center of life for people living nearby.

Mark 4 ends with Jesus and His disciples traveling across the Sea of Galilee. A storm arises that Jesus calms by speaking to the wind and waves. Mark 6 ends with a similar scene, but this time with Jesus walking on the water toward His disciples in the boat. In between these scenes on the water are numerous miracles of Jesus that were done on land and His disciples' first missionary activity. These stories are the subject of this week's study.

The overarching characteristic of these dramatic stories is to let the reader see who Jesus is. He is the One able to calm a storm, cast out demons, heal a woman who simply touches His clothes, raise a dead girl, preach in His home town, send out His disciples on a preaching mission, feed with a few loaves and fish, and walk on water—incredible displays of power that are drawing the disciples closer to an understanding that He is the Son of God.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 3.

Calming a Storm

Read Mark 4:35–41. What happens in this story, and what lessons can we take from it about who Jesus is?

At the beginning of Mark 4, Jesus steps into a boat to teach the crowd on the shore. In Mark 4:10–12, it seems He may have gotten out of the boat and talked with the disciples privately. Now, after a long day of teaching, the disciples take Jesus in the boat “as He was,” in other words, very tired. He immediately falls asleep on the boat’s cushion, which would be in the stern of the boat. A great storm arises on the lake, and the boat is at risk of sinking when the disciples awake Him. Dramatically, Jesus commands the wind and waves to cease. A great calm settles over the lake. Understandably, the disciples are deeply afraid at the display of divine power.

Read Psalm 104:1–9. How does the picture of Yahweh here compare with Christ calming the storm?

The story in Mark 4:35–41 fits within a common biblical pattern: that of a “theophany”—the appearance of God or one of His angels. Five characteristics are common to these events: (1) the display of divine power, (2) human fear, (3) the command “Do not fear,” (4) the words of revelation for which God or the angel appeared, and (5) human response to the revelation. Four of the five are present in this story—the calming of the storm is the display of divine power, the disciples’ fear is the human fear. The question, “Why are you so afraid?” is the “Do not fear.” The disciples’ question, “Who then is this?” is the human response. What is missing is the words of revelation. This missing detail plays into the revelation/secret motif that runs through the entire book, where the truth about Jesus will come out. Here the disciples’ question, “Who then is this that the wind and the sea obey Him?” pushes the reader to fill in the answer of the missing words of revelation—He is the Son of God, the Lord Himself.

Think about the power of God. How can you learn to lean on this power and to trust it in all things in your life?

Can You Hear a Whisper Above a Shout?

Read Mark 5:1–20. What can we learn about the great controversy from this amazing account and, again, about the power of Jesus?

If the night before on the lake was unforgettable, the arrival at the Gadarenes the next morning was just as impressive. The history of the demon-possessed man is laid out in heartbreaking detail. Breaking away from all constraint, he lived in the tombs and cut himself with stones. “No one had the strength to subdue him” (*Mark 5:4, ESV*)—and then he met Jesus.

The man rushed at Jesus—no word about the disciples (they probably ran off). When the man came near to Jesus, he fell down before Him. The words “fell down” translate the Greek verb *proskyneō*, usually translated “to worship.” It seems the man recognized that Jesus was Someone who could help him. But when he opened his mouth, the demons inside him shouted at Jesus, who could hear the man’s whispered plea for help above the demons’ shouts. When they asked to be released into a herd of pigs, Jesus permitted them to enter the pigs. The entire herd, about two thousand, rushed down the embankment and drowned in the water. It was a financial disaster for the owners.

What’s amazing is that the demons knew exactly who Jesus was, and they also knew their impotence before Him, which was why they “begged Him” twice (*Mark 5:10, 12, NKJV*) to do what they asked. Obviously, they knew His power over them.

This story has two overriding characteristics. First, it is filled with items of uncleanness or ceremonial defilement according to Old Testament law. Tombs and the dead were unclean (*Num. 19:11, 16*). Bleeding made one unclean (*Leviticus 15*). Pigs were unclean (*Lev. 11:7*).

But, second, overarching this litany of defilement is the back-and-forth battle between good and evil forces. Jesus drives out the demons (two points for Jesus), the demons kill the pigs (two points for Satan). The townspeople ask Jesus to leave (two points for Satan), but Jesus sends back the healed man as His witness (three points for Jesus). In some ways this man was the unlikeliest missionary, but he definitely had an amazing story to tell.

What hope can you draw from this story about the power of Jesus to help you in whatever you are struggling with?

On the Roller Coaster With Jesus

Read Mark 5:21–24. What characteristics particularly stand out about Jairus?

Religious leaders such as Jairus were not typically friends with Jesus (see Mark 1:22; Mark 3:2, 6; and Luke 13:14). So it is likely that he is desperate. This desperation is exemplified by Jairus’s falling on his knees before Jesus. His plea is understandable to any parent—his daughter is dying. But he has faith that Jesus can help. Without a word, Jesus departs with the father to go to his home.

Read Mark 5:25–34. What interrupts the progress toward Jairus’s house?

The story suddenly cuts away to another scene that evokes pity—a woman experiencing 12 terrible years of sickness. This story of Jairus and the woman is the second sandwich story in Mark (see Mark 3:20–35, covered in lesson 3). In this story the contrasting characters, Jairus and the woman, come to Jesus for help.

The woman comes up behind Jesus and touches His clothing. Immediately, she is well. But Jesus stops and asks, “Who touched My clothes?”

The woman, who had been so sick, was suddenly well. Yet, she feared that Jesus was angry at what had happened. It was a wild ride for her emotions. But Jesus wanted to heal not only her body but also her soul.

Then, back to Jairus (see Mark 5:35–43). It was a wild ride of emotions for the synagogue ruler, as well. Jesus allowed no one else to go with Him and the parents except Peter, James, and John. Jesus states that the girl is not dead but asleep. He casts out all the mourners and goes into the room where the dead girl lay. Taking her hand, He says, “*Talitha koum.*” Mark translates these words, “Little girl, get up.” Actually, the word *Talitha* means “lamb” and thus would be a term of endearment for a child in the home. The command to keep things secret is part of the revelation/secret motif that runs through Mark and points toward who Jesus is and that, ultimately, He cannot remain hidden.

Rejection and Reception

Read Mark 6:1–6. Why did Jesus' hometown people reject Him?

Usually when a small-town person becomes popular, people back home bask in the attention. Not Nazareth. They were offended and surprised at Jesus' success as a teacher and healer. His shift from being a builder to a teacher seemed hard for them to accept. There also may have been some animosity that He did most of His miracles in Capernaum (see *Luke 4:23*). And He had already had a disagreement with His family (*Mark 3:31–35*).

Read Mark 6:7–30. How does the mission of the Twelve Apostles contrast with the beheading of John the Baptist?

This is the third sandwich story in Mark (see lesson 3). The mission of the Twelve Apostles in taking the message of Jesus everywhere stands in sharp contrast with the imprisonment and silencing of the Baptist. The disciples are told to travel light and depend on others for support. This strategy actually makes missionaries dependent on the people they serve, which helps bond them to those who need their message.

But the Baptist had no such bond with Herod and his family. John's death is told in shocking detail as the plotting Herodias takes advantage of Herod's ambivalence and lust. Herodias's daughter seems to add to the scandalous plan by the grotesque request that the Baptist's head be delivered on a platter.

The silencing of the clarion voice of the Baptist occurs at the same time as the Twelve Apostles proclaim repentance, just as the Baptist did. John's death foreshadows Jesus'. John is put to death, buried, and reported as risen from the dead (*Mark 6:14–16, 29*), as Jesus would be (*Mark 15 and 16*). These parallel stories point toward a coming crisis for Jesus and His followers.

Have you ever been rejected like Jesus was or experienced some hard-to-understand crisis? What did you learn from those experiences that could perhaps help you the next time something like that happens?

A Different Kind of Messiah

Read Mark 6:34–52. What was the problem Jesus and His disciples confronted, and how was it solved?

After the disciples return from their mission, they go with Jesus to a remote area on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee to rest. But a large crowd of 5,000 people arrives at the location before them. Jesus sees that they are like sheep without a shepherd. He teaches them the entire day.

In the evening the disciples recommend sending the crowd away to find food, but Jesus tells them to feed the crowd. The ensuing dialogue (*Mark 6:35–38*) illustrates that the disciples are thinking in human terms about how to solve the problem. However, Jesus resolves the problem by miraculously feeding the large crowd with just five loaves and two fish.

Characteristics of this story play into the popular concept of Messiah in Jesus' day. The expectation was that the Messiah would liberate Israel from her enemies and would bring in righteousness and peace. A large number of men in a desert setting would carry with it military overtones of revolt (*compare with John 6:14, 15; Acts 21:38*).

This notion is strengthened by the reference to Jesus' seeing the people like "sheep without a shepherd," a partial quotation from Numbers 27:17, where Moses asks God to appoint a leader for Israel after him. This phraseology about a shepherd for God's people appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, typically with reference to Israel's lack of a leader or king (*compare with 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 18:16; Ezek. 34:5, 6*).

Yet, Jesus does not meet their false expectations. Instead, He sends His disciples away and dismisses the crowd. And, rather than lead a rebellion against Rome, what does He do? He retreats to a mountain to pray—not what the people were expecting.

In place of the popular view of the Messiah as a king who liberates Israel, He comes to liberate people from the bondage of sin. His walking on the water displays to the disciples that He is, indeed, the Lord of nature. But He does not come to rule but to give His life as a ransom for many (*Mark 10:45*).

What should this story tell us about why a correct understanding of prophecy is important? If a false understanding of Christ's first coming led to disaster for some, how much more so could a false understanding do the same for some in regard to His second?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Peace, Be Still,” pp. 333–341; “The Touch of Faith,” pp. 342–348, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In all who are under the training of God is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Ps. 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found. And this is the effectual preparation for all who labor for God. Amid the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, the soul that is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. The life will breathe out fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

“Their dissatisfied hearts queried why, if Jesus could perform so many wondrous works as they had witnessed, could He not give health, strength, and riches to all His people, free them from their oppressors, and exalt them to power and honor? The fact that He claimed to be the Sent of God, and yet refused to be Israel’s king, was a mystery which they could not fathom. His refusal was misinterpreted. Many concluded that He dared not assert His claims because He Himself doubted as to the divine character of His mission. Thus they opened their hearts to unbelief, and the seed which Satan had sown bore fruit of its kind, in misunderstanding and defection.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 385.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How would you respond if someone asked you, *What has Jesus freed you from?*
- 2 Discuss why it is that God sometimes allows a good person such as John the Baptist to be placed in prison and to be executed. What solace or hope can we find, despite these difficult things?
- 3 What lessons are there in the feeding of the 5,000 for a church congregation with few resources?
- 4 Compare popular views of Jesus today with the picture of Him in Mark 5 and 6. That is, what about those who use Jesus to seek political power and to dominate others?

Unexpected Change of Heart

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

As a university student, Anush heard many times, “When you graduate, we will give you a job.” But when she graduated, no one offered her a job.

Father was deeply worried. In Armenia, fathers often help their children get jobs. Some fathers even bribe companies to hire their children. But Father didn’t give a bribe, and Anush was jobless in her town in Armenia.

Then she learned about an interdenominational missionary organization from the United States that was looking for an Armenian translator. The job came with a small salary and required her to relocate temporarily to a nearby city, Vanadzor. She asked Father for permission to work as a translator. Armenia is a largely patriarchal society where fathers are consulted on many decisions. Father thought that working with Americans would be a good opportunity for Anush. “Yes, you can go,” he said.

Anush got the job. She was happy. Four years earlier, Father had forbidden her from going to church and getting baptized. Now she was reading the Bible, sharing Jesus with others—and getting paid for it! As she worked, a desire grew in her heart to become a missionary. When the job ended, she returned home, wondering how she could fulfill her dream. After praying and fasting for three days, she read in Exodus that God told Moses at the burning bush to ask Pharaoh to let His people go to serve Him. She felt as though God was saying to her, “Go ask Father to let you serve Me.” She went to Father. “Would you allow me to study to become a missionary in another country?” she asked.

“No,” he said.

The next morning, Anush read in Exodus that Pharaoh rejected Moses’ request, but God sent Moses back, saying, “Go, talk to Pharaoh.”

She went to Father. “Would you allow me to study in a missionary program to serve God?” she asked.

“No,” he said.

She continued reading Exodus. Again and again, God sent Moses to talk to Pharaoh. Every time Moses talked to Pharaoh, Anush spoke to Father. Father became upset. One day, he exploded. “Can you just go to the local church and get baptized and forget about becoming a missionary in another country?” he exclaimed.

Anush was confused. She hadn’t anticipated such a response. She decided to go to church. She went to a nearby city where an Adventist church was holding evangelistic meetings. When the preacher asked who wanted to be baptized, she stood up. “Are you sure?” the preacher asked. “What about your father?”

Everyone knew her story. “Father is fine with my decision,” Anush said. Father didn’t stop the baptism. With joy, Anush plunged under the water.

Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush’s in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Anush sets her heart on praying Father into church.

Inside Out



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 7, Isa. 29:13, Exod. 20:12, Mark 8:11–21.*

Memory Text: “There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man’ ” (*Mark 7:15, NKJV*).

This week's study is Mark 7 and the first half of Mark 8. At the beginning of Mark 7, Jesus stirs up controversy by His rejection of religious tradition. However, He does it in a way that is strikingly supportive of something deeply relevant to Christian life today.

Jesus then presents a riddle that opens the door to a true understanding of what faith is really about.

After this He goes to Tyre and Sidon and has an encounter with a woman who was the only person in the Gospels to win an argument with Jesus. His encounter with her is unusual, and underneath it there are a few secret communications the woman picked up on. And because of her faith, Jesus granted her request.

Mark 7, with another healing, reveals the important truth that, however impressive miracles can be, they alone are often not enough to open hearts to truth. After all, what good did the miracles do for the religious leaders who were bent on rejecting Jesus?

In Mark 8 the study looks at the significance of bread as a symbol of teachings and traditions. These stories contain great lessons about the meaning and practice of religious life.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 10.

Human Traditions Versus God's Commands

Read Mark 7:1–13. What relevant truths are presented here?

One can imagine children studying this passage in Sabbath School and coming home to tell their mothers that they do not have to wash their hands before eating because Jesus said so. However, this story is not about hygiene.

In Jesus' day, many people in that land were very concerned with ritual purity. During the time between the testaments, the idea of washing hands in order to remain ritually pure was extended to common people, even though these rules originally applied only to the priests in the Old Testament (*Exod. 30:17–21*). It is in keeping with this concept that the religious leaders complain to Jesus about His disciples.

Jesus does not directly answer the question asked of Him. Instead, He defends His disciples in a two-pronged response. First, He quotes Isaiah's strong words rebuking a nation that honors God in word but whose heart is far from Him (*Isa. 29:13*). The quotation from Isaiah continues with the condemnation of putting human traditions in the place of divine commands.

The second part of Jesus' reply plays off the Isaiah quotation. The Lord cites the command of God to honor one's parents (*Exod. 20:12*)—that is, to take care of them in their old age—and contrasts this with a religious tradition where one could give something to God (a gift, *corban*), use it for oneself, but deny its use to elderly parents in need. One can just imagine the encounter: "I am sorry, father. I would love to help you, but I gave the money to the temple."

It is this type of hypocrisy that Jesus attacks uncompromisingly. They have placed human tradition above the Word of God and, in so doing, have sinned.

So what was the answer to the Pharisees' question? The response of Jesus implies that He does not find convincing their insistence on hand purification as necessary to be in accordance with the will of God. Instead, His response clearly supports the commandments of the Law over against human tradition. (*See also Mark 1:44; Mark 7:10, 11; Mark 10:3–8; and Mark 12:26, 29–31.*)

Might we have some "traditions" that perhaps conflict with the principles of God's law? If so, what might they be?

