



The Passion according to Mark.

5

Mark 14: 1 - 16:8



Prayer

O God, who by the pages of both Testaments
Instruct and prepare us to celebrate the Paschal Mystery,
Grant that we may comprehend your mercy,
So that the gifts we receive from you this night
may confirm our hope of the gifts to come.
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Easter Vigil)

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The passion narrative is the climax of the Gospel. The shadow of the cross has been evident throughout the Gospel from the disputes with the Pharisees and Herodians from Chap.2 onwards. (*c.f. Mk 3:6*) The last week of Jesus' life comprises one third of the entire Gospel. It is important to read this final part of the Gospel in relation to all that precedes it. While we may read the passion as a unit on its own; it must be understood in the light of the entire Gospel and continues many of the themes developed within it.

The events

Jesus' interpretation of these events

In the passion narrative the *events* of the suffering and death of Jesus are interwoven with an *interpretation* of their significance.

The plan to arrest Jesus secretly and thus prevent tumult (Mk 14:1f)

Anointing at Bethany in preparation for his death (Mk 14:3-9)

Facilitation of this plan through Judas' betrayal (Mk 14:10f)

Celebration of the Passover (Mk 14:12-16) as a new and everlasting covenant in which the body and blood are to be shared in the form of bread and wine, symbols of his passion and death (Mk 14:22f).

He prophesies Peter's denial and the apostles' desertion and subsequent reunion (Mk 14:26f).

Jesus declares his acceptance of the passion to be in conformity with the Father's will (Mk 14:32-42)

Arrest of Jesus (Mk 14:43-47)

Awareness of what was foretold by the scriptures concerning him. (Mk 14:48f).

Trial before the Sanhedrin and indictment for blasphemy (Mk 14:55-64);

Transfer to Pilate's court and accusation as King of the Jews (Mk 15:1-5);

Refusal to throw himself on the mercy of Pilate (Mk 15:2-5)

Official and popular demand for Jesus' crucifixion; Pilate's consent under pressure (Mk 15:15-27)

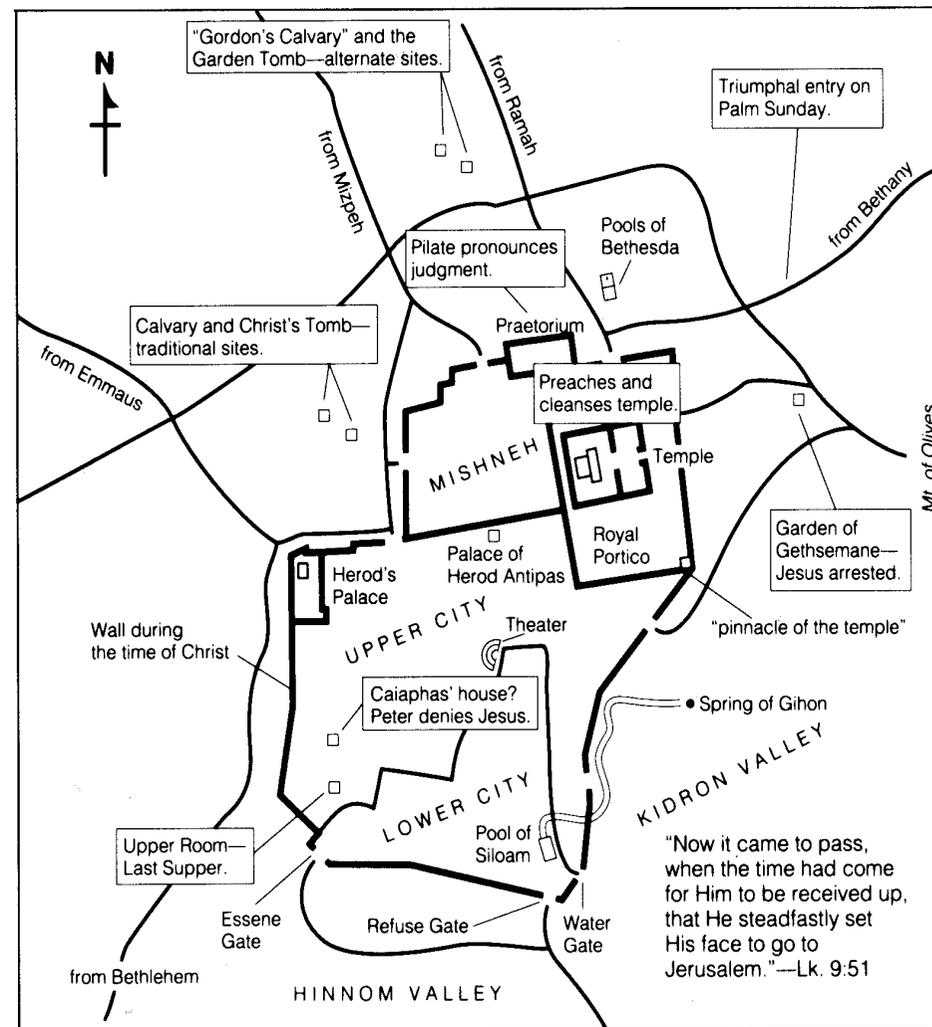
Mockery, scourging and crucifixion (Mk 15:15-27);

