Chapter 1

1:1. “The beginning.” Mark is the only Gospel that has anything like the phrase, “the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ.” Yet when we understand that Mark is the Gospel that portrays Jesus Christ as the Servant of God, we can see that the phrase fits perfectly with the purpose of Mark (see commentary on “the gospel” on Mark 1:1 as to why there are four Gospels). Jesus Christ’s ministry as the obedient and suffering Servant of God came to an end with his death, which is why in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus never appears after his death. He was resurrected, not as a servant, but as Lord of all. But the Good News of Jesus Christ did not end with his death. It continued with his resurrection, his ascension, and now with his ministry from heaven. Thus Mark, which portrays Jesus as the Servant of God, only gives us the “beginning” of the Good News concerning him. In contrast to Jesus’ ministry as a Servant, which came to an end, his ministry as King (Matthew); human man (Luke); and Son of God (John) continues to this day, and Matthew, Luke, and John all have post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. Some scholars have suggested that the word “beginning” is referring to the start of Jesus’ ministry, as if the verse read, “This is the way the Good News of Jesus begins.” However, that cannot be correct. The “Good News” of Jesus began many years before John the Baptist came on the scene. At his birth about 30 years before, the angel announced that Jesus birth was “Good News” (Luke 2:10).

“the gospel of Jesus Christ.” It is sometimes asked why there are four Gospels. Part of the answer is likely that for any testimony to be validated, there needs to be 2 or 3 witnesses (Deut. 17:6, 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28), and the four Gospels provide that, especially since Matthew and John were eyewitnesses. Nevertheless, the accounts by Mark and Luke have been recognized by most Christians not only as authentic historical documents, but also as God-inspired records of the life of Christ just as Matthew and John are.

The second reason there are Four Gospels is that each is written from a different perspective, and together they comprise a very profound, prophetic and precise fourfold pattern of the Messiah. We will see that the pattern in the four Gospels is that Matthew portrays Christ as a king, Mark as a servant, Luke as a man, and John as the Son of God. This pattern had already been set forth and foreshadowed long before by the Old Testament prophets. This fourfold pattern has its roots in an important Hebrew term used in the prophecies of Christ, which is tsemach. Tsemach means “sprout” or “offspring,” and is often translated “Branch,” and the vital “Branch,” and center of Old Testament prophecy is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Tsemach paints a mental picture of a new sprout or shoot coming up out of a dead-looking stump, certainly an appropriate picture of the Messiah, because just when it looked like Israel was cut down and dead, out of it sprang the Messiah. In the Old Testament, tsemach is used five times in direct prophetic reference to the Messiah and aspects of his life. Although “the branch” was a common term for the Messiah, five Old Testament verses in particular lay out a fourfold prophetic picture of him. In two verses the Branch is shown to be a king (Jer. 23:5; 33:15), also the Branch is shown as a servant
These four descriptions of the Messiah subdivide according to one of the most basic distinctions we can make about any person: who he is and what he does. Two of the four terms refer to his person—Son and man, while the other two relate to his work—King and servant. Intrinsic to these terms is another important distinction in the life of the Messiah: he is humbled and he is exalted, that is, both “sufferings” and “glory” will characterize his life. We see Jesus’ humility in the designations man and servant, we see his exaltation in the terms king and Son of God. Although the four Gospels are in many ways the same, they are also unique, each having its own vocabulary and style.

Matthew has a number of unique characteristics that point to Christ as King. Matthew’s genealogy presents Jesus as a King from the line of David, and starts out with the “record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David,” and then gives the genealogy from Abraham, the one who was promised the land, through King David, who was promised the kingdom in a covenant of salt with God (2 Chron. 13:5). Matthew mentions the humble birth of Christ in one sentence (1:25), but then skips forward almost two years until the Magi arrive and ask “…Where is the one who has been born king...?” (Matt. 2:2). Then the Magi present the royal Son with gifts appropriate of his status as king. The phrase, “the Kingdom of Heaven” is associated with the specific reign of the Messiah on earth. It occurs more than 30 times in the gospel of Matthew, but not once in any of the other Gospels, which use the phrase, “Kingdom of God.” The title, “Son of David,” occurs ten times in Matthew and only six times in all the other Gospels combined. There are a number of parables that are unique to Matthew, and most of them have a clear reference to the Kingdom. These include: the Darnel (13:24-30); the Hidden Treasure (13:44); the Pearl (13:45); the Dragnet (13:47); the Unmerciful Servant (18:23-35); the Laborers in the Vineyard (20:1-16); the Two Sons (21:28-32); the Marriage of the Kings Son (22:1-14); and the Ten Virgins (25:1-13). Only Matthew records the “sheep and goat judgment,” when the king lets the righteous into his kingdom but excludes the unrighteous (Matt. 25).

The Gospel of Mark, which presents Christ as a servant, is short, simple and forceful, emphasizing Christ’s works more than his words. Unlike the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, the Gospel of Mark has no genealogy at all, which makes sense because a servant’s genealogy is not relevant—the work he does is what matters. Commentators have long noticed that Mark focuses more on what Jesus did than what he said, which makes sense because obedient action is the sign of a good servant. Mark also moves quickly from one event to another. Even the vocabulary reflects this pattern. The Greek word eutheos (“immediately”) occurs 40 times in Mark but only 27 times in all the other Gospels combined. That statistic is made even more vivid when one realizes that there are only 16 chapters in Mark, but 73 chapters in the other three Gospels.

A valued servant is quick to obey. E. W. Bullinger, who also saw the fourfold portrait of Christ, notes that Jesus “is addressed as ‘Lord’ in the other three Gospels 73 times,...he is addressed as such in the Gospel of Mark only twice” (Companion Bible; intro to Mark). Bullinger notes that of these two uses of “Lord” that appear in the KJV, one was by a Gentile woman and was simply the title equivalent of “sir” (7:28), and one is 9:24, which is not even in the earliest Greek texts, but was a later addition. So actually,
Jesus is never called “Lord” in Mark by anyone who knew he was the Messiah, a clear indication of the emphasis in Mark on Jesus’ role as God’s servant. Appropriately, more than a third of Mark takes place in the last week of Jesus’ life, which places special emphasis on his obedience and the fact that he was the suffering Servant foretold in the Old Testament.

Mark also opens with the phrase that Mark gives the “beginning” of the Good News of Jesus (Mark 1:1). That is true, because the Good News of Jesus continues to this day with Jesus sitting on the right hand of God. Jesus’ role of King, human man, and Son of God, all continue to this day, but Jesus’ role as the Servant of God ended with his death. Since Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant, it is appropriate that Jesus does not appear in Mark after his resurrection, when he is no longer the Servant, but “Lord of all.” All three other Gospels have accounts of Jesus after his resurrection, but Mark does not (see commentary on Mark 16:9). Thus the Gospel of Mark only gives us the “beginning” of the Good News about Jesus, it does not continue with Good News about him after his resurrection.

The Gospel of Luke, which portrays Christ as a man, presents the Messiah and his relationships in a way that highlights his humanity as the Last Adam. The gospel of Luke has a genealogy that traces Jesus back to Adam, the first man. Luke opens with information on the parents and birth of John the Baptist, giving information we would expect to find in a “human interest” story. It then gives details about Joseph and Mary and the circumstances of Jesus’ birth, including his being presented at the Temple. These details show that Jesus was born in normal human circumstances (see commentary on those specific verses), and subject to the same laws and regulations as every other Jewish child.

Luke has an emphasis on both prayer and praise to God, which is appropriate for all mankind. Jesus is shown praying in 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 11:1; 22:32, 41, 44; and 23:34. Luke has four great praise hymns that are unique to Luke: the Magnificat of Mary (1:46-55); the Benedictus of Zechariah (1:68-79); the Gloria in Excelsis of the angels (2:14), and the Nunc Dimittis of Simeon (2:29-32), and praise to God is mentioned in many other verses.

Luke clearly portrays Jesus’ great love for all mankind, and describes him as a warm and loving person. Commentators note that the book of Luke portrays Jesus’ special concern for the poor, sinners, women and the family more clearly than any other Gospel. Luke has a unique emphasis on women, and speaks of women in a way not covered in the other Gospels, for example, Elizabeth, Anna, the widow of Nain, the repentant woman (7:37-50); the women who ministered to Christ (8:2, 3), the daughters of Jerusalem (23:27, 28), and Mary and Martha (10:38-42). Also, Luke shows Jesus sympathetically acknowledging the Gentiles. The parables that are unique to Luke emphasize human traits such as love for fellow man (and the importance of an individual), wisdom, and foolishness. Parables unique to Luke include: the Two Debtors (7:41, 42); the Good Samaritan (10:30-37); the Persistent Friend (11:5-8); the Rich Fool (12:16-21); the Lost Coin (15:8-10); the Forgiving Father (15:11-32); the Wise Manager (16:1-12); the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31); the Persistent Widow (18:1-8); the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14).

The Gospel of John, which portrays Christ as the Son of God, starts out by saying that God, in the beginning, had a plan, purpose or wisdom (the logos) that became flesh,
that is, the Son “comes from” the Father. This is a very short genealogy: the Father had a Son, an only begotten Son, and since Jesus’ father is God, any portrayal of his earthly birth would only take emphasis away from the true Father. Jesus’ intimacy with his Father is uniquely portrayed in John. For example, the word “father” occurs as many times in John as in all the other Gospels combined.

The narrator writes the Gospel of John from the standpoint that Jesus is already exalted and in heaven, something both unique to John and appropriate to his status as the Son of God (cp. John 3:13 and commentary). Theologians have long noticed that John is different from the other Gospels and truly unique. This fits with our expectations, because, as “the only begotten Son of God,” Jesus is truly unique.

John is also unique from the standpoint of what it leaves out. For example, there is no temptation in the wilderness. Kings, servants, and humans need to demonstrate their qualifications and be proven for the job they do, but as the Son of God, Jesus is qualified to be the Messiah without being tempted first. Similarly, there is no record of the event called “the Transfiguration,” because, as we have already said, John sees Jesus from the perspective of already being risen and in glory, not the perspective of preparing for his glory.

It should catch our attention that when the Messiah does a miracle in his role as King, Servant, or Man, the act is called a “miracle” (dunamis). The Greek word dunamis (miracle; power) occurs almost 40 times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but it does not occur at all in John. In contrast to the other Gospels, when Jesus does a miracle in the Gospel of John, the work is called a “sign” (simeion). A “sign” is something that gives information and points to something else. For example, a road sign with a curved line on it points out that there is a curve in the road ahead. The eight “signs” in John that are clearly miracles are called “signs” because they point to Jesus as the Son of God. Thus, Jesus could say, “though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is united with me, and I am united with the Father” (John 10:38); and “Keep on believing me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else keep believing me because of the works themselves” (14:11). The eight miracle signs in John are:

1. Water to Wine (2:1-11; called a sign in v. 11)
2. The Ruler’s Son Healed (4:46-50; called a sign in 48, 54)
3. Sick Man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-47; not specifically called a sign, but in 6:2 Jesus’ healing the sick was called a sign)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-14; called a sign in 14)
5. Walking on the Sea (6:17-21; not specifically called a sign, but obviously included in the plural “signs” in 6:26)
6. Man Born Blind (9:1-39; called a sign in 16)
7. Lazarus Raised From the Dead (11:1-45; called a sign by the Jews in 47, and called a sign in 12:18)
8. Multitude of Fish (21:1-11; Although the word “sign” is not used in John 21, the sign of the fish occurs immediately after John 20:30 and 31, which speak of “these” signs that are written, and thus certainly includes the sign that follows immediately afterward)

Besides these specifically mentioned signs, there are other places in John that refer to signs Jesus was doing, such as 2:23; 3:2; 7:31; and 12:37. The signs that Jesus
was doing shows the prejudice and spiritual blindness of the Jews, who a number of times asked Jesus to show them a sign of who he was (John 2:18; 6:30).

The fourfold portrait of Christ given by the Four Gospels is good evidence they are the God-breathed Word of God, and not just the writing and memories of four men. There is no way the four different writers could have collaborated on their individual Gospels and produced this remarkable fourfold portrait of Christ. Like all the different writers of the Bible, they each wrote independently of one another, separated by both time and space. They could not have agreed upon what to include together and what to emphasize individually such that the wonderful fourfold portrait of Christ that was foretold in the Old Testament was laid out in the Four Gospels. The Four Gospels, like the rest of the Bible, are the God-breathed Word.

“The Son of God.” This phrase, which is only two words in the Greek text, is missing from some early and important manuscripts. The variety of manuscripts that do not have the phrase is such that many scholars have concluded that differences in the manuscripts is not due to an accidental deletion that was simply re-copied, but rather was a deliberate change. That fact has not ended the debate; it has just shifted the question. Is it more likely that the phrase was original, but adoptionist scribes (those who say Jesus “became” the Son at his baptism) deleted it to add support for their position; or is it more likely that the phrase was not original, but scribes added it, following their general tendency to expand titles. At this point there is no conclusive evidence for either position, and since the adoptionist view is erroneous, whether the phrase “Son of God” was added to simply expand the title of Jesus Christ, or whether it is original, the fact remains that Jesus was the Son of God from his conception, so we left the phrase in.

1:2. “As it is written in Isaiah.” The quotation is from both Malachi 3:1 and the book of Isaiah 40:3. This is not “a mistake” or “error,” as some people claim, as if Mark thought the whole quotation was from Isaiah. Verses 2 and 3 are run together as if they were one quotation, not two. By just mentioning the part quoted from Isaiah, Mark is using a literary device that puts the emphasis of the extended quotation on the part that Isaiah wrote, which says what we are to do in light of the Lord’s coming. Hendrickson writes: “Mark tells us that he is going to quote from Isaiah. He does exactly that, though not immediately.” Had Mark quoted only Isaiah, we would be left knowing only that a “voice” was crying in the wilderness. By quoting Malachi before Isaiah, we know to whom the “voice” belongs: to none other than the messenger who will begin to prepare the way of the Lord.