Clean Hands or Clean Heart?

Read Mark 7:14–19. What did Jesus mean by the riddle in Mark 7:15?

Jesus' words in this passage have been a conundrum for many as they ponder their relationship to the teachings of Leviticus 11 regarding clean and unclean foods. Is Jesus doing away with such distinctions? Are Seventh-day Adventists mistaken in teaching that church members who eat meat are to eat it only from the clean-animal list?

First, it would be odd for Jesus suddenly to dismiss Mosaic instructions in Mark 7:14–19 when He had just defended Moses against tradition in Mark 7:6–13. Second, the very tradition that the Pharisees were promoting does not have a basis in Old Testament teaching; the food laws, in contrast, do. Third, what Mark 7:19 means when it says that Jesus cleanses all food is not that the food laws are abolished but instead that the tradition of touch contamination that the Pharisees had made was invalid. This, for example, is that false notion that if you could be contaminated by coming in contact with Gentiles, then you also could be contaminated through contact with food that they had touched.

Read Mark 7:20–23. What did Jesus say causes contamination of a person?

In Mark 7:19, Jesus notes that food does not go into the heart but into the stomach and then passes out through the intestinal tract. But in Mark 7:21–23, He notes that evil comes from inside the heart, from the center of who a person is. He presents a list of vices that start from evil thoughts but then end in evil actions.

When the reference to the fifth commandment in Mark 7:10 is included with the vice list, every commandment of the second table of the Decalogue is there. Further, Jesus refers to vain worship, in Mark 7:7, the breaking of what is at the heart of the first four commands of the Decalogue. Thus, Jesus stands as a defender of the Law of God throughout this passage.

You might have the right theology, but who fully and ultimately has your heart?

Crumbs for the Dogs

Read Mark 7:24–30. What important lessons are found in this story?

Following on the heels of the challenging passage in yesterday's study, the story in this passage also raises troubling questions. Why does Jesus respond so harshly to this woman, in so many words calling her a dog?

He does not openly explain, but two characteristics in His response to her suggest what He is teaching. In Mark 7:27, He says that the children should be fed "first." If there is a "first," it seems logical that there would be a "second." The other characteristic is that Jesus uses a diminutive form of the word "dog," not meaning puppies but rather, in context, dogs allowed inside the house in contrast to street dogs. The woman picks up on these two markers in her response to Jesus, which helps explain her response.

The woman's response is rather pointed. She replies: "Lord, yet even the . . . dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs" (*Mark 7:28, NKJV*).

How did this woman come up with this response to Jesus? Certainly the love for her daughter drove her forward. But Jesus also encouraged her. He said "first," implying there could be a "second." Furthermore, He implied she was a dog under the table. Just as the dog was in the house under the table, so she was at Jesus' feet pleading for her daughter. So, she claimed a dog's right to the food that fell on the floor.

The woman's response reveals her faith. Calling the mighty miracle of healing her daughter from a distance a "crumb" indicated both that Jesus' power was especially great (if such a miracle were a crumb, what would a whole loaf be?) and that granting her request was a small matter for Him. Jesus was moved and granted her request.

"By His dealings with her, He has shown that she who has been regarded as an outcast from Israel is no longer an alien, but a child in God's household. As a child it is her privilege to share in the Father's gifts."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 401.

Why is prejudice against other races and nationalities contrary to the teaching of Jesus? How can we seek to be purged of this evil?

Tongue-tied

Read Mark 7:31–37. Who was brought to Jesus, and what did Jesus do for him?

Jesus did not take the shortest distance to return to Galilee from the region of Tyre and Sidon. It seems Jesus went north from the area of Tyre, up through the region of Sidon, then inland and down through the area northeast of the Sea of Galilee, finally arriving near the sea itself. It was a circuitous route, likely with additional time for Him to teach His disciples.

The text does not indicate exactly who brought the man to Jesus, but his problem was plain enough—he could not hear and had difficulty speaking. Loss of hearing isolates people from their surroundings, and profound deafness can make it challenging to learn how to speak. This man’s problem may have been longstanding.

Jesus understands the man’s predicament and takes him aside privately. The Lord’s manner of healing the man is curious, particularly for modern readers. He puts His fingers in the man’s ears, spits, touches his tongue and sighs. Jesus touches the affected parts of the man that He will heal, but why the sigh? “He sighed at thought of the ears that would not be open to the truth, the tongues that refused to acknowledge the Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 404.

Jesus miraculously restored the man’s hearing and enabled him to speak clearly. His sigh illustrates the limits that God has placed upon Himself in regard to the free choice of humanity. He will not force the will. All humans are free to choose whom they will have lead their life—the Prince of Life or the prince of darkness. Jesus could open deaf ears but would not force unbelieving hearts to acknowledge His messiahship.

This brief story also illustrates what God can do for those who willingly turn to Him. Perhaps you have experienced reticence at sharing your faith, feeling tongue-tied regarding just what to say. This miracle offers encouragement that the Lord Jesus can open your ears to be sensitive to others’ needs and share a ready word to lift them on their journey.

What do you do with the gifts you have been given regarding hearing and speaking (for they are gifts)? How are you using them?

Watch Out for Bad Bread

Read Mark 8:11–13. What approach by the Pharisees deeply disappointed Jesus?

Why not demonstrate His divine power and convince these cavalers? The problem goes back to the end of Mark 3, where Jesus speaks of the sin against the Holy Spirit. If one's ears are shut and eyes are closed, another miracle, even a sign from heaven, will not convince. It would just be dismissed like everything before. Even miracles are not enough to convince those determined not to believe.

Read Mark 8:14–21. What had the disciples forgotten, and what point did Jesus make from this?

Jesus takes the opportunity to warn the disciples against the “leaven” of the Pharisees and Herod (*Mark 8:15*), meaning their teachings (*compare with Matt. 16:12*).

But the disciples misunderstand and think that Jesus is talking about avoiding buying literal bread. As is typical when the disciples misunderstand, Jesus gives them instruction. The Lord asks a series of questions, the first several rhetorical in nature, expressing His disappointment that they have not understood His mission. His words are reminiscent of what He says in Mark 4:10–12 about outsiders who do not understand. His strong words are meant to wake the disciples from their spiritual lethargy.

In Mark 8:19, 20, He asks simple factual questions about how many baskets of fragments they had taken up after He fed the 5,000 (*Mark 6:30–44*) and also the 4,000 (*Mark 8:1–10*), which are meant to illustrate that they should have understood by now that mere limitation of resources is no barrier for the Lord's Messiah. His final question in Mark 8:21 is rhetorical once again: “ ‘Do you not yet understand?’ ” (*ESV*). After all, look at all that they have seen and experienced already with Jesus.

How can we learn to keep our hearts and minds open to the reality of God and to His love? Dwell on all the evidence that we have been given for God and for His love. At times, though, why does it seem so easy to doubt?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Tradition,” pp. 395–398; “Barriers Broken Down,” pp. 399–403; “The True Sign,” pp. 404–409, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Among the followers of our Lord today, as of old, how widespread is this subtle, deceptive sin! How often our service to Christ, our communion with one another, is marred by the secret desire to exalt self! How ready the thought of self-gratulation, and the longing for human approval! It is the love of self, the desire for an easier way than God has appointed that leads to the substitution of human theories and traditions for the divine precepts. To His own disciples the warning words of Christ are spoken, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.’

“The religion of Christ is sincerity itself. Zeal for God’s glory is the motive implanted by the Holy Spirit; and only the effectual working of the Spirit can implant this motive. Only the power of God can banish self-seeking and hypocrisy. This change is the sign of His working. When the faith we accept destroys selfishness and pretense, when it leads us to seek God’s glory and not our own, we may know that it is of the right order. ‘Father, glorify Thy name’ (*John 12:28*), was the keynote of Christ’s life, and if we follow Him, this will be the keynote of our life. He commands us to ‘walk, even as He walked;’ and ‘hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.’ 1 John 2:6, 3.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 409.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What Christian practices have you found that help to keep the heart clean?
- 2 Who are the “unclean” people in your community? What can you do to help draw them to the gospel?
- 3 Ponder, as a class, what you can do to foster sharing the gospel in simple ways with your neighbors.
- 4 Read Mark 8:1–10, the feeding of the 4,000. What difference does it make for the interpretation of this passage that the crowd was likely Gentile? Why shouldn’t it make any difference?
- 5 How can we diligently protect ourselves from the innate desire we all have, as fallen beings, to exalt ourselves?

Pleading for Father's Salvation

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

As a university student, Anush watched a Mexican film about a little boy who prayed for the conversion of his father. In the film, the boy said, "I believe that if I pray for my father every single day, he will by all means come to God." The boy prayed every day, and his father gave his heart to God.

Inspired by the story, Anush decided to pray every single day for Father to get baptized. She started praying four years before her own baptism. Two years after her baptism, she was still praying for him. She was sure that he would come to God. But when tensions began to simmer at home, she began to wonder how much longer she would have to wait.

After her baptism, Anush became very active in the Seventh-day Adventist church. She volunteered for church initiatives, sometimes receiving a small salary and other times nothing at all.

Father didn't complain because he had given Anush permission to go to church and get baptized. Armenia is a largely patriarchal society where many fathers are the decision-makers of the household.

But Father wanted the best for his daughter, and he couldn't understand why she was working for so little.

"The church is using you," he said. "You are talented, and they are using you without giving you what you deserve."

Anush began to sense tensions whenever she was at home, and she didn't like it. Whenever she was invited to participate in a church program, she asked Father for permission. Father allowed her to go but complained every time.

Anush decided to have a heart-to-heart talk with God.

"God, I know that Father will come to You, but I'm so tired," she said. "I'm giving You two options: either he comes to You or he comes to You."

Afterward, she told Mother, "Today, I'm praying earnestly to God. Join with me. We don't want this situation to continue. We want Father to go to church with us."

In Armenia, many mothers and children go to church without their husbands and fathers. Many families are comfortable with the arrangement as long as the men allow the mothers and children to go without persecution. But Anush was no longer happy with such an arrangement. She wanted Father to go to church, too.

Mother agreed to pray. Anush's hopes soared. She was sure that God would change Father's heart. She was confident it could happen at any time.

Part of last quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush's in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Father forbids Anush and Mother from going to church.

THE BOOK OF MARK FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS

A DEVOTIONAL
COMMENTARY



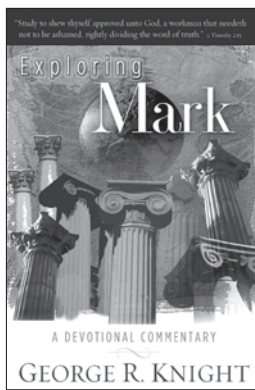
Exploring Mark

It was the worst of times. The believers faced the atrocities of an emperor gone mad. They were burned alive. Torn apart. Amid Roman horror, Mark decided the church needed some good news.

No one had ever written a Gospel before. Later Gospels enhanced the picture, but Mark set the mold. Other Gospels focused more on Jesus' teaching; but in Mark, the Man of Action marched rapidly through the Jewish milieu of first-century Palestine—all the way to the cross.

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A STORY TO TELL



Two options for sharing the mission story about Destiny in Sabbath School:

Option No. 1: Open the *Children's Mission* quarterly and show a photo of Destiny as you tell the story of how she was adopted by a Seventh-day Adventist family in Trinidad and Tobago. Give the children an image of Trinidad and Tobago's flag, printed in the quarterly, to color as they listen.

Option No. 2: Make Destiny's story come alive with photos of her, Trinidad and Tobago, and a mission map with Thirteenth Sabbath projects. At the end of the story, show a short video of Destiny singing praises to God.

How will you share the mission story next Sabbath?

Learn more in the *Children's Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/childrensmisson) and the youth and adult *Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/adultmission).



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Teaching Disciples: Part I



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 8:22–38; Matt. 20:29–34; John 12:25; Mark 9:1–50; Mal. 4:5, 6; Luke 9:30, 31.*

Memory Text: “When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (*Mark 8:34, NKJV*).

The first half of Mark focuses on who Jesus is. His powerful teaching and miracles point in the same direction: He is the Messiah. At this crucial turning point in the narrative, Jesus will ask the disciples who they believe Him to be.

Peter will give a clarion answer to that question, and Jesus will immediately begin to explain where His steps as Messiah are headed, which we know is the cross.

In the last part of Mark 8 through the end of Mark 10, Jesus focuses on teaching His disciples about His journey. In these chapters, He will give predictions about the Cross. These will be followed by special instruction on discipleship. These powerful lessons remain relevant today.

This section of the second Gospel is marked off by the healing of two different blind men, one at the middle of Mark 8 and the other at the end of Mark 10. These miracle “bookends” illustrate dramatically how discipleship includes spiritual insight regarding who Jesus is and where He is going. As His teachings challenged the twelve disciples about two thousand years ago, so they continue to confront disciples today with the deep cost, and benefit, of following Jesus.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 17.

Seeing Clearly

Read Mark 8:22–30. Why did it take Jesus two touches to heal the blind man, and what lessons came out of this account?

The Gospels report a number of blind people healed by Jesus. Besides the passage here in Mark 8, blind Bartimaeus is healed as reported in Mark 10:46–52. Matthew refers to two blind men (Matt. 20:29–34), and John 9 tells the story of Jesus’ healing a man born blind who washes in the Pool of Siloam.

But this story in Mark 8 is unique. It appears only in Mark, and it is the only miracle of Jesus that requires two actions to bring perfect health. As part of the story, it is a touching detail that Jesus takes the man by the hand and leads him out of the village. One can sense His sympathy for the man’s disability.

But why two touches? As this is the only miracle in which two actions are involved, it is not likely because of any lack of power on Jesus’ part. Instead, it is more likely an acted parable, illustrating how spiritual insight sometimes takes time to unfold. That is what is happening for Jesus’ disciples. The entire section, Mark 8:22–10:52 begins and ends with the healing of a blind man. In this section of Mark, Jesus is especially teaching his disciples about His coming death. They have trouble grasping it even though He tells them numerous times. Just like the blind man, they need “two touches” to see clearly. Restoring of sight becomes a metaphor for insightful discipleship.

Teachers love questions. They are often the key to unlocking a student’s understanding. In this passage in Mark 8, the turning point of the book has arrived. Three characteristics confirm this assertion. First, Jesus questions His disciples about His identity, something He has not done before this point. Second, Peter is the first person not demon-possessed who declares that Jesus is the Messiah. Third, immediately following this revelation of who Jesus is, He begins to explain where He is going—to the cross.

Why does Jesus tell His disciples to tell no one that He is the Messiah? It seems counterintuitive to establishing the kingdom of God. However, in Jesus’ day, “Messiah” had political overtones of overthrowing Roman rule. Jesus did not come to be that kind of messiah; hence His call for silence on His identity.

What does this story teach us about times when it’s important not to say some things, however true they might be?

The Cost of Discipleship

Read Mark 8:31–38. What does Jesus teach here about the cost of following Christ?

The disciples have come to a crucial turning point in their relationship with Jesus. They now know that He is the Messiah. The reader of Mark has known this from the beginning of the book (*Mark 1:1*) and thus has had an advantage over the sometimes bumbling disciples.

When Jesus first called the disciples, He said He would make them fishers of men (*Mark 1:17*). There was no talk of trouble. But now that they really know who He is, He unfolds to them the goal of His mission—that it is necessary for Him to suffer many things, to be rejected and killed, and then to rise again after three days.