Jesus prays Psalm 22 from the cross (Mk 15:34). Rejects the drug that would cloud his mind to the reality of the crucifixion (Mk 15:36).

Jesus' death on the Cross (Mk 15:29-39)

The Roman centurion's confession of faith (Mk 15:39). This is the climax of the Gospel of Mark.

The Places within the Passion of Jesus



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The climax of the Gospel of Mark is the death of Jesus. Jesus is revealed to be the Suffering Servant on the cross. It is here that his divinity is recognised. His message may be similar to St Paul: 'we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.' (1 Cor 1:23)

By narrating the facts without embellishing them, we can see how disconcerting the realisation of God's plan is. The Cross is scandalous. It is at this moment that the Son of God is revealed. The end of the Gospel is abrupt. The longer ending of the Gospel is recognised as divinely inspired by the Catholic Church. It does not seem to have been written by Mark. It implies knowledge of the resurrection traditions within the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Luke.

The events: a plan to arrest Jesus secretly and thus prevent tumult (*Mk 14:1f*) facilitation of this plan through Judas' betrayal (*Mk 14:10f*); the arrest of Jesus (*Mk 14:43-47*); the trial before the Sanhedrin and indictment for blasphemy (*Mk 14:55-64*); transfer to Pilate's court and accusation as King of the Jews (*Mk 15:1-5*); official and popular demand for Jesus' crucifixion; Pilate's consent under pressure (*Mk 15:15-27*) the mockery, scourging and crucifixion (*Mk 15:15-27*); death on the cross (*Mk 15:29-39*) and the burial by Joseph of Arimathea (*Mk 15:42-47*).

The interpretation: Jesus is described as interpreting these events as follows: the anointing at Bethany as a preparation for his death (*Mk 14:3-9*); his celebration of the Passover (*Mk 14:12-16*) as a new and everlasting covenant in which the body and blood are to be shared in the form of bread and wine, symbols of his passion and death (*Mk 14:22f*). He prophesies Peter's denial and the apostles' desertion and subsequent reunion (*Mk 14:26f*). Jesus declares his acceptance of the passion to be in conformity with the father's will (*Mk 14:32-42*) and confesses his awareness of what was foretold by the scriptures concerning him. (*Mk 14:48f*). He refuses to throw himself on the mercy of Pilate (*Mk 15:2-5*) and rejects the drug that would cloud his mind to the reality of the crucifixion (*Mk 15:36*). He prays *Psalms 22* from the cross (*Mk 15:34*). The Roman centurion's tribute to Jesus' courage (*Mk 15:39*) is actually a concluding confession of faith, put on Gentile lips.

Within the account of the passion, we may discern four themes that are central to Mark's Gospel and the account of the passion of Jesus:

- Jesus' foreknowledge of his passion and death.
- The failure of the disciples and the betrayal of Judas.
- The suffering of Jesus as the fulfilment of the scriptures.
- The conclusion of the Gospel: Jesus is the Messiah, and the Son of God.