The quotation from Malachi has been adapted to fit the Messiah. A more literal quotation of the Hebrew of Malachi 3:1 would be, “Behold, I [Yahweh] am sending My messenger, and he will clear the way [road] before me.” In Mark, the verse has been modified so that the messenger prepares the road for the Messiah. Hence here in Mark the verse means, “Look!, I am sending my [Yahweh’s] messenger before your [the Messiah’s] face, who will prepare your [the Messiah’s] way.

This is not the only place two places in the OT are quoted but only one prophet is cited. For example, Matthew 27:9 and 10 come from Zechariah and Jeremiah, but only Jeremiah is quoted. This same pattern occurs in the OT in 2 Chronicles 36:21, which says it quotes Jeremiah, but actually quotes both Jeremiah and Leviticus. When God quotes two sources, but only gives credit to one, He is telling us where to place the emphasis in what he is quoting so there is no guesswork about it.
In light of the fact that the extended quotation comes from Malachi and then Isaiah, it is easy to see why copyists would change “Isaiah the prophet” to “in the prophets.” The earliest texts from both the Alexandrian and Western text families have Isaiah the prophet, and the change to “the prophets” is “an obvious correction” (Roger Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament*).

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“prepare the road.” See commentary on verse 3.

1:3. “Make the road ready for the Lord! Make his paths straight!” This quotation, which comes from Isaiah 40:3 (and the quotation in Matt. 3:3 and Luke 3:4) is from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. [For more information on the Septuagint and the original NT texts being in Greek, see commentary on Luke 3:4].

The word “road” is *hodos* (#3598 ὁδὸς). Like our English word “way,” it can refer to a road or path, or it can refer to a specific way of doing things. Many times, such as here, its primary meaning is “road,” and it is helpful to translate it that way.

In the Old Testament times (this verse is quoted from Isaiah, roughly 750 BC), there was not much attention paid to the condition of the roads in a country. Even in Roman times, usually only the very important central roadways, and the roads in cities, got any real attention. Nobody owned the roads, and nobody profited from spending time repairing them. It was just repeated use that made the terrain into dirt paths, some wider than others, that then were referred to as roads. Books on the customs of the Bible lands (especially those from the 1800’s or earlier), are replete with stories of the horrors of traveling on roads. They were full of pits, or rocky, or had overhanging foliage that could knock a rider off a mount. They were dark at night and slippery when wet or frozen. They often ascended or descended quickly, and became very dangerous if the conditions were less than ideal. Often thorn bushes grew near the road such that unwary travelers were scratched or had their clothing torn. Added to all this was that there were no road signs to tell travelers where they were, or what road to take if they came to a crossroads. This caused a lot of anxiety to travelers, who did not want to waste time going the wrong way, and could be quite dangerous if the road went to an area that was inhabited by robbers.

When Jesus said, “I am the road,” (usually translated, “I am the way”), he was being clear that if a person did not want to get lost trying to get to God, that Jesus was the road to travel on.

When a king (or sometimes a high official) was going to go on a journey, he would send out messengers before he traveled. They would announce to the farmers and villagers who lived close to the road to take the time to go out and prepare it to make the king’s trip easier. The villagers would clear the rock and bushes, fill in ruts and pits, and generally make the road safer and easier to travel. “Make his paths straight” does not refer to taking winding sections of the road and re-routing them, although that might have been done on a small scale if the road went around something that was no longer an obstacle. The word “straight” can also mean “level,” and in this context refers to filling up the pits and holes that developed in the road so it was level and easy to ride on.

1:4. “John came baptizing...” There is a textual variation in this verse concerning whether or not John came baptizing or John the Baptizer came. Some versions read, “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness” (ESV); while others read, “John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness,” (NRSV). The difference depends on the addition or deletion
of the single letter for the article ho, (#3588 ὁ), meaning “the.” It is most likely, however, that the ho is not original and the preferred reading is “John came baptizing.” The reason for this is that John is frequently elsewhere called John the Baptist, but never John the Baptizer. This leads credence to viewing the participle “Baptizing” as descriptive of John’s action and not a title (Cp. Metzger, Textual Commentary).

“a baptism that symbolized repentance.” The Greek word translated “repentance” is, metanoia (#3341 μετάνοια), and it means to change one’s mind, and therefore life and lifestyle. It is ceasing thinking and doing things that are contrary to God, and instead thinking and behaving in a way that is in obedience to God.

“repentance” is in the genitive case, so literal translation is: “baptism of repentance.” Daniel Wallace points out that the genitive is so ambiguous that it can have many meanings, and therefore he says, “it may well be best to be non-committal: ‘baptism that is somehow related to repentance’” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 80). While Wallace’s statement is accurate, it is unsatisfying. It leaves us with the same problem we started with, which is that we do not know the meaning of the phrase. We should be able to draw a conclusion about the meaning of the genitive from the scope of Scripture. Of course, the denominations vary greatly about their interpretation of the scope of Scripture, and the scholars do also. On one extreme, for example, is saying the genitive is one of production, so the meaning would be “a baptism that produces repentance.” We assert that the baptism did not produce the repentance, or “complete” it in any way, except perhaps cementing in the mind of the person who had been baptized that since he had made a public declaration before God and people, he better honor his vow and live a godly lifestyle.

In his list of possible interpretations, Wallace himself gives what may be the best way to understand and translate this verse and the concept behind it: “baptism that symbolized repentance.” In the same way that animal sacrifice was a symbol that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, water baptism and washing rituals were part of the Old Testament and pointed to and symbolized the coming of the greater baptism, which was baptism in holy spirit. Many Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the spirit, which they universally said would be poured out from heaven (Isa. 32:15, 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29; Zech. 12:10). Then, John the Baptist was the first person we know of to refer to that pouring out as “baptism,” and then Jesus also referred to the pouring out of the holy spirit upon people as a “baptism” in the holy spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5).

A number of translators and scholars have seen that the genitive in this sentence is a genitive of relation, and the relation that best is being expressed is that when a person repents before God, he demonstrates that repentance by a public ceremony of baptism. Thus the outward act of water baptism symbolized the inner act of going from the old to the new, or from death to life, in the heart. C. S. Mann writes: “An alternative rendering of this Semitism would be, ‘A baptism which symbolized repentance’” (The Anchor Bible: Mark). F. Grant writes: “This baptism was the symbol of repentance” (The Interpreter’s Bible). Walter Wessel writes: the baptism indicated the repentance had already occurred of was being accompanied by it” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary; F. Gaebelein general editor). Ann Nyland translates the last part of Mark 1:4 as: He [John] preached that people should be baptized as a symbol that they had changed their minds, and this resulted in their sins being cancelled” (The Source NT). Charles Williams translates: “a baptism conditioned on repentance” (The NT in the Language of the
People). The New Testament in Modern English by J. B. Phillips translates the last part of the verse: John came... “proclaiming baptism as the mark of a complete change of heart and of the forgiveness of sins.”

“repentance resulting in the remission of sins.” The Greek word eis, here translated as “resulting in,” has many meanings, primarily purpose or result. The translation in most versions, “for” is somewhat ambiguous although accurate. A major theme in the Bible is that if a person will repent he will be forgiven. Over and over God tells people that if they will humble themselves and come to Him for forgiveness, he will indeed forgive them (1 John 1:9 is very clear, but also see such verses as: Neh. 9:7; Ps. 32:5; 103:11-13; Prov. 28:13; Jer. 5:1; 36:3; Luke 6:37). There is no place where God says something such as: “If you confess your sin I will consider forgiving you.”

The eis can be translated “because,” a less frequent but very valid meaning of eis (cp. Wuest, Word Studies). In that case, people were baptized as a symbol because their sins had been forgiven. However, that is actually just another way of understanding the eis as a result clause—it would be saying the people were baptized because their repentance led to remission. That concept can be worded as a result clause, as we have in the REV: “baptism that symbolized repentance resulting in the remission of sins.” In other words, the people were baptized as a symbol that they had repented, a repentance which had, as always, resulted in the remission of their sin.

The people came to John to be baptized so they could enter the Kingdom of God. As they stood by John they confessed their sins and repented. That confession and repentance resulted in their sins being forgiven (remitted), and John baptized them as a symbol of that repentance and forgiveness. Ann Nyland translates the phrase: “baptized as a symbol that they had changed their minds, and this resulted in their sins being cancelled” (The Source NT).

1:5. “the whole country of Judea, and all Jerusalem.” A good example of oriental hyperbole (exaggeration). Not everyone went to John to be baptized, but a great many did.

1:8. “in holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. (cp. Matt 3:10). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

1:10. “immediately as he was stepping up.” The words in many versions, “coming up out of the water,” do not make it clear that the Greek text of Matthew and Mark do not refer to Jesus breaking the surface of the water of the Jordan, but rather to him walking out of the water, up the bank, and away from the river after the baptism was completed. The Greek text of Mark reads, anabainōn ek tou hudatos (ἀναβάνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος), “coming up out of the water,” where the word “ek” means “out of,” in the sense that he was getting “out of” the water, not standing in it. The water was below the level of the bank, as it is in all rivers, so in order to get out of the water, Jesus had to “come up” out of the Jordan. We need to become clear about the fact that someone standing waist deep in water is not “out of” the water, but very much in it. However, the text says that Jesus was coming “out of” the water.

The Gospel of Matthew makes the action of Jesus crystal clear, especially when combined with Mark. Matthew 3:16 reads, anebē apo tou hudatos (ἀνέβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος), “he came up away from the water.” This is the same basic vocabulary as Mark but inflected differently, except Matthew uses the preposition apo, “away from,” not ek,
“out of.” Thus while Mark says Jesus was coming “out of” the water, Matthew emphasized that he was moving “away from” it, walking up the bank and away from the Jordan River.

The Greek word anabainō (#305 ἀναβαίνω) means “to go up,” “to come up,” and so saying, like many English versions, that Jesus “was coming up” out of the water is a very literal translation, and the REV could have used the translation “coming up from” in Mark, and “coming away from,” in Matthew. However, these translations are too often misinterpreted to mean that Jesus was still in the Jordan River with John when the heavens opened, so given the context, saying he “was stepping up” out of the water is a very acceptable translation, especially in light of the fact that it exactly describes what he was doing. It is also the translation preferred by Hendrickson (New Testament Commentary). The noted commentator R. C. H. Lenski writes:

“The descent of the Spirit occurred after the baptism had been completed, while Jesus was walking up onto the bank of the river. We should not picture it as the artists do, as though it occurred while Jesus was being baptized or while he was standing knee-deep in the water. Matthew 3:16 has apo, Jesus went away from the water; Mark has ek...Jesus stepped out of (ek) the water onto the bank and walked away from (apo) the water up the bank” (The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel).

But why is it important to know that John’s baptism was finished and Jesus was walking away on the bank of the river? After being baptized by John, Jesus was truly ready to start his own ministry as the Messiah apart from the ministry of John or anyone else. By making it clear that the baptism of John was over and Jesus had left John, we can clearly see that the heavenly vision and voice were not connected with John, but were specifically and individually to Jesus (cp. notes on Matt. 3:16 by W. Davies, and D. Allison, The International Critical Commentary). It is appropriate that God would put holy spirit upon Jesus just as he started off to do his own ministry, and not as he was standing in the water with John, as if the two ministries were somehow related. The work of the Messiah could only have been done by the one man, the true Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Another time people stepped up and out of the Jordan was in Acts 8:38 and 39, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts makes the getting into and out of the water of the Jordan River a little more clear because it speaks of them both getting in the water and coming back up from it. We can mentally picture them as they “went down into the water,” getting out of the chariot, walking down the bank into the water, and then Philip baptizing the eunuch. Then Acts 8:39 says they “came up out of the water” (“stepped up out of the water;” REV) coming up the bank and back toward the chariot, at which point Philip was miraculously transported away from there to Azotus (the Ashdod of the OT). [For more, see commentary on Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:39].

1:11. “You are my beloved Son.” The verb in this phrase, translated “are,” is in the present tense and is ontological: it is declaring who Jesus is. The second phrase is God declaring that He is pleased with Jesus, which makes perfect sense because Jesus had prepared himself through his life and now was ready to step into his public ministry.

Some people have tried to say that Jesus somehow “became” the Son when he received holy spirit, but that argument fails on a number of points. Grammatically it fails because to state that Jesus became the Son at his baptism, the text should say, “You have become my Son.” God uses the present tense verb in 1:11, and He uses the present tense
verb again at the Transfiguration, when He says, “This is my beloved Son” (Mark 9:7). Both statements are ontological, stating a fact. There is no evidence that either is announcing a change that had occurred.

It also fails because Jesus had been called the “Son” before his baptism, based on his birth and that God was his Father (cp. Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:32, 35; John 1:14). It also fails because what happened at the Baptism was that Jesus received the gift of holy spirit, but there is no other change than that recorded about him. However, Moses, Joshua, and the prophets of the Old Testament all had the gift of holy spirit put upon them, and there is no evidence that then made them “Sons” of God.

1:13. “being tempted.” The Bible does not record what these temptations were, but they certainly included hunger and danger from wild animals. The Bible records that at the end of the forty days the Devil himself came and tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:3).