It is shocking news. Peter, who just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, takes Him aside and rebukes Him for saying such things. All of this was told in indirect discourse, but now the Gospel writer reports the words of Jesus, words that must have stung as Peter heard them. He calls Peter “Satan” and tells him to get out of His way since such thoughts are not in accord with the will of God.

“Peter’s words were not such as would be a help and solace to Jesus in the great trial before Him. They were not in harmony with God’s purpose of grace toward a lost world, nor with the lesson of self-sacrifice that Jesus had come to teach by His own example.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 415.

Followers of Jesus are called to have the same goal He has—to take the cross and to follow Him. Crucifixion was the most cruel, humiliating, and intimidating method of execution that the Romans had. Everyone wanted to avoid the cross. So, why would anyone want to take up the cross as a symbol of their devotion to Jesus?

Jesus explains not only the cost of discipleship but also its great value. In the paradox of Christian faith, losing one’s life becomes the way to find it. In contrast, gaining the whole world but forfeiting eternal life is nonsensical. As missionary Jim Elliott put it so eloquently in his journal of October 28, 1949: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

“ ‘He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life’ ” (*John 12:25, NKJV*). How have you experienced the reality of these words?

The Mountain and the Multitude

Read Mark 9:1–13. What did Peter, James, and John see one night with Jesus?

In Mark 9:1, Jesus predicts that some standing with Him would not taste death before seeing the kingdom of God come in power. That prediction is fulfilled within a few days when He takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain alone. There He is transfigured before them into the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

Elijah and Moses appear from the heavenly realm and converse with Jesus. Luke notes that they were talking about Jesus' departure (Greek *exodos*) that He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (*Luke 9:30, 31*). Thus, this scene of glory is tied to Jesus' coming death on the cross (*compare with Mark 9:9*). It would give hope when the disciples see Him crucified.

Upon descending the mountain the following morning, the three disciples ask Jesus about Elijah coming first. Likely this idea is tied to the expectation that Elijah would reappear before the Messiah (*compare with Mal. 4:5, 6*). Jesus replies that Elijah has already come, a reference to John the Baptist. Just as they killed John, so Jesus will die at their hands, but He will rise after three days.

After the night of glory, the scene at the bottom of the mountain was sad chaos (*see Mark 9:14–29*). The nine disciples had encountered a demon-possessed boy whom they could not heal. When Jesus arrives at the scene, everyone runs to see Him. The story unfolds of the demon's power over the child. Jesus seems to take a long time inquiring about the details of the demon possession. It proves too much for the father, who blurts out, " 'If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us' " (*Mark 9:22, NKJV*).

Jesus immediately picks up on the expression of doubt. The Lord's response can be paraphrased, "What do you mean, 'If You can'?" (*Mark 9:23*). Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning from the sky, the father sees that it is not only his son who has a problem—he has a problem of unbelief. And his unbelief could result in his son not being healed. The desperate father casts himself on Jesus' mercy with the memorable line, " 'I believe; help my unbelief!' " (*Mark 9:24, NKJV*). Jesus heals the boy.

In what situations, if any, have you had to cry out, " 'I believe; help my unbelief' " ? What did you learn from those experiences?

Who Is the Greatest?

Read Mark 9:30–41. What is different about Jesus' second prediction of His death and resurrection (*compare with Mark 8:31*)? Also, what do the disciples argue about, and what instruction does Jesus give?

In the first prediction, Jesus refers to those who will reject Him and kill Him. In the second prediction, Jesus refers to the fact that He will be betrayed. The betrayer is not pointed out at this time, but the reader already knows who it is because of the identification of Judas (*see Mark 3:19*). Again, the Lord refers to being killed and then rising after three days. But the disciples seem even less interested in the details of this prediction than in the first. Unwelcome news does not garner discussion.

In Mark 8:27, Jesus was north of the Sea of Galilee near Caesarea Philippi. In Mark 9:30, He is passing through Galilee, and in Mark 9:33, He enters Capernaum. Thus, it is not difficult to envisage His journey from north to south. However, He enters Capernaum alone as the twelve disciples lag behind. In the house, He inquires about their discussion on the way. No one speaks up, a sure sign of their discomfort at the question, almost like children caught doing something they know is wrong. Their conversation had been about who was the greatest. As little as most people are willing to admit it, this question of who is greatest is something everyone thinks about. But in the kingdom of God, this idea gets turned upside down.

Jesus responds to the problem in two steps. First, He utters the clear statement that to be first (greatest), you have to become a servant. Then Jesus illustrates His meaning by an action. Evidently a child was standing nearby listening. Jesus takes the child and places him in the midst of the group. That would be intimidating for the child. But then Jesus takes the child in His arms, relaxing the scene. He teaches that if you receive the child, you receive Him. And if you receive Him, you receive His Father. Thus, the lowest child is linked to God Himself.

John asks a question about outsiders, and Jesus teaches the important lesson that those not against us are for us. The Lord affirms that helping those in Christian service, even in small ways, does not go unnoticed in heaven.

What is the biblical idea of greatness in contrast to the world's idea? Which one are you striving for?

The Healthy Man in Hell

Read Mark 9:42–50. What ties the teachings of Jesus together in this passage?

At first, this passage may seem to be a collection of disparate teachings of Jesus thrown together without any rhyme or reason. However, a closer look reveals that each successive teaching has a catchword connection to the previous one. The passage revolves around three main terms that move the instruction forward step by step—“causes to sin,” “fire,” and “salt.”

The first teaching is about “little ones,” referring to new believers. Teachers and leaders are tasked in the kingdom of God with the responsibility to care for these new converts with special care, similar to the Old Testament ethic of caring for those weakest in ancient society—widows, orphans, and foreigners. Jesus speaks in hyperbole that it would be better to be drowned in the sea than to cause one of these “little ones” to sin.

The catchphrase “causes to sin” leads to the longest teaching in this passage. Two conundrums confront the reader. First, is Jesus really teaching people to cut off a hand or foot or pluck out an eye? Second, is He teaching an eternally burning hell? The answer to the first question is no, Jesus is not teaching mutilation—that was rejected in Judaism (*compare with Deut. 14:1; 1 Kings 18:27, 28*). The Lord is using hyperbole to make His point. If losing a hand, foot, or eye is terrible, how much more a disaster should it be for the Christian to sin!

The second question also receives a negative answer; no, Jesus is not teaching an eternally burning hell. How do we know? First, the passage contains a certain comedic aspect. Consider people entering the heavenly city with one eye or one foot or one hand. Then consider people who are whole going to hell. Should it not be the other way around? The healthy man in hell? That is comedy. Such comedy over a serious topic leads one to consider that Jesus is illustrating a point with hyperbole. Sin should be taken so seriously that it would be better to lose a hand, foot, or eye than to sin.

As to hell being eternal, its consequences are eternal, not the fire of hell itself. “‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him *should not perish* but have eternal life’ ” (*John 3:16, ESV; emphasis supplied*). Those who are lost do not burn forever; instead, they perish forever—a very big difference!

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Ministry,” pp. 426–431; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 432–442, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Before honor is humility. To fill a high place before men, Heaven chooses the worker who, like John the Baptist, takes a lowly place before God. The most childlike disciple is the most efficient in labor for God. The heavenly intelligences can co-operate with him who is seeking, not to exalt self, but to save souls.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 436.

“By all that has given us advantage over another,—be it education and refinement, nobility of character, Christian training, religious experience,—we are in debt to those less favored; and, so far as lies in our power, we are to minister unto them. If we are strong, we are to stay up the hands of the weak. Angels of glory, that do always behold the face of the Father in heaven, joy in ministering to His little ones. Trembling souls, who have many objectionable traits of character, are their special charge. Angels are ever present where they are most needed, with those who have the hardest battle with self to fight, and whose surroundings are the most discouraging. And in this ministry Christ’s true followers will co-operate.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 440.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read again Mark 8:27–29. How often do you confess to others your belief in Jesus as the Christ?
- 2 What is the right balance between the mountaintop experience of communion with Christ and the down-on-the-plain experience of service to others’ needs?
- 3 In class, discuss the answer to the question about greatness at the end of Wednesday’s study. What did you determine is the difference between how the world views greatness and how God does? Who are some of the people the world deems great that perhaps God doesn’t? In contrast, whom might God deem great that the world ignores or even disdains? What does this difference tell us about how warped and twisted the world’s ideals really are?
- 4 How can we learn to take sin so seriously that, as Jesus said, you’re better off to be maimed than to sin?

Food Choices Trigger Uproar

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

One Sabbath, Anush and Mother returned home from church to learn that Father had made plans for a countryside picnic. “Let’s barbeque,” he said.

Anush remembered how the Israelites had prepared their Sabbath meals on Friday, before the Sabbath hours (*Exodus 16*), and wondered whether it was a good idea to barbeque on Sabbath. Out loud, she said, “No, Father. That’s not a good plan. I don’t even eat meat.” She had become a vegetarian.

Father called off the picnic, but he still didn’t grasp that Anush no longer ate meat. The next day, he prepared chicken for Sunday lunch and handed her a piece. “Father, I don’t eat meat,” Anush said.

Now Father understood, and he was upset. He thought it was abnormal not to eat meat. The next day, he forbade Anush and Mother from going to prayer meeting at the house church in their town. When the pair protested, Father angrily aired frustrations that he had collected against Adventists. He criticized the biblical requirement to return tithes and offerings (*Mal. 3:8–10*).

“Tithes and offerings are a business,” he said. “You are just supporting a business.”

He accused the Adventist Church of being a foreign group intent on destroying Armenia. He lashed out at Anush’s lifestyle. “Today you say, ‘I don’t eat meat,’ and tomorrow you will say, ‘I don’t have a father,’” he said.

Anush sat still and prayed silently, “What should I say, Lord?” Every time Father spoke against God or the church, she prayed, “This is not addressed to me. This is addressed to You. It’s Your responsibility to answer.” She remembered Romans 2:4, which says, “The goodness of God leads . . . to repentance” (*NKJV*). She sensed God was saying to extend a similar goodness to her father. She prayed, “There’s nothing that I can do except love Father.”

Father owned a small grocery store. When he left Mother or Anush in charge, they wouldn’t sell alcohol or cigarettes. Now, as Father berated them, he felt condemned. “Do you think that I’m evil and you’re good because I sell alcohol and cigarettes and you don’t?” he asked. “I’m a better Christian than you. I’m going to lead Sabbath worship services from now on. You can no longer go to church. I will lead the worship services.”

That ended the conversation. Anush went to her room, and Mother followed. Both were shocked. “What will we do?” Mother asked.

Anush suggested cooperating with Father as long as he didn’t oppose the Bible. “He said we will worship at home on Sabbath,” she said. “He didn’t take away our Bibles. He even respects the Sabbath. Let’s wait for the Sabbath. If he keeps his word, we will keep the Sabbath at home with him. If he forgets his word, we will pray and see how God guides us.”

Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush’s in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Father allows Anush and Mother to return to church.

Teaching Disciples: Part II



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 10; Gen. 1:27; Gen. 2:24; Gal. 4:1, 2; Rom. 6:1–11; Isa. 11:1–16.*

Memory Text: “‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’ ” (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*).

This week covers Mark 10, completing the special section in which Jesus teaches His disciples in preparation for the Cross. About half of the chapter deals with the disciples themselves, and the rest with issues important to discipleship but told through the lens of others who interact with Jesus. Pharisees come and argue with Him over the subject of divorce. Parents bring their children for Jesus to bless. A rich man asks about eternal life, and a blind man asks for sight.

This chapter of Mark carries important teachings about what it means to follow Jesus, particularly as it relates to living in the here and now: marriage, children, how to relate to riches, and the reward and cost of following Him. Topping it off is the healing of a second blind man (*Mark 10:46–52; compare with Mark 8:22–26*), which provides the closing bookend for the section (*Mark 8:22–10:52*) and a beautiful illustration of what following Jesus both costs and leads to.

Together, these lessons prepare the follower of Jesus—whether the disciples 2,000 years ago or disciples in the twenty-first century—for the challenges that come with discipleship.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 24.

God's Plan for Marriage

Read Mark 10:1–12, as well as Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24. What trap was hiding under the Pharisees' question about divorce, and what lessons did Jesus teach in His response?

In this passage, the Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Among the Pharisees, divorce was considered lawful. The question was on what grounds. The School of *Shammai* was arguably more restrictive—only for childlessness, material neglect, emotional neglect, or marital unfaithfulness. The School of *Hillel* was much more lenient, allowing divorce for almost any reason, though their process of granting the divorce was more complex, helping to slow things down.

So, it may seem a bit odd that they ask Jesus the blanket question if divorce is acceptable at all. Hiding under this question was a plot to get Jesus in trouble with Herod Antipas, the ruler of the region to the east of the Jordan, where Jesus was now. Antipas had divorced his wife and married Herodias, his brother's wife. Herod had beheaded John the Baptist because of his rebuke regarding this illicit relationship (see *Matt. 14:1–12*).

Jesus parries their question with His own, asking the Pharisees what Moses commanded on the matter. The passage the Pharisees reference in reply is Deuteronomy 24:1–4, which describes a particular case of remarriage after divorce. The Israelites in Moses' day were already practicing divorce. The case law described in Deuteronomy 24 was meant to provide protections for the woman. But in Jesus' day, this was twisted by the School of *Hillel* to make it easier to get a divorce for almost any reason. Thus, the law that was meant to protect the woman was being used to make it easy to thrust her aside.

Instead of debating the case law in Deuteronomy 24, Jesus refers back to God's original ideal for marriage in Genesis 1 and 2. He notes that in the beginning God made a man and a woman (*Gen. 1:27*), two individuals. He then combines this truth with Genesis 2:24, which says that a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh. This concept of unity becomes the basis of Jesus' affirmation of the marriage bond. What God has joined, people should not separate.

What can your congregation do to strengthen the marriages among you? How do you help those whose marriages have already fallen apart?

Jesus and Children

Read Mark 10:13–16. What did Jesus do for those who brought children to Him?

While children were greatly desired in the ancient world (particularly boys in the male-dominant culture), birth and childhood were not easy. Without modern medical care, the risks to mothers in giving birth and to newborns, infants, and children were elevated. Many cultures had traditional medicines and amulets used to protect these vulnerable individuals against malevolent forces.

While children were desired, they were of low social status, along the lines of slaves, actually (*Gal. 4:1, 2*). In the Greco-Roman world, those who were deformed or undesirable would be exposed, or even tossed in a river. Boys were valued over girls; sometimes girl babies were left to die among the elements. At times these abandoned babies were “rescued,” only to be raised and sold as slaves.

The disciples appear not to have understood Jesus’ teaching in Mark 9 about receiving the kingdom of God like a child (*Mark 9:33–37*). Now they rebuke those who brought children to Jesus for blessing, perhaps thinking that He would not have time for such a simple task.

They were wrong. Jesus is indignant. Throughout Mark, Jesus has some striking reactions to people, and it is instructive that one of His strong reactions was toward people who were keeping children away from Him.

He strongly insists that the disciples must not stand in the way of the children. Why? Because the kingdom of God belongs to them, and one must receive it in the attitude and outlook of a child—probably a reference to simple, implicit trust in God.

“Let not your un-Christlike character misrepresent Jesus. Do not keep the little ones away from Him by your coldness and harshness. Never give them cause to feel that heaven would not be a pleasant place to them if you were there. Do not speak of religion as something that children cannot understand, or act as if they were not expected to accept Christ in their childhood. Do not give them the false impression that the religion of Christ is a religion of gloom, and that in coming to the Saviour they must give up all that makes life joyful.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 43, 44.

How can you better reveal Jesus to whatever children are around you?

The Best Investment

Read Mark 10:17–31. What crucial lessons about faith and the cost of discipleship—for anyone, rich or poor—is revealed here?