Jesus' Foreknowledge of his Passion and Death

During his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus predicts his passion and death on three occasions. The account of the passion is the fulfilment of these prophecies. We see examples of Jesus foreknowledge as he directs his disciples to fetch a donkey (*Mk 11:2f*) and to prepare the Last Supper (*Mk 14:13f*). Often Jesus' foreknowledge is contrasted with the failure of the disciples to understand,

as with the Predictions of the Passion. The account of the Last Supper emphasises Jesus' foreknowledge of Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial and his own self-sacrifice in contrast with these events.

Jesus' foreknowledge of God's will does not necessarily imply a simple acceptance of this will. In Mark's Gospel, the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane is graphic. Jesus' foreknowledge only serves to make his suffering worse, as he contemplates his impending death. This struggle to accept God's will happens in the midst of the disciples who are hopelessly unaware of what is about to happen. Mark makes no apologies for them.

The Failure of the Disciples and the Betrayal of Judas

The arrest of Jesus displays the failure of the disciples who flee, including the disciple who runs away naked. This is interpreted by Jesus as a fulfilment of the scriptures (*Zach 13:7*). The betrayal of Judas is contrasted with the compassion of the woman who anointed his feet. This betrayal is heightened by his participation at the Last Supper and his kiss at Gethsemane.

Peter's denial is placed side by side with the first trial of Jesus. This only serves to stress the faithfulness of Jesus and the cowardice of Peter. Peter's denial grows in intensity until the prophecy of Jesus is fulfilled as the cock crows.

The Fulfilment of the Scriptures

This theme within Mark's Gospel has been made evident already. Jesus makes explicit reference to this fact throughout the passion narrative. The actions of Jesus fulfil the scriptures, especially the image of the suffering servant of *Isaiah Ch 52 - 53*.

At the Last Supper, Jesus understands his betrayal by Judas, as part of his journey to the Cross, in fulfilment of the scriptures. The Last Supper is celebrated as a Passover meal in fulfilment of the Exodus sacrifice. (*Ex 24:8*)

The crucifixion of Jesus brings to the fore the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah. Jesus' silence at the trial (*Isa 53:12*) and his suffering remind us vividly of this passage. Jesus is the suffering servant of whom Isaiah prophesied. Jesus dies with the words of *Psalm 22:1*.

The Conclusion of the Gospel: Jesus is the Messiah, and the Son of God

The anointing of Jesus by the woman at the beginning of the passion narrative reveals that she has understood Jesus' identity. By her action he is '*the anointed one*': *The Messiah/Christ*. This action also prepares Jesus for his burial which links his death and this revelation together. It is a poignant moment because this action is placed between the Chief Priest's plot and the betrayal by Judas.

Jesus reveals his identity during the trial before the Sanhedrin. He is accused of blasphemy when he reveals himself to be the Messiah. For Pilate the title 'King of the Jews' has a purely political meaning and may have carried revolutionary overtones. Jesus neither affirms nor denies the title. He understood the political implications (which he would reject), while affirming the spiritual nature as Son of David. The subsequent mockery and crucifixion only serve to underline the irony that this title applied to him is correct.

It is at the death of Jesus that the Gospel reaches its climax. Here the Centurion declares: 'Truly this man was God's Son!' (*Mk 15:39*) This is the conclusion to the opening statement of the Gospel. (*Mk 1:1*) It is on the lips of a Gentile that the declaration of faith is found. In the Temple, the curtain is torn in two. This curtain divided the holy place from the Holy of Holies. Its rending at Jesus' death suggests the end of the old Covenant and the beginning of the Gentile mission.

It is from this point that we see the women who are the foot of the cross. They provide the link which brings us from the cross, to the burial and the empty tomb. The empty tomb is not proof of the resurrection but is a necessary part of the disciples' proclamation that Jesus had risen. They are directed to return to Galilee, from where the Gospel began and where the ministry of Jesus was centred.