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς). The term means “Adversary,” and it was borrowed from the Aramaic, Satana (סָטָא) which originally referred to one who laid in ambush [as an adversary], and then became used as a proper name meaning “Adversary” (see Vocabulary of the Greek NT, by Moulton & Milligan). The word “satan” means “adversary” in all the biblical languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, although sometimes it is used just as “an adversary,” and sometimes, especially with the article, it is used as an appellative, a name, for the Devil. Being an adversary to God and the things of God is a major part of the Devil’s character and strategy. “Satan” can refer to the direct work of the Devil as in Job 1, or it can refer to indirect work as in Matthew 4:10 when Jesus called Peter “Satan.” Usually the word “Satan” places the emphasis on the indirect work of the Devil. As the great adversary of the true God, the Adversary is the indirect cause of people’s problems by way of situations or circumstances or other people, which he arranges and controls. He is the influence of these situations, circumstances, and people. It has been generally unhelpful that satanas has been transliterated as “Satan” rather than translated as “Adversary.” Anyone reading Hebrew or Greek knew what the word meant, but almost no Christian knows that “Satan” is not just a name, it is a word that became used as a name, and its meaning, Adversary, is important. For information of the names of the Devil and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“were ministering.” The Greek verb is diakoneō (#1247 διακονέω), and it is in the imperfect tense, thus indicating an action in the past which occurred over a period of time. Although a number of commentators state that they believe that Satan had already left Jesus’ presence when the angels came, that does not seem to be the sense of the Greek text or a simple reading of the verse itself. The flow of the verse clearly seems to indicate that the angels were with him at times while he was in the desert, just as the wild animals were. If we read the verse as it stands, the wild animals were certainly with Jesus during his time in the desert, and the verse simply continues on and says that the angels were ministering to him, as if they also were there at times during his temptation in the desert. Jesus’ desert experience would have been like life: the hardships of life (the desert), the presence of physical enemies (the wild animals), the hordes of Satan (including Satan himself), and God’s angels, all around one man who needed to resist temptation and walk in wisdom and power. There is no reason to believe that the presence of angels somehow meant that Jesus was not really tempted. For one thing, it is unlikely that the angels were there all the time, any more than he was constantly
surrounded by wild animals. They would likely come and go. Also, the angels did not keep Jesus from being tempted, but their presence helped remind Jesus how much was at stake in his living a sinless life.

The Word specifically says that it was the Spirit, God, who led Jesus into the desert (Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:1). The Gospel of Mark is even more forceful, saying that the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the desert (Mark 1:12). But why? Why the need to be in the desert? It surely makes a parallel between Jesus in the desert and Moses and Israel in the desert. Jesus was 40 days in the desert fasting just as Moses was 40 days fasting on Mt. Sinai (Moses was there twice: Exod. 24:18; 34:28), and Israel was 40 years in the desert. There was an angel of the Lord in the desert who helped Israel in its wanderings (Exod. 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2) and so too Jesus had angelic support. It was Moses’ and Israel’s disobedience in the desert that led to the death of a generation of Israelites, the deaths of Israel’s great leaders, and by dividing the Twelve Tribes to both sides of the Jordan River, put an end to the vision of a united Israel in the Promised Land. In contrast, Jesus’ obedience in the wilderness, and his resisting physical, mental, and spiritual temptation, contributed to his being able to restore and give life to the nation of Israel once again.

1:14. “Good News of God.” The words “of the kingdom” were added by copyists, to conform this verse to many others that appear in the Four Gospels. This is the only use of “Good News of God” in the Gospels, and from the context it is clear that it does indeed refer to the Good News of the Kingdom.

1:21. “Capernaum.” Capernaum would become Jesus’ home town when he left Nazareth. [For more information, see commentary on Mark 2:1].

1:24. “What do we have in common with you.” See commentary on Matthew 8:29.

1:25. “subdued.” Verse 25 has a couple words that have technical meanings relating to Greek magical arts (which we understand is actually part of the spiritual battle), that we must pay attention to in order to understand the verse. In every language, there are words that have a technical meaning as well as having a standard or usual meaning. In this verse, the Greek word translated “subdued” is epitimaō (ἐπιτιμάω), which usually means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent or end an action; or “punish” (cp. BDAG Lexicon).

That is not its meaning here, however. For one thing, the demon would not respond to being “rebuked.” It is too arrogant to know, or it does not care, that it is doing evil. Jesus would have certainly followed the wisdom of Proverbs: “a mocker does not listen to rebuke” (Prov. 13:1. Cp. Prov. 9:7, 8; 15:5, 12; 17:10; 23:9; 29:9). In this context, epitimaō is used in the technical sense in which it is in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon.

The technical sense is not common in the Greek literature that has survived to this day, and so does not show up in many Greek lexicons (cp. Bullinger, BDAG, Thayer, and Vine). That fact helps explains why not many Bible teachers are aware of the technical use of the word that refers to subduing rival powers in the spiritual battle between good and evil. Robert Guelich (Word Biblical Commentary: Mark) translates the opening phrase of verse 25: “Jesus subdued him....” and notes that in contexts like these, epitimaō is “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission.” (cp. A. Nylan, The Source NT). Greg Boyd writes: “...the term
denotes an authoritative exercise of God’s power in subduing his enemies. It accomplishes what it speaks” (God at War; p. 207).

*Epitimaō* also occurs in the records of Jesus “rebuking” the storm on the Sea of Galilee, after which there was a great calm (Matt. 8:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24). Jesus subdued the storm by superior spiritual power. Greg Boyd writes: “It thus appears that, in “muzzling” this storm, Jesus is muzzling yet another demon” (God at War; p. 206). It seems clear that the storm was caused by a demon. Many of Jesus’ apostles who were with him on the boat when the storm came up were experienced fishermen and would not have risked their lives if the weather looked threatening. The Devil was trying to take advantage of Jesus being in a supposedly vulnerable position and kill him or the apostles by drowning them.

In the spiritual battle there are some spirits that are more powerful than others. Strength and authority are real among spiritual beings, just as they are real on earth among creatures of the flesh. In Daniel 10:1-13 there is a spiritual battle in which an angel of God is prevented by a demon from answering Daniel’s prayer until a stronger angel shows up and assists in the fight. Revelation 12:7-9 describe a war in heaven in which the Devil is the weaker one and loses the fight, resulting in his being thrown down to earth.

Describing the spiritual battle, or any spiritual reality for that matter, is difficult. Therefore the Bible uses vocabulary that describes the spiritual battle that the Greeks would be familiar with—sorcerer against sorcerer and god against god—so the people could understand that Jesus was subduing evil spirits by using greater spiritual power. Jesus wielded the power of the true God, and thus was able to subdue the demon by that power, expressed through words. Jesus did not gain control over the demon by virtue of some “magic words” or formula that he used, as if he was some sort of Greek sorcerer. “It is not a magical incantation...it is powerful Word of the Son” (Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary, ἐπιτιµάω* Vol. 2, p. 626). The power came from God and was used by Jesus, who then instructed the Twelve Apostles (Matt. 10:5-8), and the Seventy Two (Luke 10:1-17) in casting out demons in the spiritual battle. Every Christian has the inherent power through the gift of holy spirit to subdue and cast out demons.

**“Be bound.”** As with the word “subdued” (Mark 1:25 above), the Greek word *phimoō* (#5392 φιµόω) has a technical meaning in this context that relates to the spiritual battle. Ordinarily *phimoō* means to close the mouth with a muzzle or to silence. For example, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (1 Cor. 9:9). However, it was used in Greek magic to denote the binding of a person with a spell. Moulton and Milligan write that it can refer to “the binding of a person by means of a spell, so as to make him powerless to harm” (*The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*. Cp. Ann Nyland, *The Source NT*; footnote on Matt. 22:12 and her translation: “Be bound!”).

While it is true that the translation, “Be quiet” or “Silence,” which most versions have, is part of the meaning, the real force of the command, *phimoō*, is about binding the power of evil. Thus, the Greek conveys a spiritual power which binds evil that is much better expressed by the command “Be bound,” than it is by the English, “Silence,” which does not convey any of the spiritual binding of evil that is the real point of the command. Jesus did not just command the demon to be quiet—although that is included in what he did—he bound it with the power of his word. That he commanded the demons not to speak can be gained from the sense of the word, the context, and scope of Scripture, as
we see in verse 34. Another indication that Jesus’ command was not an immediate demand for silence was that the demon came out with a shriek. If Jesus had in fact commanded by the power of God that there be “silence,” the demon would not have even shrieked.

1:27. “so amazed that.” The Greek reads more literally, “amazed so that,” using ἀστε (5620 ὁστε) to indicate the result of the amazement. We would not typically say that people were amazed so that an argument arose, we would say that they were so amazed that an argument arose. A more literal translation might be: “they were amazed, resulting in an argument” or, “they were amazed, therefore an argument arose.”

1:32. “they brought to him everyone.” This verse shows the great dedication the people of the time had for obeying the Law, and it sets a great example for us. The day being spoken of, that had just ended, was a Sabbath, as we learn from Mark 1:29. On the Sabbath people could not walk very far (a Sabbath day’s journey” was just over ½ mile or .8 km), and they could not carry a burden, so carrying a sick person could not be done. If the people did not put the Law above their own desires, they would have said, “Forget the Law! I need help now!” and they would have ignored the Law and brought the sick to Jesus as fast as possible. The fact that they waited until sundown to bring the sick to Jesus shows their dedication to God and the Law.

1:41. “touched.” The Greek verb is haptō (#681 ἁπτω), a word that has two distinct meanings. It properly means “to fasten to, make adhere to; hence, specifically to fasten fire to a thing, to kindle, set on fire, (often so in Attic Greek); cp. Luke 8:16; 11:33; 15:8. However, when it is used in the middle voice (haptomai; #680 ἁπτοµαι) it means “to make close contact with,” and has a very wide range of applications. It can mean, touch, take hold of, hold; cling to; to have contact with, or partake of something with cultic implications, (often used of touching as a means of conveying a blessing or “touching” or partaking of an unclean thing, including eating, almost like we would say, “you have not touched your food”); it can be used almost idiomatically for intimate touch, sexual contact (1 Cor. 7:1; we use “touch” the same way today); and it can be used for contact with someone with a view to causing harm, i.e., injure (Job 5:19 LXX, “no evil shall touch you.”) (BDAG; Thayer).

In this verse, there is little doubt that Jesus did more than just make a light physical contact with the leper. He would have at the very least placed his hands on him as any priest or healer would do to convey a blessing. He may have even gone so far as to hug the leper, but that is less probable, especially given the culture and cultural expectations of both the leper and the people.

On a lexical note, there is some confusion that can occur when studying haptō because most lexicographers recognize it as one Greek verb that has different definitions in different voices, something not uncommon. Nevertheless, James Strong, author of Strong’s concordance, assigned a different Strong’s number to haptomai, the middle voice of the verb. Thus there appears to be two words in Strong’s Concordance and The Englishman’s Greek Concordance, but only one word in Thayer and most other Greek lexicons.

1:44. “See that you say nothing to anyone.” Jesus often said this when he healed people. (cp. Matt. 9:30, blind men; Mark 7:36, a deaf person; Luke 8:56, a dead girl). On the other hand, he told some of the people he healed to spread the news (cp. Mark 5:19). The reason Jesus told people not to talk about their healing is never explicitly stated, and
there are likely various reasons for it. One reason would be the often infectious doubt and unbelief that comes from scoffers who hear of the deliverance which could adversely affect the person who was healed. Another reason would be the personal privacy of the individual, who would often be immediately elevated to “movie star status” in their community, as happened to Lazarus. Still another reason would be likely especially in cases such as this healing, the need for Jesus to not be thought of as “unclean” or worse, as “contagious,” in his culture. Touching a leper made the person unclean (Lev. 15:7), and since the cause of leprosy was unknown, not only were people with leprosy scrupulously avoided, but no doubt sometimes people who touched lepers were looked upon with suspicion and avoided.

“as a testimony to them.” Jesus’ healing the leper would be one more testimony that he was the Messiah. However, the Greek wording can, and often is, understood in a negative sense, “as a testimony against them” (see Robert Guelich, Word Biblical Commentary: Mark). The priests were against Jesus, and their not seeing the miracles that he did as proof of who he claimed to be was against them.

Chapter 2

2:1. “at home.” The Greek phrase is en oikos, and it does not mean “in a house” or “in the house,” as if it was Peter’s house. The phrases en oikos and eis oikos (Mark 3:20) are standard Greek phrases or idioms equivalent to our “at home.” Jesus moved to Capernaum after the people of his hometown, Nazareth, tried to kill him (Luke 4:29-31; cp. Matt. 4:13). Jesus either bought or rented a house in Capernaum, because John 2:12 indicates he even moved his family there. Shortly after Jesus moved to Capernaum, it became known as his “own city” (Matt. 9:1).

According to Mark 2:1, Jesus was “at home” when the people crowded his house to such a degree that men had to let a paralyzed man down through the roof (2:4). This was one of the times that the amazing love and compassion that Jesus had for people was clearly visible, because he was much more concerned about the man and amazed by the trust in God those men had than he was concerned about any damage that was done to his house, which was no doubt repaired reasonably quickly.

One of the reasons Jesus likely picked to move to Capernaum was that it was on the Via Maris, the “Road of the Sea,” which was the great trade route from Egypt in the south to Damascus in Syria and on to Mesopotamia (see commentary on Matt. 4:15). The fact that the Via Maris passed by Capernaum helps explain why that city had a centurion, which meant having Roman troops stationed in town, and a tollhouse so revenue could be collected from the passing caravans (Matt. 2:14). Capernaum was thus a cosmopolitan town with much commerce and opportunity. No wonder, Jesus was so disappointed at the overall reception he got in Capernaum, despite the fact the people were so proud of their town and Jesus referred to it as “exalted.” So many people, yet such a small group of them really believed. Thus he said, “And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the grave, for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom that were done in you, it would have remained until this day.”
Jesus Christ chose Capernaum to be his home town after he left Nazareth; he chose a cosmopolitan town where there would be plenty of opportunity to share the Word and reach others, as well as opportunity for others to more easily reach him.