The man’s approach indicates his sincerity and respect for Jesus. He runs up, kneels before Him, and asks the question central to the destiny of every soul—*What are the requirements in order to inherit eternal life?* Jesus responds by referring to the second table of the Decalogue. Again, the man shows his idealism by saying that he has kept all these, even from his youth.

Of the four Gospels, Mark alone notes that Jesus loved the man. There is something appealing about the man’s idealism. But Jesus tests his sincerity by asking him to sell everything and to follow Him. The man leaves crestfallen because he had great possessions. In fact, he was not really keeping the commandments. He broke the first one, placing something above God in his life. His riches were his idol.

Jesus then explains how seductive riches are and that it is easier for a big animal like a camel to go through the tiny hole of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter heaven.

The disciples are astonished by Jesus’ words and wonder who can be saved. Jesus delivers the punch line in Mark 10:27. “‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God’ ” (*ESV*).

Mark 10:27 seems like a beautiful place to end the story: you cannot make it to heaven on your own, you need the grace of God in order to be saved.

But then Peter blurts out that he and his friends have left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus responds that whatever you have left to follow Him is nothing in contrast to what you will receive, now and in “the age to come” (*ESV*).

Here is the point: it is the death of Christ that resolves human guilt, and then the grace of Christ and His resurrection are what empower obedience to His commands.

Read Romans 6:1–11. How do these verses reveal the reality of God’s grace in our lives, both in justifying us and in making us new people in Him?

Can You Drink My Cup?

Read Mark 10:32–45. How do these verses reveal the continued ignorance of the disciples regarding not only Jesus’ mission but what it means to follow Him?

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, He reveals to His disciples what will happen there. It is not a scenario they believe in or want to hear. Jesus’ specificity as to the outline of His death and resurrection is striking. But when it is not what you want to hear, it is all too easy to dismiss.

This is apparently what James and John do as they come to Jesus with a private request. Jesus rightly asks for more specifics, and they respond that they want to sit on His right and left in His glory. It is easy to criticize their request as rank egocentrism. But these two men have dedicated themselves to Jesus’ ministry, and their desires were probably not wholly selfish in nature.

Jesus seeks to deepen their understanding of just what they are requesting. He asks if they can drink His cup or be baptized with His baptism. His cup will be the cup of suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross (*compare with Mark 14:36*), and His baptism will be His death and burial (*Mark 15:33–47*), where events there parallel His baptism recorded in Mark 1.

But James and John do not see it. They glibly reply that they are able. Jesus then prophesies that indeed they will drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism. James was the first of the apostles to die a martyr’s death (*Acts 12:2*). John was the longest lived of the apostles and was exiled to Patmos (*Rev. 1:9*). But Jesus indicates that places in glory are set by God.

How did the other disciples respond to Jesus’ answer? Not too well. The same Greek word, *aganakteō*, “to be angry, indignant,” is used in Mark 10:41 as in Mark 10:14, regarding Jesus’ anger over keeping the children away from Him.

Jesus then calls the group together to give one of His most profound teachings. He indicates that Gentile rulers use power for personal advantage. But in the kingdom of God, power must always be used to uplift and bless others. Jesus leads the way as the King of the kingdom of God. How? By giving His own life as a ransom—not quite what His followers expected to hear.

What does it mean as a Christian to be a “servant” to others? That is, how do you manifest this principle in your daily interaction with people?

“What Do You Want Me to Do for You?”

Read Mark 10:46–52. How did Bartimaeus react to Jesus’ passing by?

Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, with few exceptions, Jesus has been telling people to keep quiet about His miracles and about who He is. In this account, as He is leaving Jericho, a blind man begging on the side of the road, upon hearing that it is Jesus of Nazareth, begins to shout, “ ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ” (*Mark 10:47, NKJV*). In keeping with the revelation/secret motif of the book, the crowd takes on the role of those calling for silence as they unsuccessfully try to quiet the noisy beggar.

But Bartimaeus is undeterred and shouts even louder, “ ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ” (*Mark 10:48, NKJV*). His words are both a confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah and confidence that He can heal him. The title “Son of David” in Jesus’ day had two concepts connected with it—the restoration of a king to Israel’s throne (*compare with Isaiah 11; Jer. 23:5, 6; Jer. 33:15; Ezek. 34:23, 24; Ezek. 37:24; Mic. 5:2–4; Zech. 3:8; and Zech. 6:12*), and that this personage would be a healer and exorcist.

Jesus stops and tells them to call the blind man. Significantly, the blind man throws off his cloak as he comes to Jesus. Blind people in Jesus’ day were at the bottom of society, along with widows and orphans. These were individuals below subsistence level and in real peril. The cloak would be the man’s security. Leaving it behind meant he had faith that Jesus would heal him.

Jesus does not disappoint. Indeed, whoever comes to Him for help in the Gospels always receives it. Jesus asks the same question He asked James and John in Mark 10:36, “ ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ ” (*Mark 10:51, NKJV*). Without hesitation, the blind man asks to receive his sight, which Jesus immediately restores. The blind man follows Him on the road.

This story is the close of the discipleship section in Mark, serving as a bookend with the other story of healing a blind man in Mark 8:22–26. The two stories illustrate how discipleship is about seeing the world with new eyes, sometimes not clearly at first but always following Jesus in the way He leads.

In what ways have you at times cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”? What happened, and what did you learn from this experience?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517; “‘One Thing Thou Lackest,’” pp. 518–523, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Jesus was ever a lover of children. He accepted their childish sympathy and their open, unaffected love. The grateful praise from their pure lips was music in His ears, and refreshed His spirit when oppressed by contact with crafty and hypocritical men. Wherever the Saviour went, the benignity of His countenance, and His gentle, kindly manner won the love and confidence of children.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 511.

“To those who, like the young ruler, are in high positions of trust and have great possessions, it may seem too great a sacrifice to give up all in order to follow Christ. But this is the rule of conduct for all who would become His disciples. Nothing short of obedience can be accepted. Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ. Often it is presented and enjoined in language that seems authoritative, because there is no other way to save man than to cut away those things which, if entertained, will demoralize the whole being.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are ways that you can help children and young people stay connected to Christ and the church congregation? Why is it so important that we do this?
- 2 We sometimes hear people say that they don’t care about money. That is not true. Everyone cares about money, and there is nothing wrong with that. What, then, can be the problem with money, and why must faithful Christians, either rich or poor, be careful in how they relate to money?
- 3 If Jesus were to ask you, “What do you want Me to do for you?” how would you respond?
- 4 Dwell more on Jesus’ words in Mark 10:43–45. What does it mean to live like this? How do we learn to serve as opposed to being served? What does this mean in regard to how we live and interact with others?

Home Turned Into a Church

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father kept his word about organizing Sabbath worship services at home in Armenia. Having prohibited Mother and their daughter, Anush, from going to the Seventh-day Adventist church, he called them to the living room on Sabbath morning. For Sabbath School, they studied the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* and prayed together. Then Anush preached a short sermon.

The worship services continued for months. Father, who had never visited an Adventist church, was so serious about the worship services that, if guests were visiting, he invited them to the living room, opened his Bible, and said, “Welcome to our worship service. Today is the Sabbath, and you can join us.” This was not the Armenian way. In Armenia, hosts leave everything to entertain guests. Guests were shocked and wondered what was going on.

As the family worshiped together, Father realized that he didn’t know the Bible. In Matthew 4, the family read how Jesus met every temptation by Satan with the words, “It is written.” Father was impressed. He saw that he wouldn’t know if Satan was tempting him if he didn’t know the Bible. From that day, he began to read the Bible daily. As he read, he also sought answers to why he and his family were worshiping on the seventh day, Saturday, while many Christians in Armenia worship on the first day, Sunday.

Father had vowed that Anush and Mother would never return to the Adventist Church, and he wanted to keep his word. Anush very much missed church services, but she hid her feelings because she understood that her duty was to love her father and wait for God to bring him to repentance.

But when she learned that the Adventist house church in their town was preparing for a Communion Sabbath, she asked Father for permission to go. Armenia is a largely patriarchal society where many fathers are the decision-makers of the household. “Would you allow us to take part in the communion service?” she asked.

“Communion?” Father said. “You know, I can lead that ceremony, too.”

Nobody went to Communion that Sabbath.

Then Father and Mother became grandparents. Anush had an older sister who had gotten married and left home, and she gave birth to a baby. Mother learned that the baby and the rest of the family had been lifted up in prayer at church. “They prayed for us in church, and I want to take something sweet to them as a thank-you gift,” she told Father.

Father’s heart was touched by the kindness of the church members, and he allowed Anush and Mother to return to church.

Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush’s in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Father starts going to church.

Jerusalem Controversies



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 11; 1 Kings 1:32–48; Zech. 9:9, 10; Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11; Mark 12:1–34.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses’ ” (*Mark 11:25, NKJV*).

A series of five controversies between Jesus and the religious leaders are recorded in Mark 2 and 3 (see lesson 3). In this week's lesson, when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, He has a series of six controversies with the religious leaders. The two sets of controversies are like bookends of His earthly ministry. Each set deals with important issues in the Christian life. Jesus' instructions, even in these polemical situations, help guide believers both in fundamental issues of faith and in practical issues of everyday experience.

The religious leaders come to confront, confound, and defeat Jesus, but they never succeed. Part of this week's lesson will include analyzing just what it is that brings people into opposition to God and considering what Christians can do to break through prejudice and speak to the hearts of those resisting the Spirit's call.

In Mark 11, Jesus' ministry will be in Jerusalem for Passover (March to April). Mark 11–16 covers little more than one week; the narrative time has slowed down markedly. The first 10 chapters cover approximately three and a half years. This slowdown points to the importance of these closing scenes.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 31.

The Triumphal Entry

Read Mark 11:1–11 and Zechariah 9:9, 10. What’s happening here?

Half of this story involves Jesus sending two disciples to a nearby village to retrieve a donkey for Him to ride on into Jerusalem. Why is so much time spent on this account?

The answer is twofold. First, it demonstrates Jesus’ prophetic powers, enhancing the dignity of His arrival and linking it to the will of God. Second, this aspect of the story links to Zechariah 9:9, 10, which speaks of the king as riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. It is reminiscent of the entry of Solomon into Jerusalem on a donkey (*1 Kings 1:32–48*), when Adonijah tried to usurp the throne, and David commanded that Solomon be immediately crowned.

“Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Zechariah thus foretold the coming of the King to Israel. This prophecy is now to be fulfilled. He who has so long refused royal honors now comes to Jerusalem as the promised heir to David’s throne.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 569.

Jerusalem is located in a hilly region at an elevation of about 2,400 feet (about 740 meters). In Jesus’ day its population was perhaps 40,000–50,000, but this swelled at Passover. The city covered only about 250 acres, but the temple mount covered about 37 of those acres. The beautiful temple complex dominated the city.

Jesus entered from the east, descending the Mount of Olives and likely entering through the Golden Gate onto the Temple Mount (a gate now bricked shut). The entire city was stirred by His entry, everyone recognizing the significance of His symbolic action. The crowd that accompanied Jesus shouted “hosanna,” a term originally meaning “save now” but eventually coming to mean “praise to God.”

The time for secrecy, which Jesus had insisted throughout most of Mark, has passed. Now Jesus openly enters Jerusalem using a well-known royal symbolic action. He enters the temple, but because it is late in the day, He simply looks around and then retires with the twelve disciples to Bethany. What could have turned into a riot or revolt instead ends with Him quietly retiring. But the next day will be different.

The idea of riding on the donkey invokes the idea of humility. Why is that such an important trait, especially for Christians? What have we, in light of the Cross, to be proud about?

A Cursed Tree and a Cleansed Temple

Read Mark 11:12–26. What is the significance of the events depicted here?

In the morning, coming from Bethany, only about two miles (a little more than three kilometers) from Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry. Seeing a fig tree in leaf, He went to it to find perhaps some early fruit. This action would not be considered stealing since according to Old Testament law, one could eat food from a neighbor's field or orchard to assuage hunger (*Lev. 19:9, Lev. 23:22, Deut. 23:25*). But He found no fruit and said to the tree, " 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again' " (*Mark 11:14, ESV*). It was a very strange and atypical action for Jesus, but what follows right after becomes even more striking.

What happens next likely occurs in the Court of the Gentiles, where selling of sacrifices took place (recently begun by Caiaphas). Jesus clears away the sellers from the courts so that quiet worship may return. His action is a direct affront to those in charge of the temple system.

Jesus links two Old Testament passages as a scathing rebuke of the unholy traffic. He insists the temple is to be a house of prayer for all people (*Isa. 56:7*), emphatically including the Gentiles. Then He says the leaders have made the temple a den of robbers (*Jer. 7:11*). Then, at the end of this amazing day, Jesus leaves the city with His disciples (*Mark 11:19*).

The next morning, going back to the city (*see Mark 11:20–26*), the disciples are astonished to see the fig tree withered from the roots. Jesus makes a lesson about prayer and forgiveness in His explanation of what has happened. What does all this mean?

These two stories are the fourth sandwich story in Mark (see lesson 3). In such stories, dramatized irony occurs with parallel characters doing opposite actions or opposite characters doing parallel actions. In this story the fig tree and the temple stand in parallel. Jesus curses the tree but cleanses the temple, opposite actions. But the irony is that the religious leaders will now plot to kill Jesus, and that action will spell the end of the significance of the temple services, which were fulfilled in Jesus.

What things in your life do you need Jesus to clean? How does this happen?

Who Said You Could Do That?

Read Mark 11:27–33. What challenge did the religious leaders bring to Jesus, and how did He respond?

The day after Jesus cleanses the temple, the religious leaders confront Him in the temple courts, asking by what authority He acted the day before. They are not seeking truth but seeking to trap Him. If He says that His authority is from God, they will deny that a simple country carpenter could have such authority. If He admits that His authority is human, they will dismiss Him as a fool.

But Jesus sees through their trap and says He will answer their question if they will answer one He asks. What He asks is whether John the Baptist's baptism was from God or from men. Instantly, the leaders see that they are the ones trapped. If they say from God, Jesus will say, "Why did you not believe him?" If they say from men, they fear the people. So, they lie and say they do not know. This gives Jesus the opportunity to refuse to answer their question.

Read Mark 12:1–12. How did Jesus follow up His refusal to answer, and what effect did it have?

Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard, an owner, and tenants to whom he rents the field. The story Jesus tells has great similarities to the parable of the vineyard found in Isaiah 5, where God brings a charge against unfaithful Israel. Everyone would recognize the parallel, especially the religious leaders.

The story unfolds in a most unusual way as the tenants refuse to give any of the fruits of the field to the owner. Instead, they mistreat and kill his servants. Finally, the owner sends his beloved son, whom he expects them to respect. But not so. They strangely reason that if they kill the son, the vineyard will be theirs. Their illogic is striking, and the judgment to be meted out on them is justified.

In this story, Jesus is giving the religious leaders a solemn warning as to where their steps are heading. Seen in this light, His parable is a loving forewarning. It is not too late for them to change and avoid certain judgment. Some will repent, change, and accept Jesus. Others will not.

Earthly Duties and Heavenly Outcomes

Read Mark 12:13–27. What is going on here, and what truths does Jesus teach?

The religious leaders were trying to catch Jesus in something they could use to condemn Him, either to the Roman governor or to the people. In this controversy, it was the question of paying taxes. In this time and place, refusing to pay taxes could be taken as rebellion against the Roman government, a serious offense.

Jesus' reply to give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's kept Him out of a trap and also provided profound instruction on the believer's responsibility to the government. "He declared that since they were living under the protection of the Roman power, they should render to that power the support it claimed, so long as this did not conflict with a higher duty. But while peaceably subject to the laws of the land, they should at all times give their first allegiance to God."—Ellen. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 602.