2:4. “uncovered the roof.” This record contains an unspoken lesson in ministry and life that is important to learn. Jesus was teaching the Word of God to the crowd, as verse 2 says. He was interrupted by this man and his friends who very badly wanted the man healed. The word of God does not tell us about what Jesus was teaching, it tells us about him being interrupted and changing direction to take care of the man and teach the crowd and Pharisees about what is really important and about his authority on earth. The unspoken lesson has to do with interruptions. Although we generally do not want to be interrupted from something we are doing, we should look to see if there is an opportunity to do God’s work when we are interrupted, rather than just being annoyed or always assuming that interruptions are from the Devil.

2:7. “He speaks defaming words.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) is transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. However, in Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In this case, the religious leaders thought it was insulting to God’s reputation that Jesus would forgive sins. [For more information on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“Who is able to forgive sins but God alone?” The religious leaders thought that by forgiving sins, Jesus was harming the reputation of God, who was alone thought to be able to forgive sins. It is important that we realize the Bible never says only God can forgive sins. The rabbis taught that, but that does not make it true: it was just their tradition. In truth, only God can forgive sins, but God’s representatives, to whom God delegates the authority to forgive sins, can forgive them, or declare that they are forgiven if they get the revelation to make that declaration.

The religious leaders were used to prophets speaking for God, but not forgiving sins, although they should have been open to that. Nathan came very close when he said to David, “Yahweh also hath put away thy sin” (2 Sam. 12:13; Rotherham), and the author/agent aspect of the Hebrew language and culture would have allowed Nathan to say, “Your sin has been forgiven.” It should be especially clear to us that God delegated to Jesus the authority to forgive sins, because Jesus taught that very explicitly. “For the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son….I am not able to do anything on my own. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:22, 30).

Forgiving sins, or knowing that one’s sins have been forgiven, is essential to having a peaceful life. Great anxiety, and both mental and physical sickness, can come from feeling unforgiven and in danger of judgment. Jesus knew that, and loved the man in the record and told him his sins were forgiven, which opened the door for the person to be healed. Experience tells us that many times people are not healed because they do not think they are forgiven, or they do not forgive others.

Jesus’ action in stating that the man’s sins were forgiven were not meant to prove that he was God, rather, it is to show that God “has given [Jesus] authority to execute
judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27). Notice that the onlookers were amazed that such authority had been given to men. They did not conclude from what Jesus did that he must be God. They drew the simple conclusion that God must have given authority to this man to forgive sins. Elsewhere, Jesus delegates the authority to the apostles saying, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:23). If being given the authority to forgive sins means the person is God, then we should conclude the apostles were God also. But this is surely absurd. Instead we should acknowledge that the authority ultimately comes from God who has given it to people.

2:9. “Which is easier?” Which is easier to say and accomplish, declaring someone’s sins are forgiven, or divine healing? They are equally easy. See commentary on Luke 5:23.

2:14. “Levi.” This is another name for the Apostle Matthew.

2:15. “his house.” Matthew’s house. Luke 5:29 makes it clear that it is Matthew’s house (Matthew is called Levi in Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-30). Matthew was a tax collector, and so it makes sense that his friends were tax collectors and “sinners,” which is why so many people like that were at the dinner. [For more information see commentary on Matthew 9:10].

2:16. “and drinks,” which appears in many versions, was added by copyists, prob. to harmonize with Luke 5:30. There is strong evidence that it is not original.


2:26. “Abiathar.” The name “Abiathar” is questioned because in the record in 1 Samuel 21:1-9, Ahimelech is the priest. Although many commentators simply assume Mark made a mistake, we believe the Word of God is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), and that “Abiathar” is not a mistake. There are several ways this apparent contradiction might be solved. One of them is that both men may have been referred to by both names. That would be one good explanation why 1 Samuel 22:20 refers to Abiathar as the son of Ahimelech, but 2 Samuel 8:17; 1 Chronicles 18:16; 2 and 4:6 refer to Ahimelech as the son of Abiathar. It was quite common for someone to be referred to by different names. But it also has been suggested that Abiathar had a son named Ahimelech who was a priest, and that could explain the Old Testament verses that seem to switch the names. Another solution, frankly, a more likely one, is that both Ahimelech and Abiathar were present when David came. It is even possible that due to Ahimelech’s age Abiathar had started to take on the duties of the priesthood and Mark recognized him for that. That would be similar to the position of Annas and Caiaphas at the time of the ministry of Christ. Annas was the elder and still called High Priest, but Caiaphas was the man actually running the priesthood and he is also called High Priest. But even if that was not the case, we know it was common for priestly families to live together, just like Eli did with his sons (cp. 1 Sam. 2:12ff), and the city of Nob had at least 85 priests (1 Sam. 22:17). When Doeg the Edomite killed 85 priests, Ahimelech was killed and Abiathar escaped and went to David (1 Sam. 22:20), and became High Priest under David. This could be why Mark says that David entered the house of God “in the days of Abiathar” (KJV; NIV), or “in the time of Abiathar” (ESV; NASB). Since Abiathar would have taken over the priesthood de facto as soon as his father died, David did in fact enter the house of God “in the days of Abiathar,” the well-known High Priest under David.
Chapter 3

3:3. “Stand up in the midst of the people.” Christ told the man to stand up in the middle of the crowd. The healing would be performed by a word, not by a touch. He did not ask the man to come up front, but healed him in the middle of the crowd, right where he was.

3:4. “life.” The Greek word is *psuchē* (ὕπνα, pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

3:9. “crush.” The Greek *thlibō* (θλίβω) is to press (as grapes), press hard upon (Thayer, Lexicon). The versions are split between “press upon” and “crush,” but the people were already pressing upon him (v. 10). He wanted to be sure they did not crush him.

3:16. “Peter.” Jesus continues the tradition of God and other ancient rulers by changing the names of those whom he rules. Historically, changing someone’s name might be done to prove your power over someone, but Jesus would not have done it if Peter, James and John were not sold out to him. Notice that he does not change Judas’ name. Cp. Gen. 17:5 and 15; 32:28; 2 Sam. 12:24 and 25; Jer. 20:3; Gen. 41:45; 2 Chron. 36:4; 2 Kings 24:17; Daniel 1:7).

3:19. “into his home.” The Greek phrase is *eis oikos*, and it does not mean “into a house” or “into the house,” as if it was Peter’s house. The phrases *eis oikos* and *en oikos* (Mark 2:1) are standard Greek phrases or idioms equivalent to our “at home.” [For more information see commentary on Mark 2:1].

3:21. “those who were close to him.” The Greek is *para* (παρά), a preposition usually meaning “beside.” Thus the book of Mark is vague here, saying only that these people were those who were beside him. This is a case when we have to rely on other parallel records to give the details, and we learn what happened from the scope of Scripture. Matthew 12:46 and Luke 8:19 let us know that this group of people is his mother and brothers. This verse is a clear indication that Jesus’ step-father, Joseph, was dead, otherwise he would have been leading the group. That means Joseph died between the time Jesus was 12 (Luke 2:42) and the time he started his ministry. He had worked with his father, the carpenter, and had become a carpenter himself (Mark 6:3). This group “set out” to take him. They arrive in verse 31.

3:22. “Beelzebul.” The Greek is *Beelzeboul* (Βεελζεβούλα), which gets put into English as “Beelzebul.” He is called the “prince of demons” in Luke 12:10. “Beelzeboul” is “lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew *zebul* (dung, a dunghill). [For more on the name Beelzebul and other names of the Slanderer (the Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

The versions differ as to whether this is one statement by the scribes, or two statements. The context seems to support two statements, because it says they “were saying…,” so there was a lot of talking going on.
“the ruler of the demons.” This phrase is used in part to describe Beelzebul, in the first part of the verse, so from it one thing we know is that the Jews were considering Beelzebul to be the ruler of the demons or to us, another name for the Slanderer (Devil). The Greek word translated “ruler” is archon (#758 ἀρχων), which is from archē, “first,” and it means the one who is first, thus the “ruler, commander, chief,” etc. [For more on the names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

3:23. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

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3:27. “binds.” The word “bind” (deō) was a common word for bind, and one of its uses was “to describe the ‘binding’ power of curses” (Moulton and Milligan, Vocabulary of the Greek NT). The context is the casting out of demons (v. 28), so the “binding” in this verse refers to binding a demon and making it powerless by the power of God. See commentary on Matthew 12:29.

3:28. “defaming talk...defame.” The Greek noun blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία) and the verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. However, in Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3]. The two uses of “defame” in this verse inflected differently is the figure of speech polyptoton. See Bullinger’s Figures of Speech Used in the Bible.


“the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].


3:32. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

Chapter 4

4:1. “facing the lake.” The crowd was on the land, and Jesus was in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, so the crowd was “facing the lake.” (cp. Lenski).

“Listen!” The Greek is akouō (#191 ἀκούω), which means to hear, to listen, or to understand, and it is in the imperative mood. Coupled with idou (“Pay attention!”) it is an extremely powerful way to say that we better pay attention to what Jesus is saying in the parable.

“Pay attention!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

4:9. “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen!” This is almost the same Greek phrase as occurs in Matthew 11:15, and for an explanation of the exclamation, see the commentary on that verse. This verse is longer, reading, “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen,” while the occurrences in Matthew read, “Anyone who has ears had better listen!”

4:11. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

4:12. Quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 10. Some texts such as the Byzantine Text from which the KJV was translated, read “of sins” at the end of the verse, but scholars are now aware that this is an explanatory gloss that worked its way into the text.

“so that…” For this quotation from Isaiah and the purpose of parables, see commentary on Matthew 13:13. The “so that” is the Greek word hina plus the verb in the subjunctive mood, which shows this to be a purpose-result clause: see entry on Matthew 2:15, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” To fully understand this passage, we must see how Matthew’s record portrays the human side of the events, John’s the spiritual side, and Mark and Luke’s records combine the two into one.

4:15. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

4:23. “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen!” This is the same Greek phrase as occurs in Mark 4:9 (see commentary there), and almost the same Greek phrase as occurs in Matthew 11:15. For an explanation of the exclamation, see the commentary on that Matthew 11:15. Jesus emphasized his teaching that everything we do will be disclosed on Judgment day with this solemn command and warning.

4:31. “mustard seed.” For more information on this parable, see commentary on Matthew 13:32.

4:36. “just as he was.” This is a very important verse that shows us how hard Jesus pushed himself to serve and bless people. He was exhausted from serving. That is why he went right to sleep in the boat. The Devil knew he was exhausted, and tried to kill him off, thinking he might be too weak to really defend himself and calm the storm.

4:39. “having fully awakened.” In v. 38 he was awakened, the verb in v. 39 is stronger. He was not “sleepy” or “just coming to his senses” as so many do when they are awakened. He became fully awake.
“subdued.” In this context, ἐπιτιμάω (#2008 ἐπιτιμάω) has a technical meaning: it is used in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. Jesus subdued the storm, which was no doubt caused by a demon, by the power of God he wielded, which he expressed in words. The power came from God and was used by Jesus. Jesus did not gain control over the storm by some “magic words” or formula that he used. “It is not a magical incantation...it is powerful Word of the Son” (Gerhard Kittle, *Theological Dictionary*, ἐπιτιμάω Vol. 2, p. 626). For a more complete explanation, see commentary on Mark 1:25.

“Hush!” The Greek σιόπαω (#4623). “To refrain from speaking or making a sound, keep silent, say nothing, make no sound” (BDAG). Although this word gets translated “Peace” in many versions, it is not the standard word for peace.

“Be bound!” As with the word “subdued” (above), the Greek word φιμώω (#5392 φιμώω) has a technical meaning in this context. Ordinarily φιμώω means to close the mouth with a muzzle or to silence. However, it was used in Greek magic to denote the binding of a person with a spell. Moulton and Milligan write that it can refer to “the binding of a person by means of a spell, so as to make him powerless to harm” (*The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*. Cp. A. Nyland, *The Source NT*; footnote on Matt. 22:12 and her translation: “Be bound!”). The Greek conveys a spiritual power behind the command that the English, “Be still,” simply does not convey. Jesus did not just command the storm—and the demon causing it—to be still—he bound it with the power of his word. See commentary on Mark 1:25.

Chapter 5

5:3. “in the tombs.” The Greek word “in” (en) can be “in” or, as many versions, “among,” but since the hillsides of that area east of the Sea of Galilee are steep and have many cave-tombs, it is not likely he lived “among” the tombs. That would be akin to living on a hillside with some cave-tombs around. It is much more likely that he lived inside a cave-tomb, but what the state of dead bodies he would be around were we are not told. They could be rotting, or have turned to dust.


“torment me.” See commentary Matthew 8:29.

5:12. “Let us enter into them.” This is a command clause composed of hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood in Greek. See commentary on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

5:23. “Come.” Lenski points out that in certain cases the Greek word hina [untranslated] simply introduces an imperative, not a purpose clause. Here, it is the imperative of prayer, which is why some versions, fill in the “ellipsis” with “I pray.”


5:28. “was saying.” She talked to herself (cp. Matt. 9:21) over and over.

5:34. “made you whole.” The Greek σῶζω, in the context of sickness, is to be made whole or to be healed. In the context of everlasting life, it is to be “rescued, saved.”
“Go in peace.” Had Jesus simply let the woman take her healing and leave, she would likely have been wracked by guilt. Jesus knew not to let that happen, and in doing so set a wonderful example for us. We need to take care of people emotionally as well as physically.

“affliction.” The Greek mastix (#3148 μαστιξ) is literally a whip, and was used metaphorically of a whipping, affliction, disease, etc.

5:39. “sleeping.” The Greek verb is koimao (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

5:42. “for she was twelve years old.” This describes why she could walk even though she had been referred to as “little” in this and other Gospel records.

“amazed…with a great amazement.” This is the figure of speech polyptoton, the repetition of both noun and verb forms together (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). It highlights the degree of astonishment, they were greatly amazed.

**Chapter 6**

6:1. “his own city.” The context is clear that this is referring to Nazareth, even though he had moved to Capernaum, and that was now considered his home (see commentary on Mark 2:1).

6:2. “being done.” Present tense. Astonishingly, the people of Nazareth, who did not have trust in him, were able to admit that Jesus was doing miracles.

6:8. “staff.” In Matthew and Luke, it seems Jesus said not to take a staff. For the apparent contradiction, see commentary on Matthew 10:10.

6:14. “out from among the dead.” For an explanation of this phrase, see commentary on Romans 4:24.

6:15. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

6:16. “whom I beheaded, has been raised.” The Greek is more emphatic than just, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” The way it is written, Herod had no doubt that John was both dead (because he had killed John) and raised. Wuest says: “raised out from among those who were dead.”

6:20. “feared.” Better than “was afraid of” here because there is an element of holy awe with the fear.

“liked to listen to him.” The Greek we translate as “like to” is hēdeōs (#2234 ἥδεως; pronounced hay-de-ōs) and it means with pleasure, with delight, gladly. This shows that people can hear the Word of God taught and enjoy it, but not have it change their lives (see commentary on Mark 12:37).


6:33. “knew where they were going.” (Cp. Brown and Comfort Interlinear, and Lenski). It is not that the people “recognized them.” Jesus had just been with them. They knew both Jesus and the apostles well. And, had they been sensitive at all, they also would have known why he was leaving—to get some privacy. But they were selfish, and knowing where he would go to be alone, got there before he did.
“went before them.” This, and the start of verse 34, which is translated in many versions as “came ashore” or something similar, creates a contradiction with John 6:3-5. The crowd was not waiting on the shore for Jesus. If it were, he would have seen the people long before he came ashore. John makes it clear that the crowd, even if it was ahead of Jesus and the group with him for a little while, eventually lagged behind. Thus, Jesus arrived with his disciples on the shore and spent some time with them before the crowd assembled. Jesus “came out” of his retreat and saw the multitude assembled, and had compassion on them.

6:45. “immediately he compelled.” The feeding of the five thousand (much more when you include the women and children who were there) is one of the few events that is recorded in all four Gospels. It is watershed time for Jesus Christ, and needs to be studied from all four Gospels to really understand it and what happened after it. After the feeding, the huge crowd became convinced that Jesus was their Messiah and they were going to come and take him by force and make him their king (John 6:14, 15). Jesus had to act swiftly to avoid a potential revolution which would have certainly also included charges against him by the Romans that he was a revolutionary, which would have no doubt landed him in prison.

As well as realizing the intent of the crowd, he recognized that his apostles were basically of the same mind as the crowd. They too were tired of Roman domination, Jewish perversion of religion, and the cares of the world, and they too were anxious for the Kingdom of God to come, which Jesus had been saying was at hand ever since he started his ministry. It was a very real possibility that the apostles could have been swept away with the emotion and conviction of the crowd and joined in the revolt. To prevent this, Jesus acted decisively. First, “immediately he compelled” his disciples to leave the scene (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45). He made them get into a boat and head west to Gennesaret (Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53), and the next day they went from there a few miles northeast to Capernaum (John 6:59). Then he dealt with the crowd and sent it away (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:45). This was not easy to do. The people had to be calmed down and convinced to leave. Mark 6:45 says Jesus “was sending” the crowd away, the verb being in the present tense, indicating the action was ongoing, taking some time. It was not as easy as saying, “Go home now.” Jesus worked with the people to convince them to leave.

Now finally alone, with no disciples and no crowds, Jesus went to a mountain to pray (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46; John 6:15). He needed wisdom and needed God’s help to keep his ministry on track, he needed to keep defeating the temptation to avoid the cross and try to become king immediately, and no doubt he prayed hard for his apostles that they would not be led away by false Messianic expectations. We get a glimpse of the wisdom and direction that God gave Jesus in his teaching and action when we read John 6:22-70, which occurred the day after the five thousand were fed (John 6:22). Jesus made a decisive shift in his ministry from just demonstrating the power of God for people and teaching them, to starting to require commitment from them (John 6:29, 53-58). The reaction of the crowd was about the same then as it is today: most people talk about loving God and living the Word, but when you really require them to do it, they refuse. The people in Jesus’ audience said, “This is a hard saying: who is able to hear it?” (John 6:60), Even Jesus’ disciples grumbled about it (John 6:61). Jesus challenged his disciples about their unbelief, and many of them left (John 6:66). Jesus, most likely hurt and
angered by the selfishness of the crowd and many of the disciples, turned to the twelve and asked, “Will you also go away?” Thankfully, they did not.

There are many lessons that can be learned from this account. One is that people are selfish. They are now, and they always have been. Jesus did not convince them otherwise, and neither will we. We must do what Jesus did: work with the people who want to work and let the others go. Another lesson is to not allow ourselves to be tricked and trapped by worldly aspirations. No doubt Jesus would have loved to have come into his kingdom without the pain of rejection and crucifixion, but it was not the will, nor the way, of God. Selflessness, humility and giving are the godly way forward.

Another thing we can learn from the account is that sometimes quick and decisive action is needed to keep us out of trouble. Had Jesus not compelled the disciples to immediately leave the scene, he could have been fighting a battle on two fronts and had a hard time indeed. Another lesson is that prayer is essential for success. If Jesus needed to pray, surely we do too. One more thing we can learn is that the wisdom from God may be to change the direction of what you are doing. The result of what happened after Jesus’ great miracle, the potential revolt against Rome, and his hours of prayer was to change the direction of his ministry by adding that he require things from his disciples. This seemed to have the wrong effect because many disciples left, but the history of the early church shows us that those who stayed were tried and tested, and able to carry on the work of Christ after he ascended.

“toward Bethsaida.” Jesus sent them “toward” (the Greek is pros, “toward”) Bethsaida, which is nearer to Capernaum than they were on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, but the eventual destination was Capernaum (John 6:16). Bethsaida was almost a suburb of Capernaum, which was a major city, and site of a tax office and Roman troops, so for travel purposes, the names Bethsaida and Capernaum are synonymous. However, the boat landed at Gennesaret (see commentary on Matt. 14:34).

6:48. “fourth watch of the night.” The fourth watch of the night started at our 3 AM.

At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the “day” was divided into 12 hours (John 11:9, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?). The first hour started at roughly 6 AM. That made the “third hour” about our 9 AM (cp. Matt. 20:3; Acts 2:15, 10:3); the “sixth hour” about our noon (cp. John 4:6; John 19:14; Acts 10:9); the “seventh hour” about our 1 PM (John 4:52), the ninth hour about our 3 PM (cp. Matt. 27:45, 46; Mark 15:34; Acts 3:1; 10:3); and the tenth hour about our 4 PM (John 1:39); and the eleventh hour about our 5 PM (Matt. 20:6).

Also, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four “watches,” each being three hours long. This was true even though the Jews started their new day at sunset, at the start of the first watch of the night, and the Romans reckoned their new day at midnight, at the start of the third watch of the night (our day beginning at midnight comes from the Romans). The names of the four night watches were “evening,” “midnight,” “cockcrow,” and “morning” (Mark 13:35: “So keep watch, for or you do not know when the lord of the house will come, whether during the evening watch, or the midnight watch, or the cockcrow watch, or the morning watch.”). Sometimes, however, the watches were just called by “first watch,” “second watch,” “third watch,” and “fourth watch.” On occasion, the “watches” were not accurate enough, and so even the night was divided into hours. This is why Paul was taken to Caesarea at the “third hour of the night,” our 9 PM (Acts 23:23).
The hours of the day in Roman times were often approximations, because there was longer daylight in the summer and shorter in the winter. However, in both seasons the day was divided into 12 hours. Thus we would say that the “third hour” of the day was around our 9 AM, not 9 AM exactly.

The feeding of the 5,000 took place in the area we know as Bethsaida-Julius, on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 9:10). The disciples left that general area in the evening and headed for “Bethsaida” (Mark 6:45; cp. “Bethsaida in Galilee, John 12:21), which was apparently a small fishing village to the southwest of Capernaum (it can be confusing that the disciples left the area of Bethsaida and sailed toward Bethsaida. “Bethsaida” means “House of fishing,” and there were a couple of them on the Sea of Galilee). Thus the total distance the apostles had to row was likely somewhat less than 5 miles (8 km). This should have been an easy journey, but the wind was so against them they had rowed for hours and were no doubt incredibly frustrated and near exhaustion.

6:49. “an apparition.” The word phantasma means “something that appears,” from phaino, to appear. Thus an apparition. The only other appearance of the word is in Matthew 14:26, where it is used in a sentence and translated “ghost.”

6:53. “Gennesaret.” This is where Jesus and the disciples landed, and it is confirmed in Matthew 14:34 (see commentary there).

Chapter 7

7:1. “And the Pharisees and some of the experts in the law…” Mark can be read to mean that only the scribes came from Jerusalem, but Matthew 15:1 is clear that the entire delegation came from there.

7:3. “to the wrist.” The Greek literally reads “with the fist.” This is a good example of a custom being so obscure that translating it into the text would only confuse the reader. Edersheim gives the best explanation we have seen, and Young’s Literal Translation renders according to his explanation.

“The water was poured on both hands…. The hands were lifted up, so as to make the water run to the wrist, in order to ensure that the whole hand was washed, and the water polluted by the hand did not again run down the fingers. …But there was one point on which special stress was laid. In the ‘first effusion,’ which was all that originally was required when the hands were Levically ‘defiled,’ the water had to run down to the wrist. Fn. “The language of the Mishnah…can only refer to the wrist. Fn. The rendering ‘wash diligently’ gives no meaning; that ‘with the fist’ is not in accordance with Jewish Law; while “up to the elbow” is not only contrary to Jewish Law, but apparently based on a wrong rendering of [the Hebrew]” (Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah).

The general uncertainty among commentators, however, about what the Greek texts, “with the fist” means, explains the huge number of variations in the translations: “oft” (KJV), “carefully” (NASB), “ceremonial washing” (NIV), “thoroughly” (NRSV), “to the wrist” (YLT), etc. “wash.” Greek = nipto, to wash.

7:4. “they bathe themselves.” The Greek is baptizō (#907 βαπτίζω), which means “…Properly, 1. to dip repeatedly, to immerse, submerge. 2. to cleanse by dipping or
submerging, to wash, to make clean with water; in the middle and the 1 aorist passive to wash oneself, bathe; so Mark 7:4….metaphorically, to overwhelm, as … to be overwhelmed with calamities, of those who must bear them, Matt. 20:22f Rec.; Mark 10:38 f; Luke 12:50 (Thayer). Many commentators have had problems with this verse, believing that even the religious Jews did not bathe themselves each time they came from the marketplace, but the text seems clear, and we must assume that some people did that, because his audience did not charge him with an absurdity.

Some versions have “and couches” (YLT) or “and tables” (KJV) after “copper vessels,” Metzger (Textual Commentary) writes, “It is difficult to decide whether the words…were added by copyists who were influenced by the legislation of Leviticus 15, or whether the words were omitted (a) accidentally because of homoeoteleuton or (b) deliberately because the idea of washing or sprinkling beds seemed to be quite incongruous. In view of the balance of probabilities, as well as the strong witnesses that support each reading, a majority of the Committee preferred to retain the words, but to enclose them within square brackets.” We decided to leave them out, following the original translation of the ASV.


“doctrines.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching.” For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13).

7:9. “tradition.” The Greek word is paradosis (#3862 παράδοσις), and it means something that is handed over, or something that is handed down. Thus it can mean surrender or arrest, or it can refer to a “tradition.” Traditions can be a great help to people. God established traditions in the OT, such as keeping the Passover feast every year. Jesus himself started the tradition of “the Lord’s Supper.” However, there are Christians who believe that any tradition created by man is an offense to God and should not be practiced or condoned. How should Christians view traditions? It seems clear that we should view traditions the same way Jesus did. There were hundreds of traditions in the Judaism of the time of Jesus (cp. Mark 7:4), but the ones he spoke against fall into several categories.

One category that Jesus spoke against was traditions of men that had, in the minds of the religious leaders, become equal to the commands of God. No matter how helpful they are or holy they seem, and no matter how many years they have been observed, traditions are only traditions, they are not commandments, and should not be treated as such. When traditions are treated like commandments, first, the words of man become elevated to the status of the word of God, and second, someone who is unable or unwilling to keep the tradition is almost always treated badly by those who do.

Another category of tradition that Jesus spoke against were traditions that could not be kept without ignoring or rejecting the commandments of God (Mark 7:8, 9). These traditions, by their very nature, are harmful. Jesus cited the tradition of giving “to God” the support that elderly parents needed (Mark 7:10-13). Of course, the support that was supposedly given “to God” ended up enriching and empowering the religious leaders, and the honor that God commanded that children give to parents was ignored.
A third category of tradition that is harmful is a tradition that has become a burden to a Christian’s life and walk, instead of being a blessing. The religious leaders had many burdensome traditions that they enforced (Matt. 23:4). A godly tradition is to be a blessing and bring people closer to God. A tradition that makes living a godly life into a burden should not be kept.

There are many traditions in the Church, and very few are kept by all Christian denominations. Most are not harmful, and can be helpful. For example, dressing up for Sunday church is a tradition in some denominations, and is not harmful unless it takes on the force of a command and someone who comes not dressed up is scorned or rejected. It can be helpful in that it helps some people take their worship time more seriously. On the other hand, the tradition of praying to “the saints” is practiced in some denominations, but is against the command of God and therefore harmful.