What follows next is a question about the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees were a priestly group that accepted only the five books of Moses as Scripture. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The scenario they present to Jesus was probably hypothetical. It involved seven brothers and one woman. According to the law of Moses, when a man who died left no sons, his brother would marry the widow to maintain property in a family line, and any children born to that union would be legally those of the dead man (*Deut. 25:5–10*).

Seeking to throw discredit on the doctrine of the resurrection, the Sadducees point to a moral dilemma of whose wife the woman would be in the resurrection. Jesus counters their argument in two steps, referring to the Scriptures and to the power of God. First, He describes the power of God in the resurrection and indicates that there will not be marriage in heaven. Then He defends the doctrine of the resurrection by appealing to Exodus 3:1–22, where God indicates that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus implies that this means that they will be raised; they cannot remain dead if God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are, for now, dead.

If someone were to ask you, "Do you know the power of God?" what would you reply, and why?

The Greatest Commandment

Read Mark 12:28–34. What deep question did the friendly scribe ask, and what double response did Jesus give?

Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, most of the religious leaders, with few exceptions, are antagonistic to Jesus. This is particularly true in Jerusalem, where Jesus has confronted the leadership over temple worship—that which stands at the heart of Judaism. Thus, for a scribe to listen to the disputes and appreciate Jesus’ responses displays both honesty and courage in face of the prevailing animosity toward Jesus. It would be easier to just stand back and watch, even if one were in sympathy with Jesus. But this man does not do that.

The scribe cuts to the heart of religion with his question as to which commandment is the most important. Jesus responds with simplicity and clarity, quoting the *Shema*, the confession of faith in Judaism from Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. The greatest commandment, says Jesus, is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—that is, with the totality of who you are. Jesus gives the scribe a bonus by listing the second most important commandment, citing the Old Testament again, this time from Leviticus 19:18, to love your neighbor as yourself.

Sometimes people wonder how it is possible to command love. The cultural context of the command in Deuteronomy helps explain. The language comes from ancient treaties between parties, and the term for “love” refers to being faithful to the requirements of the treaty, faithfully fulfilling them. Thus, while it does not rule out the concept of deep affection between parties, it is much more focused on actions that demonstrate such loyalty.

The scribe was honest and saw the clarity and simplicity of Jesus’ response and said so. One can imagine scowls from other religious leaders since the honest scribe has affirmed Jesus’ reply as valid, something no one else was willing to do. Jesus also affirmed the scribe for his honest answer, saying he was not far from the kingdom of God. Not far does not mean inside. What the scribe still needed was to recognize who Jesus was and follow Him, a further step in the journey of faith.

How do we learn to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves? Why is the Cross the key to following these commands?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “A Doomed People,” pp. 580–588; “The Temple Cleansed Again,” pp. 589–600; “Controversy,” pp. 601–609, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Christ’s act in cursing the tree which His own power had created stands as a warning to all churches and to all Christians. No one can live the law of God without ministering to others. But there are many who do not live out Christ’s merciful, unselfish life. Some who think themselves excellent Christians do not understand what constitutes service for God. They plan and study to please themselves. They act only in reference to self. Time is of value to them only as they can gather for themselves. In all the affairs of life this is their object. Not for others but for themselves do they minister. God created them to live in a world where unselfish service must be performed. He designed them to help their fellow men in every possible way. But self is so large that they cannot see anything else. They are not in touch with humanity. Those who thus live for self are like the fig tree, which made every pretension but was fruitless. They observe the forms of worship, but without repentance or faith. In profession they honor the law of God, but obedience is lacking. They say, but do not. In the sentence pronounced on the fig tree Christ demonstrates how hateful in His eyes is this vain pretense. He declares that the open sinner is less guilty than is he who professes to serve God, but who bears no fruit to His glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 584.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Ponder the meaning of Christ’s cleansing the temple. How might that principle apply to our church today? How should such a cleansing take place?
- ② All through the Gospels, again and again, Jesus refers to the Scriptures and how they must be fulfilled. What does this tell us about just how central they are to the life of faith? Why must we fervently reject any attempt to downplay the authority of Scripture, especially the idea that the Scriptures are merely people’s own ideas about God, who God is, and how He operates?
- ③ Where is the proper line between church and state? How does Jesus’ teaching in Mark 12:13–17 guide this discussion?
- ④ Look up texts that talk about the resurrection. Why is this doctrine so central to our faith, especially considering the state of the dead?

Dream Changes Father's Life

By Andrew McChesney

Anush had prayed for years for Father to come to God. After Father allowed her and Mother to return to church on Sabbaths, she began to pray even more earnestly, pleading with God to reveal Himself to Father.

"I don't want to be the center of this story. Ignore me," she prayed. "Speak to Father through dreams, visions, or friends. I just want his salvation."

She surrendered the matter to God. "It's about You and him," she said.

Then Father had a dream. In it, he saw fire raining down on a city located near their town in Armenia. He saw some people running and screaming and others who were peaceful and singing. Father was astonished. He told Anush and Mother about the dream.

About the same time, Anush watched an online sermon about the Holy Spirit, and she told Father about it. "The preacher said the fire of the Holy Spirit protects us from the fire of hell," she said. "When you get the fire of the Holy Spirit, you won't be scared of the fire at the end of the world."

Something clicked. Father understood that the frightened people in his dream didn't have the Holy Spirit and were afraid of hellfire, while the peaceful people were not afraid because they had received the fire of the Holy Spirit. He remembered reading that the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended on Jesus at His baptism (*Matt. 3:16*).

"I need to get baptized," Father said.

But the words sounded strange to him even as they came out of his mouth. Armenia prides itself as the first country to adopt Christianity, in 301 A.D., and many Armenians consider it their duty to be Christian. They were baptized as infants, not as adults. Now, Father wasn't sure what to do.

"You have the Bible," Anush said. "Read it. Let the Bible answer your questions. Let the Bible lead you to the right church."

Father read the Bible even more earnestly. One day, a friend asked him why he was reading the Bible so intently. "Is it something to boast about?" the friend asked. "If Jesus came tomorrow, would you say, 'I have read the Bible?' Would that be enough?"

The questions shocked Father. His whole body trembled. A short time later, when he had left the friend's house and was alone in his car, he poured out his heart to God. "If Jesus came tomorrow, what would I say to Him?" he prayed. "If Jesus really came, what would I say to Him?"

He went home and told Mother, "I'll go to church with you next Sabbath."

But Father didn't want to go to the town's house church, which was comprised of seven women. "Let's go to the church in the next town," he said.

From that Sabbath, Father began to worship every week in church.

Part of last quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush's in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Father is baptized.

The Last Days



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 12:41–44, Mark 13:1–32, Dan. 9:24–27, Dan. 7:25, 1 Thess. 4:13–18.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven’ ” (*Mark 13:26, 27, NKJV*).

This week's lesson starts with a very brief story at the end of Mark 12, where Jesus makes a profound statement about a small act by a widow. The main portion of this week's lesson, however, deals with Mark 13, a striking prophecy about the fate of the Jerusalem temple and more. This chapter, along with its parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, tell about the fall of Jerusalem and beyond, even to the end of the world.

What Mark 13 makes quite clear is that the prophecy goes from the time of the prophet, Jesus, to the time of the end, His second coming. This pattern follows what is known as “the historicist interpretation of end-time prophecy,” as opposed to the attempt to put these prophecies in the past or way off into the future.

Like many teachings of Jesus in Mark, the Lord's instruction is in response to a question or a misunderstanding by His disciples. These questions or misunderstandings give Jesus the opportunity to teach truths vital to Christian life and experience. Jesus not only predicts the future but also instructs His disciples both then and now in how to prepare for the coming trials.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 7.

Two Little Coins in the Offering

Read Mark 12:41–44. How much did the widow give, and what did Jesus have to say about that?

The Jerusalem temple was an amazingly beautiful structure. The temple mount dominated the city, and the massive stones involved in its construction are a marvel to this day, some weighing hundreds of tons. The remodeling and expansion of the temple and the temple mount began under Herod the Great around 20 B.C., but the construction and embellishment of the structure continued into the A.D. 60s.

Many people brought large offerings to deposit in 13 chests located in the Court of the Women near the temple. It was here that Jesus was sitting when He saw a widow approach and cast in two *lepta*. This would be equivalent to one thirty-second of a *denarius*, the usual wage for a day laborer. Hence, the woman's offering was quite small.

Jesus, however, was impressed by her offering. Many rich individuals put in large sums, but He did not comment on their gifts as they deposited them. But this widow's offering called forth His praise. He states that she gave more than everyone else. How is that possible? Jesus notes that they gave out of their abundance but she out of her poverty. They had much left; she gave everything she had to live on. This fact makes her gift extravagant, even though its monetary value was tiny.

This story contains a deep lesson about the management of resources. Giving to God's cause does not depend on the actions of leaders to have validity. The religious leadership of the temple was corrupt, but Jesus did not thereby affirm withholding offerings. If ever there were corrupt religious leaders (Caiaphas? Annas?), those at this time were among the worst. And Jesus knew it too.

It is true that leaders have a sacred responsibility to use resources in accordance with the will of God, but even if they do not, those who give to the cause of God are still blessed in their giving, as this woman was.

On the other hand, withholding tithes or offerings when leaders do something displeasing means that the giving is tied to their actions instead of being made in thankfulness to God. However tempting it may be to do that, it's wrong.

What should this story teach us about the importance of being faithful in what we give to the Lord's work?

Not One Stone on Another

Read Mark 13:1–13. How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ statement about the temple, and what is the significance of Jesus’ answer to them?

As we have noted, the temple complex was a truly amazing structure. Josephus notes that the Royal Portico on the south side of the complex had 162 pillars, each of which three men clasping hands could reach around (*Antiquities*, 15.11.5 §§413–414). Jesus says that it will *all be thrown down*. Such a prophecy concerning this amazing structure would sound to the listener like the end of the world.

“As Christ’s attention was attracted to the magnificence of the temple, what must have been the unuttered thoughts of that Rejected One! The view before Him was indeed beautiful, but He said with sadness, I see it all. The buildings are indeed wonderful. You point to these walls as apparently indestructible; but listen to My words: The day will come when ‘there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 627.

The disciples want to know when this prediction that Jesus has made will come to pass. Thus, in Mark 13:4, a small group—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—ask Him for the timing. They want to know when all these things will happen and what will be the sign when they are about to take place.

What is striking in Mark 13:5–13 is that Jesus spends most of His time not in describing the fall of Jerusalem but rather in warning His disciples about what they can expect in their ministry of establishing the early Christian church. It does not sound as though it’s going to be easy either.

In fact, they will be persecuted, put on trial, and some will be killed. But all through this, Jesus indicates that the time is not yet. They are not to be deceived by tumultuous events. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit will give them the words to speak at the right time, even when family and friends desert them.

The takeaway from these introductory words in Jesus’ prophecy is that the people of God are not to fear tumult and trial. They are to be vigilant because God’s Spirit is going to carry them through the trouble.

What has been your own experience with the trials that come from following Jesus? If you haven’t had any, might you need to ask if you are actually following Him?

The Abomination of Desolation

Read Mark 13:14–18. What clue does Jesus give in figuring out what the “abomination of desolation” refers to?

Jesus comes to the central point about the fall of Jerusalem in Mark 13:14. He refers to “*the abomination of desolation.*” The Lord says that the reader should understand. With these words, Jesus is pointing the disciples to the book of Daniel. This terminology appears in Daniel 9:27, Daniel 11:31, and Daniel 12:11, with a parallel in Daniel 8:13.

Read Daniel 9:26, 27. Who is the “anointed One,” and who is “the prince who is to come” (*ESV*)?

The “anointed one” in Daniel 9:26 (*ESV*) is the Hebrew word *māšīah*, in English, Messiah. In a careful study of Daniel 9:24–27, it is clear that this anointed one refers to the coming of Jesus Christ.

But who is “the prince who is to come,” who brings the desolation of the city of Jerusalem? The city was destroyed by the Roman general Titus. Thus, it seems logical that he is “the prince who is to come” referred to in Daniel 9:26, 27. The two individuals are linked because the way that the Messiah was treated spelled the doom of the city.

What, though, is this “abomination of desolation” that Jesus, referring to Daniel, talks about? Unfortunately, many scholars believe that this abomination refers to Antiochus Epiphanes’s desecration of the temple in the second century B.C. That doesn’t work though. Jesus describes the “abomination of desolation” as something that occurs after His own time here, so it hardly could refer to something that happened two centuries before Christ’s earthly ministry.

Instead, the abomination likely refers to the planting of the Roman pagan standards in Israel during the siege of Jerusalem in the late A.D. 60s. This was the sign for the Christians to flee, which they did.

Just as Jesus predicted, Jerusalem fell. How can we learn to trust Him and the Bible in all its predictions?

The Great Tribulation

Read Mark 13:19. What does this verse refer to?

Mark 13:14, regarding the abomination of desolation, is the fulcrum around which the chapter pivots (see Tuesday's study). Mark 13:19 marks a transition point, as well. It refers to a great tribulation that does not have an equal since the creation of the world. This portends a greater or more extensive persecution than had occurred at the fall of Jerusalem. Mark 13:19 also shifts to the future tense, pointing toward events more distant from Jesus' time.

Just as Mark 13:14 echoes the prophecy of Daniel 9, the great persecution described here in Mark 13:19–23 echoes the prophecies of Daniel 7 and 8, where the little-horn power persecutes the people of God for “a time and times and half a time” (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV*). This prophetic period of 1,260 days is equal to 1,260 literal years (*Num. 14:34, Ezek. 4:6*). This time extended from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. In A.D. 1798, Napoleon sent his general to take the pope captive. During this time period of 1,260 years, the little-horn power persecuted and killed those who did not agree with its system of church governance.

Read Mark 13:20–23. What hope does God offer His people during the time of persecution, and what warning does He give them as it closes?

Mark 13:20 speaks of persecution being shortened for the sake of God's people. Historically, the fires of persecution did lessen after the rise of the Protestant Reformation, shortening the time of distress. As the little horn's power waned, more people joined the reforms. But the little horn would rise in power again, as the prophecy of Revelation 13 indicates.

In Mark 13:21–23, Jesus warns of another threat: that of false prophets and false christs, who will arise before He comes back. Jesus warns His followers to beware of them.

At the time Jesus warned about false christs, His movement had barely even begun, and yet, He was able to make such an amazing prediction, which has come true (even today people claim to be Jesus). How should this prediction increase our trust in the Word of God?

The Coming of the Son of Man

Read Mark 13:24–32. What great event is described here?

The great event described in Mark 13:24–32 is none other than the return of Jesus Christ in glory, preceded by signs in the sun, moon, and stars. The New Testament is full of prophecies pointing toward this wonderful event. The apostle Paul describes it in detail in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, where he speaks of those who have fallen asleep in Christ being raised to life and caught up with the living saints to meet Christ in the air. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle speaks in detail about the reality of the resurrection of the dead, which occurs at Christ’s return.

Peter describes that great day as well in 2 Peter 3:3–13, explaining that the Lord is not slow about His promise but wants all people to come to repentance. And Revelation has vivid descriptions of Christ’s return (*see Revelation 1:7, Revelation 6:12–17, Revelation 14:14–20, and Revelation 19:11–21*). The consistent New Testament teaching is that Christ’s return is personal, literal, visible, and audible. Everyone will see Him when He comes.

What, however, does Jesus mean by “this generation” and “that day” or “that hour”? These words have troubled many people because obviously the generation to whom Jesus spoke is long dead.