Christians should view traditions like Christ did. Even if a tradition is not “in the Bible,” it can still bring people closer to God in a very meaningful way. However, if a tradition begins to take on the force of a commandment, or if it makes godly living a burden, or especially if it contradicts the Bible or can only be kept at the expense of ignoring a biblical command, then the words spoken by Isaiah more than 2500 years ago still apply: “in vain do they worship me” (Mark 7:7; cp. Isa. 29:13).

7:16. This verse is omitted in REV. This verse is absent from some important early texts such as Β, and Λ. It seems to be a scribal addition, perhaps to parallel 4:9 or 4:23. There seems to be much more likelihood that the verse was added to later texts than removed from earlier ones. See Metzger, Textual Commentary.
7:22. “evil eye.” The “evil eye” was idiomatic in Semitic languages for someone who was greedy, covetous, and stingy, which is why some versions translate it as “envy” or “stingy” (cp. HCSB; ESV, NASB; NET; NIV; NRSV). In Western cultures, the “evil eye” was a look or glace that meant harm and brought harm, but there is no evidence it was used that way in the Bible. See commentary on Matthew 6:22.

“insults.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

7:30. “having gone out.” Greek = exerchomai (ἐξέρχομαι). to move out of or away from an area. a. of animate entities go out, come out, go away, retire). Demons can inhabit the mind or body, and thus when they leave they are “gone out.”

Chapter 8

8:9. “Now about four thousand people were there…” This is the shorter reading represented in the Nessle-Aland Greek text, 27th edition.
8:11. “And the Pharisees came out.” The Bible says that everyone who lives a godly life will suffer persecution. These religious zealots did not wait for Jesus even to come to where they were, but came out to him to argue with him and defend their religious turf.

8:18. Quoted from Jeremiah 5:21.

8:28. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.


8:35. “life” (2x). The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”.

8:36. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē, as in verse 35. It is used twice in verse 35 of the life of the body, and it is expanded in this verse to be life in general, both here and the hereafter, which is why many versions translate it “life” in verse 35 but “soul” in verse 36 and 37. We felt it was better to translate the word the same way in Mark 8:35, 36, and 37 and point out that “life” can be just our physical life or our physical and everlasting life [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

8:37. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē, as in verse 35 and 36. See commentary on Mark 8:36.

Chapter 9

9:2. “transfigured.” For an explanation of the Transfiguration, see Matthew 17:2.

9:6. “say.” The Greek is apokrithē (ἀποκριθῇ), technically, “answer,” but in this case he was “answering” the situation, not a question. Hendrickson (New Testament Commentary) states: “Here, as in verse 5 and often, the verb ἀποκριθῇ has a wide meaning, so that τί ἀποκριθῇ means, “what he should say,” or “what to say.”


9:10. “And they kept the matter to themselves, discussing…” The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead. That is simply not what most first-century Jews believed about the Messiah, so they did not understand what Jesus was speaking of when he spoke of being raised from the dead (see commentary on Luke 18:34).


9:12. “come first to restore.” If the text is to be translated and understood as if John did restore everything, then the restoration has to refer to a spiritual restoration. However, it seems apparent that John did not restore everything. In fact, that John did not manage to restore everything sets the stage for Jesus’ question, “how is it that it is written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?” In other words,
the disciples need to understand that John did not restore everything, which is one reason the Messiah must suffer and die.

It is a well-known aspect of the Semitic languages that an active verb can represent an attempt to do something, not an accomplishment of something. In other words, instead of John “restoring” everything, he “tried” to restore everything. This use of the Hebrew verb is well documented and even appears in places such as the “Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation” section in the front of the Young’s Concordance (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1970, hint #70). Young’s has, “Active verbs frequently express only an attempt to do the action,” and one of the examples it gives is the verse about Elijah restoring everything.

It is because of the Semitic idiom that versions such as the ESV, NRSV, and RSV, say “to restore all things.” John came to restore all things, but could not accomplish that task, which is a reason that Jesus had to suffer and die.

“and yet.” (Cp. Lenski, NASB). Jesus was asking the question, without answering it, how it could be that if Elijah came and restored everything, there was any need for the suffering of the Messiah. The disciples did not believe that the Messiah would die (and did not truly understand that until after his resurrection). Thus, Jesus is just trying to get them to open their mind to other possibilities for the Messiah than they had learned in Synagogue. The question is a good one, because although the death of the Messiah was veiled to the disciples, the fact that he would suffer should have been clear to them. But why even that if John did indeed restore all things? The restoration of John was a spiritual restoration, turning people’s hearts back to God. It was not a political restoration, or a full restoration in which the Devil and his minions were defeated, the curse removed from the earth, etc.

“and restores.” The Greek uses just the participle, “restoring.”

9:18. “strong enough.” The Greek is ischuo (#2480 ἰσχύω), which means strength. This verse gives us a glimpse into the spiritual battle that can wage when demons live inside a body. It takes spiritual strength to cast them out. That strength comes from trust (Matt. 17:20), which is connected to one’s prayer life (Mark 9:29). Another example of strength in the spiritual battle is Revelation 12:8. The Devil and his demons wanted to remain in heaven, but they were not strong enough to fight against Michael and the angels. To say the apostles “could not” cast out the demon is correct, but not helpful, because then we have no idea why. The Greek is more helpful, saying that the spirit did not come out because the apostles were not spiritually strong enough. Spiritual power in the life of a believer is usually not a matter of either having it or not, it is usually a matter of how much power one has, and do we have enough to get the job at hand done for the Lord.


In this context, epitimaō has a technical meaning: it is used in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. See commentary on Mark 1:25.

9:31. “Is being delivered.” The Greek is paradidomi (#3860 παραδίδωμι), and in this context it means to give into the hands of another; to deliver up treacherously; by betrayal to cause someone to be taken. It is present tense, but is an example of the “prophetic present,” meaning the present tense is stated, but it is prophetic of something that will happen in the future. Thus, some versions render the verb, “will be delivered over” or something similar. The prophetic present has “the note of certain expectation” (Lenski), because it is spoken as if the action is occurring at that very time. Jesus’ betrayal was not
far away. [For more on the idioms of the prophetic present and prophetic perfect, see the commentary on Luke 3:9 and Ephesians 2:6].

9:32. “But they did not understand the saying.” Jesus taught about his suffering, death, and resurrection many times. However, in spite of Jesus’ clearly stating he would suffer, die, and be raised from the dead, the disciples never understood what he meant. This gives us some very important insight into the how the Jews at the time of Jesus viewed their Messiah. Just as they never expected a virgin birth (note Mary’s reaction to the angel’s message--Luke 1:34), they never expected their Messiah to suffer and die. This verse and others, such as Luke 18:34, make that plain. Even after his death and resurrection, upon seeing the empty tomb, they did not understand what had happened (John 20:9). It took Jesus personally appearing to a number of people for the disciples to believe he had been raised from the dead. Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:16), then to the women who came to the tomb (Matt. 28:9), then to Peter (this appearing is not recorded in Scripture; we are only told that it happened; Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); then to the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:31), then to the disciples as a group (Luke 24:36ff). Even with all that evidence, Thomas, who was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared, still did not believe until he had personally seen the resurrected Lord (John 20:26-28). Ultimately, it took both understanding the Scriptures and seeing the resurrected Christ to fully confirm their belief in the resurrected Christ (Luke 24:45; and see commentary on Matthew 16:21).

9:34. “greatest.” This is not “greatest” in the sense of who had done the most miracles, or had the greatest trust (“faith”). Jesus telling them that the one who is greatest must be the servant of all (v. 35), shows us that “greatest” refers to the person with the most authority. In the patron-client society of the biblical culture and Greco-Roman world, the “greatest” person was the one who had the most authority and ruled the others (cp. 10:42). Jesus was trying to instill in his followers that we must have a servant’s heart, and the greatest one of all must be the most willing to serve.

9:40. “For whoever is not against us is for us.” This is said in the opposite way (and perhaps more clearly) in Matthew 12:30: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.” Although they are worded differently, both have the same message and neither statement allows for a neutral ground. There is no neutrality in the spiritual battle: we are either for or against God.

Both ways of saying that people were either for you or against you were attested in the ancient world, and Jesus’ disciples were no doubt familiar with the concepts. The world in ancient times was very tough and there were many situations in which neutrality was not acceptable and people had to choose which side they were on. When the Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 BC) defended the people of Pompeii to Caesar, he quoted Caesar’s own words back to him, saying to Caesar, “Let that maxim of yours, which won you your victory, hold good. For we have often heard you say that, while we considered all who were not with us as our enemies, you considered all who were not against you as your friends” (quoted in The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Mark by W. Lane).

We are all either “for” or “against” God and Jesus. If we are not “against” him then we are for him. If we not “with” him then we are against him. Someone might say, “Well, I am not against him, but I am not ‘for’ him either.” That statement only shows an ignorance of the spiritual battle and the reality behind the spiritual battle. God created the
world, and us, and He demands our allegiance. Someone who is unwilling to recognize God to the point of getting saved is an enemy of God and will end up in Gehenna. Someone who recognizes God to the point of getting saved is part of the Kingdom of God. There is no place where “neutral people” go on the Day of Judgment. The sheep go into the Kingdom, the goats into the Lake of Fire. Being unwilling to commit to being “for” or “against” God is actually part of the Devil’s plot to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Especially to our modern ears, not being for or against something sounds so reasonable and good-natured that it is easy to think that God must be some kind of Ogre for demanding that we believe in Him. But in the End we will not be able to sweep under the rug the fact that He is our creator, and He created us for a purpose; a purpose that is intertwined with His own purposes, and if we do not want to support Him, then we are in fact against Him.

There is a story about a man who was sitting on a fence, with the Devil on one side and God on the other. God and the Devil were both trying to get the man to come down off the fence to their side. The arguments and pleas went on hour after hour, but the man would not make a decision or come down from the fence. At the end of the day God went home to heaven and the Devil said to the man, “OK, come down and come with me.” The man said, “But I am still on the fence; I have not made a decision yet.” The Devil replied, “Come down. You obviously don’t understand. I own the fence.” How true. If you are not “for” God, you are against Him.

9:42. “lake.” From the context, he was teaching in Capernaum, right beside the Sea of Galilee, which is actually a lake.

9:43. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”.]


9:44. This entire verse (and v. 46) was an addition to the text, and so is omitted in the REV, just as it is omitted in many other modern versions as well. Metzger (Textual Commentary) simply makes the comment that these verses are “lacking in important early witnesses” [i.e. manuscripts] and “were added by copyists from v. 48.” In other words, the evidence that this verse, as well as verse 46, were added by copyists is so strong that it is not even debated by scholars. See commentary on 9:48.

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9:47. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”.]

9:48. “Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” This verse is quoted from Isaiah 66:24, and it has been used to prove that people “burn in hell forever,” but that is not what it is teaching. Both in Isaiah and here in Mark it is teaching that unsaved people are totally destroyed. Jesus specifically uses the word Gehenna, which is
where people will be destroyed (Mark 9:47), while Isaiah does not mention the place, but simply says people will “go out” (of the city) and see the dead bodies. We know from the book of Revelation that the destruction of the wicked will occur in the Lake of Fire (see Rev. 20:14 and 15).

Gehenna was the garbage dump of Jerusalem. [For more information on Gehenna, see commentary on Matthew 5:22]. All kinds of garbage, and even dead animals, were thrown into Gehenna and destroyed. The fires in the valley burned up everything that could be burned, and the maggots and worms ate up the vegetable and animal waste. Everyone in Christ’s audience knew this. No one thought that the wood, rags, or other burnables that had been thrown into Gehenna burned forever in the valley, or that animal and vegetable garbage lasted forever, eternally being consumed by worms. Christ’s point in comparing the Valley of Gehenna to the future Lake of Fire was graphic and clear: if a person was thrown into Gehenna on the Day of Judgment, he would never be restored, he would be totally consumed; he would be annihilated.

One thing that helps us understand Jesus’ teaching is knowing that Isaiah 66:24 is not speaking of living people suffering, but dead bodies in the process of being destroyed. This is clear from paying attention to the context and vocabulary of the verse. Isaiah 66:24 says, “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.” From this we can see that this verse is not talking about living people being tortured. It is talking about dead people being totally destroyed.

In reading Isaiah chapter 66, we can see that the closing verses are about God’s judgment on the wicked, and how He will destroy them with fire and sword (Isa. 66:16). This is a general picture of God’s judgment, and could refer to either to the Battle of Armageddon just before the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 19:19-21) or to the Final War at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:7-10), or even to both. At some point after the battles, the unrighteous people go to the place where God has thrown the bodies of the unsaved, and they are all dead, they are not suffering. Isaiah said the righteous will look upon the “dead bodies,” and the Hebrew word peger (#06297 פֶּגֶר) is always used of dead bodies, never living ones. Those dead bodies were being consumed by worms and fire, and eventually would be completely gone. So we see that Isaiah is not portraying the suffering of the wicked, but their final fate: destruction.

When Jesus quoted Isaiah 66:24 in his teaching, he quoted it to reinforce his point, which was the same point that Isaiah was making: that there is no restitution for the wicked, only complete annihilation. Jesus was not modifying or correcting what Isaiah wrote. Rather, Jesus was teaching about Gehenna, and quoted Isaiah to help emphasize the point he was making about the destruction of the wicked. In another teaching, Jesus made it clear that God would destroy both “body and soul” in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28).

The phrase, “their worm does not die,” does not mean the worms never die. “Immortal worms” would not have made sense to anyone in biblical times. Neither Isaiah nor Jesus was teaching or explaining a new doctrine that worms somehow lived forever. This is not picturing everlasting torment, but rather that the worms and fire will not stop until everything in Gehenna has been annihilated. People who vermapost (that is, compost by using worms), are very familiar with the fact that as long as they keep adding garbage to the worm-bins, the worms there do not die off, but multiply. Individual worms die, but collectively the worms eat and multiply until all their food is gone, at which point
they starve and die. Of course there cannot be literal worms, as we know worms, in Gehenna, because they could not survive, so they may just be a metaphor for total destruction, but it is possible that God would miraculously keep worms alive to be part of the destruction of the wicked. Most orthodox teachers do not believe the worms are literal, but believe they are a figure to portray horrible suffering. However, as we saw, the people were “dead bodies,” they were not alive.

Similarly, the phrase “is not quenched,” does not mean the fire burns forever, it means it is never purposely put out. Firemen today are very familiar with house fires that “cannot be quenched,” and do not go out until the house is consumed to ash. We disagree with Lenski and other commentators who insist that these words portray everlasting torment. For example, Lenski writes, “A fire that is ‘unquenchable’ is by that very fact eternal.” We disagree. The text simply states the fire is “not quenched.” No one puts the fire out, but that does not mean the fire does not go out when the fuel is gone. “Not quenched” does not mean “eternal.” The phrase “not quenched” would only refer to a fire that burned forever if the other biblical evidence showed that the fuel for the fire lasted forever, but in fact the other biblical evidence supports the eventual destruction of the wicked.

When people are thrown into Gehenna after they are judged on the Day of Judgment, the fire there will not be able to be put out, and the worms there will not die until there is nothing left to consume and all the sinners have been annihilated [For more on annihilation, see Appendix 5, “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].

The Bible does not describe people’s suffering in the Lake of Fire, it simply notes that there will be some suffering there. Nevertheless, as the teaching about “eternal hell” continued to be developed and embellished throughout Church history, there was a tremendous fascination and emphasis on “hell.” This is well represented in Christian art through the centuries, and in literature such as the epic poem, Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (the first part of which is titled “Inferno,” which is Italian for “Hell”). It is worth noting that there was such a fascination with hell that somehow the phrase about the worm not dying and the fire not being quenched was added two more times in some manuscripts of Mark. Thus, both Mark 9:44 and 9:46 were added to some manuscripts, but those two times are not in the original text and are not in most modern Bibles.

Chapter 10

10:1. “from there.” From Capernaum (9:33).
10:7. Quoted from Genesis 2:24, occurs also in Matthew 19:5.

“be glued to.” The Greek is proskollaō (#4347 προσκολλάω), and it literally means to glue to or to glue upon. Thus it was used to join oneself to someone, or to cleave or stick to that person. We still use the idiom of glue today to express extreme attachment, and say things such as “He stuck to his coach like glue,” or “He is glued to the TV set.” In this verse the meaning of “glue” becomes very important. When a man and woman marry, they become “one flesh.” That is a spiritual reality and has important physical
implications as well, so it is important to bring the meaning of the Greek text fully into the English.

10:17. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [For more information, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”.

10:19. Quoted from Exodus 20:12-16.

10:23. “will be.” The future tense “will be” is supplied from the verb “to enter” which is a future tense. A more literal rendering of the verb, and one that would maintain the future tense of “to enter,” would be to say, “How difficult it will be to enter the Kingdom of God for those who have wealth!” But this is more difficult in English.

10:27. “With people...with God...with God.” The key to understanding this passage, and the parallel passage in Matthew 19:26, is the word “with,” which is the Greek preposition para (#3844 παρά). In this case, the preposition para is modifying “people” and “God,” which are both in the dative case (and all three uses in Matt. 19:26 are in the dative case). When para is with the dative case in reference to people, it means “beside” or “with.” The point that Jesus is making is that when it comes to getting saved, human effort alone will never get anyone saved. There is no amount of human effort, even if others are “with” you and helping, that will get a person saved and into the Kingdom of God. Robertson writes: “The impossible by the side of men becomes possible by the side of God” (Words Pictures in the New Testament). Vincent writes: “Man cannot save himself or his fellow” (Word Studies; Matt. 19:26).

If a person wants to be saved, if he teams up with God, his salvation becomes not only possible, but assured, because, along with God, all things are possible. Peter responds to Jesus’ statement by pointing out that he and the others have certainly teamed up with God, saying, “We have left everything and followed you.”

This verse shows that salvation is indeed a team effort between God and the sinner. It is not, like some theologians teach, that God saves who He wants and rejects who He wants, or that salvation is totally accomplished by God apart from human will. In that light, the preposition para should not be translated “for,” because that significantly changes the meaning of the verse. When salvation is “with” God, it is a team effort. The sinner is working “with” God, and salvation can be accomplished. If we change the “with” to “for,” then the meaning of the verse totally changes: “For people it is impossible, but not for God, for all things are possible for God.” Now the verse says nothing about teamwork, but just makes the point that people cannot be saved by their own efforts, but God can save anyone. However, that is not what the verse is saying, or the Greek text means. We know that God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and if He could save people without them wanting or asking for salvation, then everyone would be. The reason God wants everyone to be saved but not everyone will be, is that salvation is a team effort—the person must want it and ask for it before God can save the person, and not everyone wants to be saved.

10:28. “See.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 Ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

10:30. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

10:32. “amazed...afraid.” The amazement and even fear that the disciples were experiencing is natural. For some time now the Jews in Jerusalem had been trying to
arrest and kill Jesus. At the Feast of Dedication (in our December), the Jews were trying to arrest him (John 10:39). Then, when Jesus went back to the Jerusalem area to raise Lazarus from the dead, the Jews made plans to kill him (John 11:12). After that, Jesus made one last itinerary.

10:33. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἦδοù), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

10:34. “will be raised.” The Greek verb is anistēmi (ἀνιστηµι), and it means to be raised from the dead. Like many verses say, God raised Jesus from the dead. The translation “rise again” is confusing, because Jesus was never raised before.

10:45. “life.” See commentary on Matthew 20:28, which is a similar verse.

“ransom.” The Greek word is lutron (λύτρον). In the Greek literature, the lutron, “ransom” was the price paid for the release of a slave or prisoner of war. There has been huge debates in Christendom about to whom the ransom is paid. Before summarizing some basics, it is important that we realize that the Bible never says to whom the “ransom” is paid. This should speak volumes to us. God certainly could have told us. The word ransom is specifically used in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, and the closely related word antilutron, also translated “ransom,” is used in 1 Timothy 2:6. The New Testament tells us that we, by our sin, earned “death.” “The wages of sin are death” (Rom. 6:23). Then to magnify the work of Christ, we are told that Christ paid the price that we owed and died in our behalf (cp. Rom. 5:6, 8; Heb. 2:9). The sinner is “ransomed,” “redeemed,” “bought with a price” “declared righteous,” etc.

God could have told us “to whom” the ransom or price of redemption was paid. He did not clearly say it. This should tell us that we should not put our emphasis there. We can talk about it, surely, but the obvious emphasis in the Word is that redemption is done. It is accomplished. To go beyond “It is finished” is to drift from the realm of certainty into, to some degree anyway, into the realm of speculation. That can be seen at once simply by studying the “theories of atonement.” Dozens of books have been written on the subject specifically because there are unclear issues involved. What is clear is that we are ransomed, we are redeemed, the price has been paid on our behalf, and when we have trust (“faith”) in Christ we are saved and promised everlasting life.

That having been said, it may help to briefly cover a few points. One is that many unbelievers reject the theory of atonement altogether and say that it in and of itself disproves Christianity. They say that no matter to whom the ransom is paid, how can one man righteously die for another? We answer that by saying that unbelievers did not create the universe nor the rules by which God governs it or the people who live in it. It is clear from the sacrifices in the Old Testament that God righteously accepts substitutionary sacrifice, and if He does, He does.

The Church Father Origen said that the ransom paid by the death of Jesus was paid to Satan, and many people still believe that. However, it seems clear that both righteousness (holiness), and the penalty for acting and becoming unholy and unrighteous was established by God. Satan has power today only by virtue of the fact that he is a liar and murderer. He lied his way into getting his power, and will end up destroyed in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10). Satan was not owed any ransom just because he tricked mankind into sin; mankind did not break any of his laws; and Satan cannot, in fact, would not, accept the blood of Christ as a ransom. He cannot because he does not have the
power to release mankind from the penalty of sin, he did not give the laws or set the penalty in the first place. Furthermore, if a person is jailed in lieu or payment of a fine, would he pay it to the jailer? No, he would pay it to the court, the system that put the law in place. Lastly, Satan would not accept the ransom of Christ because it is against his purposes: he does not desire mankind to be saved; he desires the destruction of all mankind.

That having been said, there are two more theories of atonement that should be mentioned. The first is that the ransom or redemption price is paid to God. That theory in and of itself has so many variations that books have been written on that alone. The basics of the theory that the payment is made to God as expounded by Anselm, Bishop of Canterbury (1033-1109) is that because God is righteous He must respond with anger and punishment when His laws are broken, thus the payment of breaking those laws is made to Him. Adding to the logic of this theory is that under the Law of Moses, the sacrifices for sin were offered to Yahweh (cp. Exod. 12:48; Lev. 4:3, 4, 14, 15, 24; 5:6, 7, 15; 22:24; 23:12; etc.), and the Passover, and sacrifices, were shadows of Christ. In contrast, sacrifices to the Devil or demons was strictly forbidden. It foreshadowed nothing (cp. Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:20). It is this theory of atonement that has dominated the orthodox Church for some 1000 years.

Another theory of atonement is that the payment was not actually made to anyone. God set up the laws, and His justice required death for sin. When Christ died, that fulfilled the law, it did not actually “pay” anyone. In that sense, the word “ransom” is understood figuratively, as if “Justice” was personified. We can best understand this in terms of someone paying for his crime by being imprisoned. If a person is in prison for a year and “pays his debt to society,” who gets paid? Not society, they do not receive a dime. Not the jailor (Satan), not the Judge (God). The debt is “paid” in a figurative sense simply by fulfilling the law. The strongest evidence for this argument is that of all the scriptures that refer to the death of Christ, atonement, ransom, redemption, substitution, being “bought with a price,” etc., not once is anyone said to be paid. Not God, and certainly not the Devil. The simple biblical truth would be that Jesus paid the legal price required by mankind’s sin, which was death, and thus fulfilled the legal requirement that the wages of sin is death.

10:50. “tossing aside his garment.” This is an indication of how badly Bartimaeus wanted to be healed. The heavy outer cloak was essential to stay warm and protected from the weather. It was so important to a poor person that if he needed to borrow money and gave his cloak as collateral, even if he could not repay the debt, the cloak had to be returned to him by nightfall, so he could use it (Deut. 24:13). But the cloak was heavy and long, and if someone wanted to move quickly it could get in the way. Bartimaeus did not want anything to get in the way of his healing, and he did not want to be so slow that Jesus moved on before he could be healed. So he risked losing his valuable cloak so he could get his healing, which was of much greater value to him.

Chapter 11
11:2. “in front of.” Jesus was traveling from Jericho on what is known as “the Jericho Road,” the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. It is only about a 15 mile journey, and thus a person can walk it in one long day, however, it is a steep climb. Jericho is more than 800 feet below sea level, and the Mount of Olives, which Jesus had to climb and from which he would get the view of Jerusalem (Luke 20:41) is over 2,500 feet high, making the ascent well over 3000 feet. Jesus would reach Bethphage and Bethany before he reached the summit of the Mount of Olives.

“colt.” This “colt” is not a young horse, but a young donkey (Matt. 21:2-5).


“Hosanna.” The people who were shouting praises to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were for the most part not the same group as the group that shouted, “Crucify him” only a few days later. See commentary on Luke 23:21 and 27.

11:13. “indeed, it was not the season for figs.” The question this verse poses to the average reader is, “Why would Jesus curse the fig tree for not having figs if it was not the season for figs?” The answer to that question lies in understanding that, although there were a couple varieties of fig tree in Israel, the common variety produces two crops of figs per year. An early fig grows on the old branch stock that grew the preceding year. This early fig often begins to grow even before there are leaves on the fig tree, although sometimes these early figs and the leaves start to grow at the same time. These early figs usually start developing in March, but may be a little earlier or later depending on the climate, and the circumstances of any given tree (Israel has many different climates, usually somewhat depending on elevation). These early figs mature in June, and the leaves grow and mature along with them. A second crop of figs starts on the new tree growth that sprouts that year, and they generally ripen in August.

Since Mark is recording events around Passover, Jesus would have approached the fig tree in April. Although it was not yet the season for figs, Jesus noticed that this particular tree was in full leaf. If the leaves were fully formed, that meant he could expect the figs of this particular tree to be early too, or at least be far enough along to be somewhat satisfying to eat. This should not surprise us. It often happens in horticulture that a plant is a few weeks earlier than the “regular season.” However, when Jesus got to the tree, the situation was not just that the figs it had were not yet ripe, it did not have any figs at all!

This fig tree was a fitting parable of Israel. It was in full leaf and looked very promising, even ahead of the rest of the trees. It should have been a source of great blessing for those who looked for early sustenance coming out of the winter months. Instead it was a liar, promising much but delivering little, deceiving weary travelers and giving them false hope. Jesus cursed it, foreshadowing the curse and destruction that would come upon Israel.

“indeed.” The Greek is gar (#1063 γάρ), and is usually translated “for” or occasionally “because,” and it usually gives the reason for something. However, that use of gar does not fit this verse. Jesus did not find only leaves on the fig tree “because” it was not the season for figs. This phrase is letting us know that, indeed, it was not the general season for figs. But if that was the case, why would Jesus expect figs in the first place? The answer is that this particular tree had leaves, so Jesus could expect to find them on this tree. This use of the gar is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory
gar” and confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. See commentary on Romans 9:3.