A number of solutions to this passage have been suggested. Some argue that the word “generation” can refer to a race of people, in this case the Jews. That is to say that the Jewish race would not perish before Christ returns. Another solution is to speak of the generation of people who see all the signs fulfilled as those that will not pass away before Christ returns.

But a simpler solution is to note that in Mark 13:30, Jesus uses the word “this” as in “this generation,” and in Mark 13:32, He uses the word “that” as in “that day and hour.” In Mark 13, the word “this” (*houtos, hautē, touto*) appears more often in verses 1–13, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem. The word “that” characterizes the latter part of the chapter.

Thus, “this generation” most likely refers to the first-century generation, which saw the destruction of Jerusalem, as Mark 13:30 describes. However, Mark 13:32 refers to the second coming of Christ, which is still future and was more distant from the first century. Consequently, Mark 13:32 uses the word “that” to speak of events more distant from the first century.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” pp. 627–636, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Many things are happening in the world that are very disturbing. People truly are frightened about what is unfolding. How can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, with a kind of “inside track” on events, use these things to point people to the hope we have in Jesus and the promise of His coming?

“Because we know not the exact time of His coming, we are commanded to watch. ‘Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.’ Luke 12:37. Those who watch for the Lord’s coming are not waiting in idle expectancy. The expectation of Christ’s coming is to make men fear the Lord, and fear His judgments upon transgression. It is to awaken them to the great sin of rejecting His offers of mercy. Those who are watching for the Lord are purifying their souls by obedience to the truth. With vigilant watching they combine earnest working. Because they know that the Lord is at the door, their zeal is quickened to co-operate with the divine intelligences in working for the salvation of souls. These are the faithful and wise servants who give to the Lord’s household ‘their portion of meat in due season.’ Luke 12:42. They are declaring the truth that is now specially applicable. As Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses each declared the truth for his time, so will Christ’s servants now give the special warning for their generation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 634.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 It’s one thing to give to the Lord’s work. It’s another to give *sacrificially*. What’s the difference, and why is that difference important?
- 2 Why did God not prevent the persecution of His people through the centuries and in today’s world? How does the great controversy motif help us understand, somewhat, why persecution exists?
- 3 What signs of Christ’s coming especially stand out to you in the present world?
- 4 Think about the state of the dead and the fact that the dead sleep until Christ returns. People close their eyes in death, and what is the very next thing they know? How does this idea help us see how, for each person individually, the second coming of Christ is always very near?

“Adventists Are Good People”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Anush worked as a project manager for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) before Father prohibited her and Mother from worshiping at the Seventh-day Adventist church in their town in Armenia. After he lifted the ban, Anush resumed working at ADRA.

Through her work, Father met a number of visiting Adventist leaders, including the ADRA director for the Euro-Asia Division, which oversees a large swath of the former Soviet Union, including Armenia.

When Anush brought the guests home, Father was impressed to see that they were sincere and well educated.

“Adventists are good people,” he told Anush.

As he got to know the seven women who attended the Adventist house church in his town, he concluded that they also were good people.

Then Anush was accepted into a master’s program at Andrews University in the United States, and the Euro-Asia Division and ADRA agreed to cover her costs. Father was impressed by that as well. He only wanted the best for her.

When Anush graduated, she was appointed ADRA director for Armenia. Father watched as she oversaw a number of projects, and his respect grew for both the Adventist Church and the Adventist lifestyle. He removed tobacco and then alcohol from the small grocery shop that he owned.

Then he got baptized and joined the Adventist Church. It was 21 years since Mother had gotten baptized and nine years since Anush had started praying for Father to find his way to God.

After his baptism, Father met the friend whose question about reading the Bible had shocked him and prompted him to start going to church.

“Did you know that your words change my life?” he asked. “I stopped being a passive Bible reader and got baptized.”

“What are you talking about?” the friend asked.

“You asked, ‘If Jesus came tomorrow, would you say, “I have read the Bible?” Would that be enough?’” Father said.

The friend denied that the conversation had ever taken place.

“I never said that,” he said. “I would never judge you like that. You must have made a mistake.”

At that moment, Father realized that God had spoken to him through his friend, who hadn’t even realized what he had said.

Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush’s in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Father has another dream.

Taken *and* Tried



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 14, John 12:4–6, Rom. 8:28, Exod. 24:8, Jer. 31:31–34, Zech. 13:7.*

Memory Text: “And He said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.’ ” (*Mark 14:36, NKJV*).

Chapters 14–16 in Mark are known as the Passion Narrative because they describe the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As noted in lesson 9, the last six chapters of Mark cover only about one week. The majority of events in Mark 14–16 occur on Thursday and Friday of this Passion Week. Jesus’ death will occur on Friday, and His resurrection on Sunday.

This week’s lesson focuses on Mark 14, beginning with the fifth sandwich story, which interlinks two opposite actions in relation to Jesus. This is followed by the Last Supper, followed by Jesus’ struggle in Gethsemane. There He is arrested and taken before the leaders to be tried. The trial scene is linked with Peter’s denial of Jesus, forming the sixth and last of the sandwich stories in Mark. Again, two opposite actions occur, but by an ironic twist, they affirm the same truth.

Throughout the narrative, two contrasting story plots march hand in hand. In a crisp style, Mark sets before the reader these clashing plots while revealing the triumph of Jesus.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 14.*

Unforgettable

Read Mark 14:1–11. What two stories are intertwined here, and how do they play off of one another?

Mark 14:1 indicates that the Passover was two days away. This meeting probably occurred on either Tuesday night or Wednesday of that week. The religious leaders have a plan and timing. They just need a means to accomplish their goal. It will come from a surprising quarter.

This passage is the fifth sandwich story in Mark (see lesson 3). The story of the plot against Jesus is linked with a story of a woman who anoints Jesus' head with precious perfume. Two parallel characters do opposite actions, displaying an ironic contrast.

Who the woman is here is not revealed by Mark. Her amazing gift to Jesus stands in contrast to Judas's perfidy in betraying his Lord. She is unnamed; he is named as one of the Twelve. The value of her gift is listed; his price is only a promise of money.

No specific reason is given for why she does this, but the guests at the dinner are appalled by what they consider a grand waste of close to a year's wages in pouring out the perfume on Jesus. Jesus, however, interposes in her defense and says that what she has done will be included in gospel proclamation throughout the world as a memorial to her. It is unforgettable. Indeed, all four Gospels tell this story in one form or another, probably because of Jesus' words memorializing her deed.

Judas's betrayal also is unforgettable. Mark implies that his motive was greed. The Gospel of John makes it explicit (*John 12:4–6*).

Mark contains a play on the word "good" in order to illustrate that two different motives, or plots, are in play in these stories. Jesus calls the woman's action "good/beautiful" in Mark 14:6. He says you can always do "good" for the poor (*Mark 14:7*). In Mark 14:9, He calls her deed part of the "good news/gospel." In Mark 14:11, Judas looks for a "good opportunity" (*ISV*) to betray Jesus. What this play on words suggests is that the plot of men to destroy the Messiah will actually become part of the gospel story because it brings to fruition the will of God in giving His Son for the salvation of humanity.

How does Romans 8:28 help explain what will happen here?

The Last Supper

Read Mark 14:22–31 and Exodus 24:8. What great significance to the Christian faith is found in this account?

Mark 14:12 notes that this is the first day of unleavened bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. The meal was on Thursday evening.

At the Last Supper, Jesus institutes a new memorial service. It is a transition from the Jewish Passover celebration and is directly linked to Israel's leaving Egypt and becoming God's covenant people at Sinai. In the sealing of the covenant, in Exodus 24:8, Moses sprinkles the people with the blood of the sacrifices and says, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (ESV).

It is striking that in the Lord's Supper, which Jesus institutes here, no use is made of the lamb of the Passover meal. That is because Jesus is the Lamb of God (*compare with John 1:29*). The bread of the Lord's Supper represents His body. The new covenant (*compare with Jer. 31:31–34*) is sealed with the blood of Jesus, and the cup represents this. He says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24, ESV).

Then, amid all this, Jesus predicts that His disciples will all abandon Him. He cites Zechariah 13:7, which speaks of the sword striking the shepherd and the sheep being scattered. Jesus is the shepherd, and His disciples are the sheep. It is a stark and depressing message. But Jesus adds a word of hope, repeating the prediction of His resurrection. But He adds that He will go before the disciples to Galilee. That prediction will be referred to by the young man at Jesus' tomb, in Mark 16:7, and thus it carries special weight here.

But all this is too hard for the disciples to accept, especially Peter, who argues that everyone else may fall away, but he will not. However, Jesus continues with the solemn language and predicts that Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows twice. The prediction will play a crucial role in the scene of Jesus' trial and Peter's denial; so, it also plays a crucial role here.

What can you learn from whatever times you promised God that you would or would not do something and ended up doing or not doing it anyway?

Gethsemane

Read Mark 14:32–42. What did Jesus pray in Gethsemane, and how was the prayer answered?

Leaving the walled city of Jerusalem where they ate the Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples go across the Kidron Valley to a garden on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The name Gethsemane means oil press, suggesting that there was an olive oil processing press in the vicinity. The exact location is unknown because the Romans cut down all the trees on the Mount of Olives during the siege in A.D. 70.

As Jesus enters the garden, He leaves His disciples there and goes farther with Peter, James, and John. But then He leaves these three, as well, and proceeds farther by Himself. This spatial distancing suggests Jesus is becoming more and more isolated as He faces His upcoming suffering.

Jesus prays for the cup of suffering to be removed but only if it is God's will (*Mark 14:36*). He uses the Aramaic term *Abba*, which Mark translates as "Father." The term does not mean "daddy," as some have suggested. The term used by a child to address his father was *abi* (see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, Anchor Bible Reference Library [New York: Doubleday, 1994], vol. 1, pp. 172, 173). However, the use of the term *Abba*, "Father," does carry the close familial linkage, which should not be diminished.

What Jesus prays for is the removal of the cup of suffering. But He submits Himself to the will of God (compare with the Lord's Prayer, *Matt. 6:10*). It becomes obvious throughout the rest of the Passion Narrative that God's answer to Jesus' prayer is no. He will not remove the cup of suffering because through that experience salvation is offered to the world.

When you face hardships, it is encouraging to have friends who support you. In Philippians 4:13, Paul talks about doing all things through the One who strengthens him. Many forget Philippians 4:14, where the apostle begins, "Nevertheless." It reads: "Nevertheless, it was kind of you to share my troubles" (*ISV*). This is what Jesus desired in Gethsemane. Three times He came seeking comfort from His disciples. Three times they were sleeping. At the end, He arouses them to go forth with Him to face the trial. He is ready; they are not.

Leaving All to Flee From Jesus

Read Mark 14:43–52. What happens here that is so crucial to the plan of salvation?

It is shocking that one of Jesus' closest associates betrayed Him to His enemies. The Gospels do not go into great detail about Judas's motivation. But Ellen G. White writes: "Judas had naturally a strong love for money; but he had not always been corrupt enough to do such a deed as this. He had fostered the evil spirit of avarice until it had become the ruling motive of his life. The love of mammon overbalanced his love for Christ. Through becoming the slave of one vice he gave himself to Satan, to be driven to any lengths in sin."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 716.

Betrayal in itself is deplored by all, even by those who make use of betrayers (*compare with Matt. 27:3–7*). But Judas's deed is particularly nefarious because he seeks to hide his betrayal under the guise of friendship. He gives the crowd instruction that the man he kisses is the man to arrest. It appears that Judas wanted to hide his perfidy from Jesus and the other disciples.

Chaos breaks out when the crowd arrests Jesus. Someone draws a sword (John 18:10, 11 says it was Peter) and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus addresses the mob, chastising them for doing in secret what they were afraid to do in the open when He was teaching in the temple. But Jesus ends with a reference to the Scriptures being fulfilled. It is another signal of that dual plot running through the Passion Narrative—that the will of God is coming to fulfillment even as the will of man works to destroy the Messiah.

The disciples all flee, including Peter, who nevertheless will reappear, following Jesus at a distance and ending up getting himself in trouble. But Mark 14:51, 52 tells of a young man following Jesus, an account found here and nowhere else in the canonical Gospels. Some think it was Mark himself, but that is unprovable. What is remarkable is that he runs away naked. The young man, instead of leaving all to follow Jesus, leaves all to flee from Jesus.

Think about the fearful idea that being a slave of only *one vice* led Judas to do what he did. What should this tell us about hating sin and, by God's grace, overcoming it?

Who Are You?

Read Mark 14:60–72. Compare how Jesus responded to events in contrast to how Peter did. What lessons can we learn from the differences?

Mark 14:53–59 describes Jesus being brought to the Sanhedrin and the first part of the trial. It is an exercise in frustration. Again and again, the leaders try to make their accusation against Jesus stick. The Gospel writer notes how the testimony was false and the witnesses never agreed.

Finally, the high priest arises and addresses Jesus directly. At first Jesus does not respond. But then the high priest places Him under oath before God (*see Matt. 26:63*) and asks the direct question if He is the Messiah. Jesus frankly and openly admits that He is and then references Daniel 7:13, 14, regarding the Son of man as seated at God’s right hand and coming with the clouds of heaven. This is too much for the high priest, who tears his robes and calls for Jesus’ condemnation, which the council immediately gives. The leaders begin to shame Jesus by spitting on Him, covering His face, beating Him, and calling on Him to prophesy.

While Jesus is inside being tried and giving a faithful testimony, Peter is outside giving a lying report. This is the sixth and final sandwich story in Mark, and here the irony is particularly pointed. Here are two parallel characters, Jesus and Peter, doing opposite actions. Jesus gives a faithful testimony, Peter a false one. Three times Peter is accosted by a servant or bystanders, and each time he denies association with Jesus, even cursing and swearing in the process.

It is at this point that a rooster crows a second time, and Peter suddenly remembers Jesus’ prophecy that he would deny his Lord three times that very night. He breaks down and weeps. Here is the striking irony—at the end of His trial, Jesus is blindfolded and struck and commanded to “prophesy!” The idea was to mock Him since He could not see who struck Him. However, at the very time they do this, Peter is denying Jesus in the courtyard below, fulfilling one of Jesus’ prophecies. Consequently, in denying Jesus, Peter demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah.

What words of hope would you give to someone who, though wanting to follow Jesus, fails at times to do so? Who of us has not, at times, failed to follow what we know Jesus wants?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas,” pp. 698–715; “Judas,” pp. 716–722, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“While the degrading oaths were fresh upon Peter’s lips, and the shrill crowing of the cock was still ringing in his ears, the Saviour turned from the frowning judges, and looked full upon His poor disciple. At the same time Peter’s eyes were drawn to his Master. In that gentle countenance he read deep pity and sorrow, but there was no anger there.

“The sight of that pale, suffering face, those quivering lips, that look of compassion and forgiveness, pierced his heart like an arrow. Conscience was aroused. Memory was active. Peter called to mind his promise of a few short hours before that he would go with his Lord to prison and to death. He remembered his grief when the Saviour told him in the upper chamber that he would deny his Lord thrice that same night. Peter had just declared that he knew not Jesus, but he now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately He had read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 712, 713.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How, by merely reading what Jesus predicted in Mark 14:9, are we seeing another of Jesus’ predictions—a highly unlikely prediction given the circumstances in which it has been uttered—actually being fulfilled?
- 2 Compare and contrast Judas and Peter. How were they alike and how different in the way they acted in the Passion Narrative?
- 3 Discuss the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. How can we make this more meaningful in our church and involve more members in its celebration?
- 4 Discuss the fact that God said no to Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane. What does it mean when God says no to us?
- 5 Though Peter greatly failed Jesus with his denials, Jesus did not cast him off. What hope can you take for yourself from this fact?

Fulfilling a Dream About Tofu

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father developed stomach problems, and Mother and Anush decided to pay close attention to his diet. Anush was a vegetarian, and Mother, a biologist by training, knew which foods were healthy. But they had not sought to place the healthiest foods on the family table. Mother and Anush began to feed Father mostly plant-based meals, and the stomach problems went away.

Then Father had another dream. He saw a bright light in the garage. It was so bright that he couldn't look at it. "Do not be afraid," said a voice from the light. "Come. Take this bucket with seeds, and plant them on this table."

Father saw a bucket of seeds beside a stainless-steel table. But the command made no sense. As a university student, he had trained to become an agricultural scientist, so he knew plants. But even without that knowledge, he knew that seeds couldn't sprout on steel. "Seeds have to be planted in the ground," he protested. The voice did not waver. "Do as I say," it said.

Still in the dream, a day passed, and Father saw healthy three-inch shoots growing from the table. He was shocked. "What's going on?" he asked. "How can seeds grow in one night and on this stainless-steel table?"

"You need to pull up the green shoots and sell them," the voice said.

Father related the dream to his family. As Anush listened, she wondered if God was telling Father to make tofu. There was no company that made tofu in Armenia. Father was a business owner with agricultural training, and Anush was sure that he could do it. But she didn't want to try to interpret his dream. She prayed for Father to hear God's call directly.

Then Anush participated in a medical missionary conference in Ukraine. The 300 participants grew excited when they heard about Father's dream. It was 2019, and Adventists had flourishing tofu production facilities and health-food stores in the country. When the conference organizer asked who would be willing to teach Father to make tofu, everyone raised their hands.

Two months later, Father bought plane tickets to Ukraine. Like Abraham and Sarah, he and Mother left home without knowing exactly where they were going. God organized everything. Medical missionaries from the conference met them at the airport. Father and Mother stayed with them as they visited Adventist health-food stores and tofu facilities for 12 days. Father saw Christians could work not only for money but also for God's glory. He was impressed. He returned home and opened Armenia's first tofu company.

Anush was overjoyed. She was amazed to think that Father had once used her vegetarian lifestyle as a reason to bar her from going to church and now he was selling tofu and promoting a vegetarian lifestyle.

Part of last quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush's in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: The family unites to spread the gospel in Armenia.

Tried *and* Crucified



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Mark 15, Luke 13:1, Ps. 22:18, John 20:24–29, John 1:1–3, Dan. 9:24–27.*

Memory Text: “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (*Mark 15:34, NKJV*).

Mark 15 is the heart of the Passion Narrative. It presents the trial of Jesus, His condemnation, the mockery by the soldiers, His crucifixion, and then His death and burial. The events in this chapter are presented in stark, crisp detail, likely because the author let the facts speak for themselves.

Throughout this chapter, irony plays an important role. Because of this, it is helpful to have a clear definition of what irony is.

Irony often contains three components: (1) two levels of meaning, (2) the two levels are in conflict or contrast to each other, and (3) someone does not see the irony and does not recognize what is happening and does not know that he or she is the one who will suffer the consequences.

This week, from the question of Pilate, “ ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ” to the mocking soldiers, the sign above the cross, and the mocking of the religious leaders, “ ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save,’ ” to the unexpected appearance of Joseph of Arimathea, the chapter is filled with painful ironies that nevertheless reveal powerful truths about the death of Jesus and what it means.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 21.

“Are You the King of the Jews?”

Read Mark 15:1–15. What kind of ironic situations occur here?

Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea from A.D. 26–A.D. 36. He was not a kind leader, and a number of his actions caused consternation among the inhabitants of the land (*compare with Luke 13:1*). The Jewish trial of Jesus resulted in a death sentence for blasphemy. But under Roman rule, the Jews could not execute people in most cases, and so, they brought Jesus to Pilate for condemnation.

The charge against Jesus before Pilate is not mentioned, but it is possible to ascertain the charge based on the brief question that Pilate asks Jesus: “ ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ ” (*Mark 15:2, ESV*). In Old Testament times, Israel anointed its kings; so, it is not hard to see how the term Messiah (“Anointed One”) could be twisted into claiming homage as a king in competition with the emperor. Thus, the charge brought before the Sanhedrin was blasphemy while the charge brought before the governor was sedition, which would lead to death.

The irony is that Jesus is both the Messiah and the King of the Jews. His convictions for blasphemy and sedition were mistaken; He should have received homage and worship instead. Yet, Jesus still acts in a kingly manner. His response to Pilate, “ ‘You have said so’ ” (*Mark 15:2, ESV*), is noncommittal. He does not deny the title or affirm it. This response may suggest that He is a king but of a different sort (*compare with John 18:33–38*).

Mark 15:6 introduces into the narrative a custom of releasing a prisoner at the time of the Passover. In Mark 15:9, Pilate asks if they want him to release the “ ‘King of the Jews,’ ” and though he might have meant it ironically, the irony is really playing out against him.

Mark 15:9, 10 is a study in perception and imperception. Pilate perceives that the religious leaders turned over Jesus because of envy, but he does not perceive that, by asking the crowd, he is playing into the hands of the religious leaders. They stir up the crowd and call for Jesus’ crucifixion. Pilate recoils. Crucifixion was such a terrible way to die, particularly for one he considered innocent. How painfully ironic that the pagan governor wanted to release the Messiah while the religious leaders wanted Him crucified.

What can keep you from following the crowd when the pressure is great to do so?

Hail, King of the Jews!

Read Mark 15:15–20. What did the soldiers do to Jesus, and what is its significance?

The Romans utilized a severe form of beating to prepare prisoners for execution. The victim was stripped of his clothes, tied to a pole, and then lashed with leather whips to which pieces of bone, glass, stones, and nails were tied.

After Jesus was whipped, the soldiers tasked with His execution continued His humiliation by clothing Him in a purple robe, placing a crown of thorns on His head, and mocking Him as king of the Jews. The group of soldiers is called a battalion, in this case anywhere from 200 to 600 men.

The irony in the scene is evident to the reader because Jesus really is the King, and the mocking words of the soldiers proclaim this truth. The action of the soldiers was a parody of how soldiers hailed the Roman emperor with the words “Hail, Caesar, Emperor!” Thus, there is an implicit comparison to the emperor.

The actions of the soldiers in mocking Jesus are “striking” His head with a reed, “spitting” on Him, and “kneeling down” in mock homage. All three of these actions are expressed in Greek with the imperfect tense. In this setting, this tense has the idea of repetitive action. Thus, they kept striking Him, kept spitting on Him, and kept kneeling down in mock homage before Him. Jesus takes all of this in silence, not responding at all.

The typical pattern of Roman execution by crucifixion involved having the convicted person carry the cross naked to the place of execution. This pattern, again, was to humiliate and shame the person completely before the community.

But the Jews abhorred public nakedness. Mark 15:20 notes that they removed the purple cloak and put His own clothes back on Him. Thus, this appears to be a concession that the Romans made to the Jews at that time and place.

Think about all the irony here. Their bowing and paying “homage” to Jesus as King was all in mockery even though Jesus really was the King, not just of the Jews but of the Romans, as well.

These men had no idea what they were doing. Why, though, will their ignorance not excuse them on Judgment Day?

The Crucifixion

Read Mark 15:21–38. What terrible and painful irony appears in these passages?

At this point in the Passion Narrative, Jesus is a silent victim, controlled by people who are bent on His death. Throughout the Gospel, up to His arrest, He was the master of activities. Now He is acted upon. Though He was a robust itinerant preacher, the beating He had received and the lack of food and sleep wore Him down to where a stranger had to bear His cross.

At the cross His garments were removed and became the property of the soldiers, who cast lots to see whose they would be (*compare with Ps. 22:18*). Crucifixion was a fairly bloodless method of execution. The nails used to fasten a person to the cross (*compare with John 20:24–29*) were likely driven through the wrist below the palm where no major blood vessels run. (In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for “hand” can refer to both the hand and the forearm.) The palm of the hand itself does not have the structures necessary to carry the weight of the body in crucifixion. The median nerve runs through the center of the forearm and would be crushed by the nails, causing excruciating pain up the arm. Breathing was difficult. To get a good breath, victims of crucifixion had to push against their nailed feet and flex their arms, again causing agonizing pain. Exhaustion asphyxia was one of the possible causes of death.

Jesus received tremendous mockery and humiliation during His crucifixion. The Gospel of Mark has a revelation/secret motif in which Jesus typically calls for silence about who He is. Consequently, such Christological titles as “Lord,” “Son of God,” or “Christ” do not appear often in the narrative.

This element changes at the cross. He cannot be hidden. It is ironic that it is the religious leaders who use these titles in mocking Jesus. How these men are condemning themselves!

One of their mocking statements stands out. In Mark 15:31, they say, “He saved others; he cannot save himself” (*ESV*). To make their point about His helplessness on the cross, they indicate that He did help others (the Greek verb can mean “save,” “heal,” or “rescue”). Thus, ironically, they admit He is the Savior. The irony goes further—the reason He could not, or would not, save Himself was because at the cross He was saving others.

Read John 1:1–3, and then think about what this passage tells us about Jesus, the same Jesus who is being crucified here in Mark. How do we wrap our minds around what Christ’s death means for us?

Forsaken by God

Read Mark 15:33–41. What are Jesus’ only words on the cross in Mark? What does Christ’s death ultimately mean for us all?

The Gospel of Mark presents the cross as a very dark place, both physically and spiritually. A supernatural darkness descended on Calvary from about noon on that Friday until about 3 p.m. “And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour” (*Mark 15:33, ESV*).

The words of Jesus on the cross are called the “cry of dereliction” as He prays, crying out to God, asking why He has been forsaken. He is quoting from Psalm 22:1. Other references to the same psalm occur in Mark 15:24, 29, indicating that the Scriptures are being fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Even in the evil plotting of men, the will of God is being fulfilled.

Jesus’ words from the cross are reported in Aramaic along with translation. The words “my God, my God” are *Eloi, Eloi* in the verse (a transliteration of the Aramaic *’elahi*). It would be easy to hear Jesus as calling for Elijah (Aramaic *’eliyyah*, which means “My God is YHWH”). This is the mistake that some bystanders make.

What becomes striking about this passage is the parallel it has to the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–11.

The Baptism: Mark 1:9–11	The Cross: Mark 15:34–39
John baptizes Jesus	Jesus’ baptism (<i>compare with Mark 10:38</i>)
John (Elijah figure; <i>see Mark 9:11–13</i>)	Calling Elijah
Heavens split	Veil split
Spirit (<i>pneuma</i>)	Jesus expires (<i>expneō</i>)
God’s voice “Beloved Son”	Centurion says “Son of God”

What these parallels suggest is that as the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1 is the beginning of His ministry, as prophesied in Daniel 9:24–27, what occurs in Mark 15 at the cross is the culmination, or goal, of His ministry, as He dies as a ransom for many (*Mark 10:45*). The death of Jesus on the cross also fulfills part of the prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. The tearing of the temple veil (*Mark 15:38*) points to the fulfillment of the sacrificial system, as type meets antitype, and a new phase of salvation history begins.

Even despite the evil plotting of humanity, God’s purposes were fulfilled. Why should this help us learn that, regardless of what happens around us, we can still trust God and know that His goodness will ultimately prevail?

Laid to Rest

Read Mark 15:42–47. What is the significance of Joseph of Arimathea’s intervention, especially since all of Jesus’ disciples were nowhere to be seen?

After all that drama, the more “mundane” things happen next. For starters, dead people always have to be buried. But several factors in what follows are quite touching spiritually, and others are extremely important historically.

In this passage, Joseph of Arimathea appears for the first and last time in the Gospel of Mark. He was a respected member of the Sanhedrin and one of the “urban elites.” As a wealthy and respected man, he had standing with the governor, which explains how he could dare approach Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus. It is a touching detail that a member of the council took such interest in Jesus’ burial. Meanwhile, where were Jesus’ trusted disciples in all this?

One historical detail of extreme importance here is the verification of the death of Jesus. Mark 15:43 tells of Joseph’s request for the body of Jesus. But Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus already was dead (*Mark 15:44*). He, therefore, summoned the centurion in charge of the crucifixion and asked if Jesus was dead already. The centurion confirmed that it was so.

This is important because of the later claim by some that Jesus did not die on the cross but only fainted. The testimony of the centurion to the Roman governor directly counters that assertion. The Romans did, after all, know how to execute criminals.

Joseph brought a linen shroud to wrap Jesus, and he laid His body in a tomb hewn from rock. This tomb was large enough to walk into (*Mark 16:5*). Along with Joseph, the Gospel writer notes two women who saw the location—Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus. These two, along with Salome, watched the Crucifixion from a distance; all three will go to the tomb on Sunday morning with the intention to complete their work of embalming Jesus (*Mark 16:1*).

Why the reference to these three women? They will be the witnesses to the empty tomb in Mark 16 and thus are important witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.

How ironic that Jesus’ followers are “missing in action” while a member of the Sanhedrin, the very body that condemned Jesus, becomes the “hero” here. How can we be sure that, in crucial times, we are not missing in action either?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “In Pilate’s Judgment Hall,” pp. 723–740; “Calvary,” pp. 741–757; “‘It Is Finished,’” pp. 758–764, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Pilate longed to deliver Jesus. But he saw that he could not do this, and yet retain his own position and honor. Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life. How many, to escape loss or suffering, in like manner sacrifice principle. Conscience and duty point one way, and self-interest points another. The current sets strongly in the wrong direction, and he who compromises with evil is swept away into the thick darkness of guilt.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 738.

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at how central the theology of substitution was to Ellen G. White and also to the Bible (*see, for instance, Isaiah 53*). Why is any theology that downplays the central role of substitution and Christ’s dying in our stead, paying in Himself the penalty for our sins, a false theology?
- 2 Who or what is the “Barabbas” in today’s world that gets asked for instead of Jesus?
- 3 What should the story of Joseph of Arimathea tell us about not judging outward appearances?
- 4 Review Daniel 9:24–27. Why should you be able to give a Bible study on this section to anyone who asks? Can you?

Bringing Armenia to Christ

By ANDREW McCHESNEY

While Anush was praying for her father, she also was praying for the other 4,000 residents of her town in Armenia. Then God began to touch hearts.

After her baptism, Anush met regularly with two other young women to pray for the town. Then they organized seminars that attracted several dozen young people. After that, with assistance from the Euro-Asia Division, they chartered buses and took groups of 50 young people on sightseeing tours around Armenia. Church members greeted and befriended the young people at every stop. Anush saw that the young people became more sincere and open in their questions about God when visiting places far from home.

As interest in the Adventist message grew, a pastor started to visit the town every other Sunday to hold talks about relationships, finances, and other practical issues. Many people attended the meetings over two years.

Father was influential and respected, so when he became a Seventh-day Adventist, the whole town took notice. People began to talk about faith and his decision to go to a church that was not the national church. His baptism broke the ice. The town's Adventist church, which once consisted of seven faithful women meeting in a private home, has now moved into a rented hall where dozens of people gather every Sabbath. Church members and others also meet online to pray daily. Plans are under way to buy a church building.

Today, Father, whose name is Armen Safaryan, works together with his wife, Gayane Badalyan, and daughter, Anush Safaryan, to make three kinds of tofu at their company. As the only tofu company in Armenia, it has been featured on national television, and Father had an opportunity to share his faith when asked why he makes tofu.

Father is a church elder and leader of the family ministries department, and he and Mother, who runs the church's health ministries department, are in high demand at other churches. Father is seen as a role model in a country where many mothers and children still go to church without their husbands and fathers. Father, Mother, and Anush want to change that.

"See, this normal Armenian man is an Adventist," church leaders say in introducing Father at speaking engagements. "Men, you are not alone. This man goes to church on Sabbath."



Anush shares her story at churches and youth camps, saying, "Do not be satisfied with your husbands and fathers just allowing you to go to church. Plead with God for them to go with you."

Part of last quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings.

The Risen Lord



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Mark 15:42–47, Mark 16, Col. 2:10–12, 1 Cor. 15:1–8, Dan. 9:24–27, John 20:11–18.*

Memory Text: “But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him’ ” (*Mark 16:6, NKJV*).

The crucifixion of Jesus destroyed the hopes and faith of His disciples. It was a dark weekend for them as they not only grappled with their Master’s death but feared for their own lives, as well (*John 20:19*).

In Mark 16, the final chapter in this Gospel, we will look at what followed His death.

First, we will look at the timing of Jesus’ resurrection and why the women came to the tomb on that Sunday morning. Adventists have sometimes shied away from resurrection morning because of the way it is misused to support Sunday sacredness. We will instead see how we can rejoice in the Sunday resurrection, despite the false theology that has, unfortunately, arisen from it.

Second, the lesson explains the first verses of Mark 16, linking these words to a theme that runs through the entire book. Our studies on Monday and Tuesday will look at these concepts.

Third, Wednesday and Thursday will examine the rest of Mark 16 and consider the mission it sets before us. This study will close with a challenge to the reader of Mark to take the gospel throughout the world.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 28.

Rejoicing in the Resurrection

Read Mark 15:42–16:6. What happens here, and why is this story so relevant to the resurrection narrative?

All the Gospel writers agree that Jesus died on the day that they identify as the “preparation” (*Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42*). Most commentators understand this as a reference to sunset Thursday through sunset Friday. Jesus died late on Friday afternoon and was then quickly buried before sunset.

During the Sabbath, the Lord rested in the grave, and all of Jesus’ disciples rested, as well. “And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (*Luke 23:56, NKJV*), a rather strange action if, in fact, Jesus had lessened, at least in their minds, the obligation to keep the fourth commandment.

On Saturday night, the women bought spices, and on Sunday morning, they went to the tomb with the desire to complete the typical burial process. Of course, Jesus was not there!

As early as the second century, Christians saw significance in the fact that Jesus rose on Sunday. This became the basis for Sunday sacredness. But is that what the New Testament teaches?

Read Colossians 2:10–12. What is the New Testament memorial of Jesus’ resurrection?

Not a word in the Bible hints at Sunday sacredness as a memorial of the Resurrection. That memorial is baptism. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (*Rom. 6:4, NKJV*).

Regardless of the false theology regarding Sunday worship, as Adventists we must rejoice in the Sunday morning resurrection of Jesus. Jesus has triumphed over death, and in His resurrection, we have the surety of ours.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (*1 Pet. 1:3, NKJV*). Look at the certainty Paul had about the resurrection of Jesus. How can we have that certainty, as well?

The Stone Was Rolled Away

Read Mark 16:1–8 and 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. What do these passages have in common?

The story of the resurrection appears in each of the Gospels. Each Gospel writer presents the story from a different perspective, but they all contain the core concepts that appear also in 1 Corinthians 15:1–8.

Four ideas appear again and again—died, buried, risen, seen. In Mark, “died” and “buried” are in chapter 15. The “risen” and “seen” appear in chapter 16, but with a twist. Mark 16:7 speaks of a meeting in Galilee, and there you will see Him (*see John 21*).

Some people find it incredible that Christians believe in a risen Lord. But the evidence for His resurrection is substantial and consistent with reason.

For starters, all one has to do is believe in God as the Creator (*see Genesis 1 and 2*) and the idea of the resurrection, of a miracle, becomes reasonable. The God who created the universe, and then life on earth, certainly had the power, if He chose, to resurrect Jesus. The existence of God doesn’t make the resurrection of Jesus inevitable, only reasonable.

Next, the tomb was definitely empty. Even atheist historians accept that fact. If it were not, the claim about His resurrection would fail right from the start because the existence of His body there would destroy any claims of His having risen.

Next, the explanation that His disciples stole the body does not work. The disciples surely couldn’t have gotten past the guards. And even if they had done so and got the body, why were the disciples never arrested for stealing it? The answer is that the religious leaders knew that the disciples had not done it.

Also, numerous people testified that they saw the risen Christ. Many, including the disciples, did not at first believe. And one very solid enemy, Paul, not only claims to have seen the risen Lord but that this experience changed the whole trajectory of his life—in very radical ways, too.

Finally (though there are many other reasons), how does one explain the rise of the Christian church, founded by people who claimed to have seen the risen Lord? Why would these people have been willing to die for what they knew was a lie? Their consistent testimony, both right after His death (*Acts 3:15*) and years later (*1 Pet. 1:3*), provides powerful evidence for His resurrection.

What would you say if someone were to ask you, What evidence do you have for Christ’s resurrection?

The Women at the Tomb

“The women who had stood by the cross of Christ waited and watched for the hours of the Sabbath to pass. On the first day of the week, very early, they made their way to the tomb, taking with them precious spices to anoint the Saviour’s body. They did not think about His rising from the dead. The sun of their hope had set, and night had settled down on their hearts. As they walked, they recounted Christ’s works of mercy and His words of comfort. But they remembered not His words, ‘I will see you again.’ John 16:22.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 788.

Read Mark 16:1–8. What happened, and how did the women first respond?

From the beginning of the Gospel, the reader knows that Jesus is the Messiah. But in the text itself, the first non-demon-possessed person who proclaims Him the Messiah is Peter in Mark 8:29. And this profession doesn’t happen until halfway through the book.

All throughout Mark’s Gospel, Jesus tells people to keep quiet about who He is or about a healing that He did for them. In Mark 1:44, He tells a leper to tell no one of his healing. In Mark 5:43, He tells Jairus and his wife to tell no one of the raising of their daughter. In Mark 7:36, He tells a group not to tell people about His healing of a deaf and mute man. And then He commands His disciples not to tell people that He is the Messiah (*Mark 8:30; see also Mark 9:9*). No doubt the main reason for Jesus’ telling them to be silent was to allow Himself the time to finish His ministry according to the time prophecies of Daniel 9:24–27.

Now, in this scene, even after they had been told that Jesus had been raised, the women, fearful and amazed, fled from the tomb and, at least at first, didn’t talk about what had happened either.

The silence, however, didn’t last long. By the time we reach the end of the book of Mark, we read this: “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs” (*Mark 16:20, ESV*).

Thus, the motif of being silent about Jesus and about who He is and what He has done is shattered. The book ends with them preaching “everywhere.”

**Why must we not keep silent about Jesus and what He has done?
Who can you tell today about Jesus and the plan of salvation?**

Appearing to Mary and Others

Read Mark 16:9–20. What do these verses add to the Resurrection story?

Almost all of Mark 16:9–20 has parallels to other passages in the New Testament—Mary Magdalene at the tomb seeing Jesus (*Matt. 28:1, 9, 10; John 20:11–18; compare with Luke 8:2*); two disciples see Him in the countryside (*Luke 24:13–35*); the 11 disciples are commissioned (*Matt. 28:16–20, Luke 24:36–49, John 20:19–23*).

The first person to see Jesus alive was Mary Magdalene (*John 20:11–18*). Other women saw Him, as well (*Matt. 28:8–10*). It is significant that the first people to see the risen Lord were women. Because women in the ancient world did not have high status as witnesses, if the story were fabricated, it would have been much more likely to name men as the first witnesses. But it is not men, not the Twelve, but a woman. She goes to tell the good news to the disciples, but, not surprisingly, they do not believe her testimony, most likely because it seemed fantastic and also, unfortunately, because Mary was a woman.

Apologists for the resurrection story of Jesus have used this fact, that of women being the first ones to have seen Jesus, as powerful evidence for the veracity of the story.

What happens in Mark 16:14 that makes no sense if this story were a fabrication?

Of course, if they were making the story up, why would they have made themselves look so bad? Jesus had to rebuke them for their “hardness of heart.” The Gospel accounts, from the time of His arrest to His appearances after the Resurrection, depict the followers of Jesus in a very negative light—fleeing, denying, disbelieving, and so forth. This would make no sense if the story were made up.

In contrast, their later bold and unwavering proclamation of the risen Christ, and the hope it offers everyone, presents powerful evidence for the veracity of their claims.

How can we protect ourselves from falling into the spiritual trap of doubt and unbelief? Why must we daily link ourselves to the risen Christ?

Go Into All the World

Read Mark 16:14–20. What did Jesus say to His disciples when He appeared to them, and what do these words mean to us today?

The first words of Jesus to His disciples are recorded only in indirect discourse in Mark 16:14. He rebukes them for their unbelief and hard-heartedness. This question of unbelief is not simply a modern problem. As we already have seen, the original disciples of Jesus struggled with belief (*Matt. 28:17, John 20:24–29*), and they were with Jesus in the flesh and saw, again and again, the miracles.

But by various proofs, He demonstrated to them the reality of His resurrection. Then their testimony, combined with the evidence summarized in Monday’s study, forms a firm foundation for faith.

Jesus then commissions His disciples to take the gospel to the world. His command is expansive. They are to go to the entire world and proclaim the gospel to all creation. Jesus then explains the outcome of their work for weal and for woe—believers will be saved, unbelievers condemned.

Jesus also describes signs that will accompany the disciples’ work—casting out demons, speaking new languages, protection from harm, and healing the sick. Some people have mistakenly interpreted Mark 16:18 as an affirmation for Christians to show their faith by picking up poisonous snakes. No such presumptuous action is authorized here. What Jesus is describing is protection when one is involved in mission, such as Paul’s service for others, as in Acts 28:3–6.

Of course, the Bible does not teach that Christians will always be protected from harm. At times God sees fit to work a miracle to further the gospel cause. But sometimes Christians suffer because of their witness. In that circumstance their patient endurance is another sign to unbelievers of the power of faith.

And then, after doing all He did here, “He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (*Mark 16:19, NKJV*). Jesus ascended to sit at the right hand of God, the place of supreme power, for Jesus had defeated all the forces of evil.

Notice the last verse. Though they went “everywhere,” preaching the gospel, they did not go alone. “The Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen” (*Mark 16:20, NKJV*). He was with them then and promises to be with us now as we continue the work they started.

“**I am with you always, even to the end of the age**” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*). What comfort can, and should, we take from this promise as we, too, seek to proclaim the gospel “everywhere”?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘The Lord Is Risen,’ ” pp. 779–787; “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Saviour the life that was lost through sin is restored; for He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will. He is invested with the right to give immortality. The life that He laid down in humanity, He takes up again, and gives to humanity. ‘I am come,’ He said, ‘that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’ ‘Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.’ ‘Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.’ John 10:10; 4:14; 6:54.

“To the believer, death is but a small matter. Christ speaks of it as if it were of little moment. ‘If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death,’ ‘he shall never taste of death.’ To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and ‘when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.’ John 8:51, 52; Col. 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 786, 787.

Even atheist historians, those who cannot accept the reality of the Resurrection, admit not only that Jesus had been killed but that after His death many people claimed to have seen the resurrected Christ, and as a result they began the nucleus of what became the Christian church. Some, in an attempt to explain why they claimed this, said that Jesus had a twin brother or that the early disciples hallucinated, thinking that they saw Jesus. Others said that Jesus never really died but only swooned and then, later, revived. Another person claimed that aliens came down and took the body. For a look at all these arguments and how they don’t work, see Clifford Goldstein, *Risen: Finding Hope in the Empty Tomb* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2021).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why would the disciples have lied about the resurrection of Jesus? From all that we know, they faced nothing but hatred, alienation, and persecution for their belief. What would they have gained by making this story up?
- 2 What evidence of Jesus’ resurrection is most convincing to you? Share your reasons with your class.
- 3 Dwell more on the great hope that Jesus’ resurrection offers us. Read 1 Corinthians 15. How much importance does Paul put on the resurrection of Jesus?

A Church Built on Garbage

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Purna faced a seemingly impossible task. He had volunteered to plant a church in an unentered district of a major South Asian city, and he didn't know where to start. He had moved to the district after volunteering to serve as a Global Mission pioneer. But how could he share his love for Christ with his non-Christian neighbors?

"God, please help," he prayed.

Purna prayed for a week, but he still didn't know where to start. But he did know one thing. He couldn't stand the stench on the road outside his house. Piles of garbage and puddles of dirty rainwater mingled on the road. One morning, he saw that the garbage had blocked the gutters, and filthy water was overflowing onto the road. He decided to do something. Taking a long bamboo pole, he began picking away the trash from the gutters.

As he worked, the neighbors noticed.

"Did the city government send you to clean the road?" someone asked.

Purna replied that he had not been hired to clean the road and that he simply lived on it. The neighbors were impressed. Nobody had ever cleaned the road before.

"You're a good man," a neighbor said. "We need you here."

"Don't ever leave here," another said.

As he cleaned the road, Purna became a local celebrity. Everyone knew him and was talking about him. People invited him into their homes.

As he met the neighbors, he learned that one man was paralyzed on his left side. Purna, who had been trained in massage, offered to help. The man agreed, and Purna began to give massages. Every time they met, Purna prayed and then gave a massage. The man recovered fully.

Neighbors were amazed to see the man in such good health.

"Who healed you?" they asked.

"Oh, it was the good man who cleans our road!" the man replied.

Then the neighbors really wanted to get to know Purna. They began to ask for prayers and massages.

Today, Purna has accomplished the seemingly impossible and planted a church. Eleven people have been baptized, and 20 others are studying the Bible. "Please pray for God to help us serve Him more and more," Purna said. "Even today, I am cleaning the road. If I see garbage stuck in the drains, I clean it up."

Purna lives in a veiled country that Adventist Mission is not identifying so as to protect his work among a population often hostile to Christianity. Learn more about Global Mission pioneers on the Adventist Mission website: bit.ly/GMPioneers.

During this quarter, we will be studying the Gospel of John, a finely crafted masterpiece. It is the Word of God, as artfully expressed by the apostle John.

It is unique among the four Gospels, often focusing attention on the personal interactions between Jesus and just one or two people. Many of these stories appear only in John.

As with the entire Bible, the Gospel came by the will of God rather than by the will of humanity. John was merely the willing instrument whom the Holy Spirit used to convey many crucial themes: the Word (*logos*), light, bread, water, the Holy Spirit, oneness, signs, testimony, and prophecy. These themes mutually enhance and illuminate one another throughout the Gospel.

But let us not miss the big picture while examining the details. May our study of John's Gospel, written by E. Edward Zinke and Thomas Shepherd, carry us back to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. The details have a role, which is to point us toward the big picture, and in John that big picture is a divinely inspired revelation of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Lesson 1—Signs That Point the Way

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Wedding at Cana** (*John 2:1–11*)

MONDAY: **The Second Sign in Galilee** (*John 4:46–54*)

TUESDAY: **The Miracle at the Pool of Bethesda** (*John 5:1–9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Hard Hearts** (*John 5:10–16*)

THURSDAY: **Jesus' Claims** (*John 5:19–47*)

Memory Text—*John 20:30, 31, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: John calls Jesus' miracles "signs"—miraculous events that point toward the deeper reality that Jesus is the Messiah.

Lesson 2—Signs of Divinity

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Feeding of the Five Thousand** (*John 6:1–14*)

MONDAY: **"Surely, He Is the Prophet"** (*John 6:14*)

TUESDAY: **The Healing of the Blind Man: Part 1** (*John 9:1–16*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Healing of the Blind Man: Part 2** (*John 9:17–34*)

THURSDAY: **The Resurrection of Lazarus** (*John 11:38–44*)

Memory Text—*John 11:25, 26, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Jesus not only said things that revealed His divinity but backed up His words with works that manifested His divinity.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, Inc., Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: info@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.