11:14. “will ever eat.” The Greek word translated “eat” is ἐφαγῶ (ἐφάγωμαι), in the optative mood, but as Lenski points out in his commentary, here the optative is equivalent to the imperative mood, a command. Jesus is not saying, “May no one eat,” as if he was making a request, but rather, “No one will eat!” He is commanding something to happen. He is cursing the fig tree [For “curse,” see 11:21 and see commentary on Luke 6:28]. A. Nyland (The Source New Testament) gets the sense correctly: “No one will ever eat fruit from you again!”

11:15. “came into Jerusalem.” The exact meaning of “came into” (erchomai eis) must be determined from the context because it is used for “come to,” “come into,” “arrive at,” etc. In this case, Jerusalem was a walled city, so they literally “came into” it. They did not just “come to” it. Although the eastern wall of the Temple was part of the outer wall of Jerusalem, the main entrances to the Temple were from inside Jerusalem, especially from the south (which had both a double and triple entry gate) and from the west.

11:17. Quoted from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

11:22. “faith.” To properly understand faith in this verse, see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9, “faith.”

11:23. “snatched up.” The Greek is ἀἰρῶ (#142 αἰρεῖν; pronounced eye-rō), and it is passive voice, imperative mood. Although it would be very literal to say, “Be taken up,” the imperative mood combined with the context, moving a mountain at your command, gives the sense that the mountain is being snatched up out of its place and thrown into the ocean (cp. The Source New Testament, which also uses “snatched”).

“sea.” In this context, Jesus is teaching in Jerusalem, and the Mediterranean Sea and Dead Sea were the closest and best known bodies of water.

“does not doubt.” The Greek is διακρίνω (#1252 διακρίνω). In the middle voice, as it is here, it refers to being undecided within oneself. It is the indecision that causes one to hesitate or waver. Nyland (The Source New Testament) makes the case that “doubt” is not a good translation here, saying ἀπιστεῖ or ἀπορεῖ would be “doubt,” and “undecided” would be better. While it is true that we often use “doubt” in the sense of a specific and steady state of mind, such as when we “doubt” that what someone says is true only because we cannot “prove” them to be lying,” it is also true that we use “doubt” of the times we doubt ourselves and waver between doubt and trust. Also, “undecided” might seem to say we are undecided about obeying God, which is not what the verse is saying. This verse makes a strong point about the manifestation of faith (which is the full context here. It takes revelation from God, and then the manifestation of faith to move a mountain). When God gives us revelation that something can be done at our command, of course it will not happen if we doubt we can do it. But even if we are “undecided” and waver between faith (trust) and unbelief, we will not be able to carry out the will of God. Like Abraham, we must be strong in our faith, our trust in God.

11:24. “believe that you have received them, and you will have them.” This verse contains great truth, and great potential to be misunderstood and wrongly applied. Certain faith teachers have taken it to mean that through faith we instantly receive what we ask for, even though it may clearly seem to not be the case, we must nevertheless believe that we have already received what has been asked for. Often, this can lead to unhealthy
situations where Christians must pretend that circumstances are not as they are, or feel that they are not having “faith.”

This comes from a misguided understanding of the verse. The second half of the verse should settle any thought as to whether the requests have been received—it assumes they have not. This is why it says, “and you will (future tense) have them.” An understanding of the Greek behind this phrase will further clear things up. To properly understand this verse we must understand the tense of the verb translated “you have received.” It is not the present tense, as the KJV can give the impression with their rendering, “believe that ye receive them.” Rather, the verb is in the aorist (past) tense. So understood literally, the verse would not be asking us to believe we have presently received anything, but to believe that we have already in the past received what we are presently praying for; then, perplexingly, it ends with the promise that if we so believe, we will in the future receive what we believe has already been received before we even asked for it.

How are we to understand this? Why would God put the verb is the aorist tense? The reason is this verse contains as idiom known as the proleptic aorist (under the category of the idiom of the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6). The proleptic aorist is a form of the figure of speech heterosis, where one tense is used instead of another for emphasis. In this case the aorist tense is used for the future tense, speaking as though a yet future event had already come to pass. Wallace explains the proleptic aorist as follows: “An author sometimes uses the aorist for the future to stress the certainty of the event. It involves a ‘rhetorical transfer’ of a future event as though it were past” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 564). Here in Mark 11:24 the event of receiving what is prayed for is yet future, but it is put in the past tense (“have received”) to emphasize it certainty.

When we understand that this phrase is the idiom of the proleptic aorist, we see that God is not asking us to believe we have already in the past received something we do not really yet have, nor is he asking us to believe we have presently received something we have not yet received; rather, he is asking us to believe we will receive our requests in the future. This saves us from the harm of turning biblical belief into make-believe.

11:25. “stand praying.” The indicative mood of the Greek verb “stand” (στήκω #4739) indicates that Jesus is thinking of this as something the disciples do; it is not just a hypothetical. Standing up to pray was an ancient practice, and reflected the belief that our Creator deserved the honor of standing before Him when making supplications and requests.

11:26. We omit this verse as do most modern versions as being an addition to the text in order to harmonize Matthew and Mark. Metzger, Textual Commentary: “Although it might be thought that the sentence was accidentally omitted because of homoeoteleuton, its absence from early witnesses that represent all text-types makes it highly probable that the words were inserted by copyists in imitation of Mt 6.15.”

11:27. “came again into Jerusalem.” Jerusalem was a walled city, so they literally “came into” it. They did not just “come to” it. See commentary on Mark 11:15.

Chapter 12
12:1. “And he began to speak to them in parables.” This parable is a clear reference to the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7, except in Isaiah the vineyard is itself Israel, and is wicked, while in Jesus’ parable the vineyard is God’s and it is the people who are hired to tend it who are evil. Jesus was using thinly veiled language to speak of the leaders of the Jews, who had been entrusted by God to take care of His vineyard, i.e., His people, but were evil. The Jews got his point (v. 12), and wanted to arrest him but were afraid of the people. This shows the boldness and honesty of Jesus. He did not just ignore the evil of the Jews, but informed them and any disciple that was paying attention. This parable appears in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12, and Luke 20:9-19.

12:2. “of the fruits.” This is an example of a partitive genitive. We would say, “Some of the fruit.”

12:10, 11. Quoted from Psalm 118:22, 23.

12:14. “poll-tax.” The Greek word is κῆνσος (κῆνσος; pronounced kane'-sos). In the New Testament it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. It is not an income tax, a property tax, or a toll. Since it is a tax on every adult we would call it a poll-tax or capitation tax. The Jews especially hated this tax, because it was seen as a specific sign of servitude to Rome, and therefore the Rabbis had many disputes among themselves and with others about paying it. This was a well thought through trap. It is recorded in three of the four Gospels: Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; and Luke 20:20-26. This event occurred in the last week of Jesus life, and especially in those latter days of Jesus life the authorities were actively seeking a way to discredit and arrest him, and the subject of taxes could provide a way for them to trap him.

Paying taxes was always a “hot topic,” and most people hated to pay them. To heighten the tension of the situation (and thus the chance of Jesus making a misstatement and being trapped) the Pharisees, who took issue with Rome on many issues, brought with them the Herodians, who were Jews who supported Rome and supported paying taxes to Rome (cp. Matt. 22:16; Mark 12:13). There was a natural animosity between these two groups, but it also seemed natural that they would ask Jesus, a teacher from Galilee with no party affiliation, about taxes, something that no doubt the Pharisees and Herodians argued about regularly. Thus, although the Jews were trying to trap Jesus by asking him the question, people in the crowd would not have thought it out of character for them to ask Jesus about paying the poll-tax.

They began the trap by flattering Jesus and telling him how they knew he only cared about teaching the true way of God (Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21). This was more than just flattery. It was designed to make sure that Jesus would not simply dodge the issue and refuse to answer the question. If he did not care about what people thought, and taught the way of God, he would answer clearly and directly—something basically guaranteed to get him in trouble either way he answered. If he answered it was lawful to pay, the people would have doubted his being a teacher from God. If he answered it was not lawful to pay, he would have been in trouble with the Roman authorities.

The Pharisees then asked Jesus if it was “lawful” to pay taxes to Caesar. The main idea behind the word “lawful” seems to be if paying the tax, and thus acknowledging Rome’s authority over people individually, broached God role as the sole true authority over the people. Jesus’ answer was godly and wise: the money belonged to Caesar, so give back to Caesar what was his. This answer, of course, amounts to paying the tax, but
with a different emphasis. It is not that in paying the tax Jesus recognized the authority of Caesar over him, it was simply that the money was not his to begin with. It belonged to Caesar. Jesus demonstrated over and over in his ministry that if people would trust God, then God would take care of them. It was okay with God if people used money borrowed from Caesar to help make life easier, but God also could take care of people without borrowed money, something He did regularly, for example in multiplying food for hungry people.

There is quite a bit on paying taxes in the Bible, and Jesus addressed it on a couple different occasions. For example, besides this poll tax, he spoke of the half-shekel temple tax in Matthew 17:25-27. Never did Jesus support not paying taxes for the reason most people do not like to pay taxes—that the government wastes the money or spends it unwisely. The fact is that in biblical times the government was not answerable to the people. There were no elections, and certainly no promises of being “fair,” being “transparent” with the tax money, or using it for the good of the people and the education of children. The ruler used it any way he wanted, and that was the way it had always been. In biblical times people had no recourse from unfair taxes, they paid them or suffered. They could be sent to jail or sometimes be sold into slavery. Today taxes are as hated as they have ever been, but in many countries, such as the USA or Great Britain, the people have the right to vote for representatives who will recognize their right to keep that which they have worked for. Sadly, the number of people who want a free ride on the backs of others keeps growing, so it is harder and harder to get a majority to vote to allow a person to keep the money he works for. The standard communist idea, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need,” is more and more the global standard, which means that those people who work hard and should have more just have more taken away from them by those in power.

In spite of that, God’s way is not lying and cheating on taxes, but realizing that mankind does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; and storing up treasure in heaven by living a holy lifestyle. Certainly there have been times in history when people revolted against their government and overthrew it, but that is totally different from an individual simply not paying taxes because he thinks they are unfair. Christians need to realize that this world will never be fair, just, or right, and the joy of life is in fellowship with God and Christ, and with likeminded believers.

12:19. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 25:5.
12:24. “Is not this.” This is the figure of speech Erotesis (rhetorical question).
12:25. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. (Cp. Wuest)
12:28. “What.” The Pharisee asks this question in a respectful manner, and it was an honest question, and designed to “test” Jesus. Jesus had just silenced the Sadducees on the topic of resurrection, which delighted the Pharisees. The Sadducees and Pharisees also were sharply divided over which commandments were important and which were not. The Sadducees asserted that a commandment had to be in the Torah, the first 5 books of Moses, while the Pharisees had a much broader interpretation. This Pharisee wanted to see how Jesus would answer, and whether it would support a Pharisaical position or not.

“first.” The Greek word translated “first” is prōtos (πρῶτος), and it can mean first in time, first in place, first in rank, honor or power. Here it means first in rank. We would normally say, “most important.” “What is the most important commandment in the
Law?” The answer is important, because it turns out that the most important commandment was not even one of the Ten Commandments, although it is certainly implied because if we have no other gods before God, and if we obey the Ten Commandments, then we clearly love God. Nevertheless, the statement that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, was an amplification and a clarification of the rest of the Law.

12:29. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:4.

“Hear, O Israel!” The verb “hear” means not only to hear, but to pay attention and heed. Thus, some versions have, “Listen.” The verb “hear” is in the imperative mood, hence the exclamation point at the end of the phrase.

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!” This verse is a quotation of Deuteronomy 6:4, and is most often translated something like this: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,” or “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” However, in this article we will see that these translations are not the best, and can lead to false conclusions.

The Hebrew words Shema Yisrael (שְׁמַעְוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל, “Hear, [O] Israel!”) are the first two words of Deuteronomy 6:4, and are the title of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services (the title “Shema Yisrael” is often shortened to simply “Shema”). Observant Jews consider the Shema to be the most important part of the prayer service in Judaism. Originally the “Shema” prayer was only Deuteronomy 6:4, but in more modern Judaism it has been expanded to include other sections of the Torah as well. (In this article, we will sometimes refer to Deuteronomy 6:4 as the Shema).

The first thing we should say about the statement, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!” is that, according to Christ, it was a part of the greatest commandment in the Law. Usually when someone asks, “What are the two greatest commandments in the Law?” the answer is “Love God, and love your neighbor.” But Jesus did not answer that way. Jesus included the Shema in his answer, and by doing so made a very important point: before we say that “Love God” is the first and greatest commandment, we should know who “God” is. The Shema shows us that we do not get to choose who “our God” is, Yahweh alone is God.

Most people think that the great commandment is just “Love God,” partly because the record in Matthew 22:37, which is the same event, does not include the Shema statement. However, it is common that when two or more Gospels record an event that they include different details. In this case, Mark gives the full account, and Matthew leaves out the Shema, which is understandable because the account in Matthew is much shorter than the account in Mark.

The Shema is widely understood by Christians to be about the nature of God and a confirmation of the Trinity and the compound unity of God, i.e., that God is “one,” and therefore He is one God made up of three persons. However, that is not at all what the verse is saying, as we will see by examining both the Old Testament and New Testament texts on the subject.

One thing should be clear to everyone who studies Mark 12:29: no matter how the Greek text of Mark is worded, it is a translation of the Hebrew, because to answer the Pharisee’s question, Jesus Christ would have quoted the Hebrew text of the Old
Testament. Jesus would not have spoken Greek to him. Although we will see as the study develops that the Greek in Mark (and the Septuagint), can mean what the Hebrew OT says, the Hebrew wording is very dense and has a number of secondary meanings built into it, and so the full meaning of the Hebrew is difficult to capture in Greek.

To fully understand the dialogue between the Pharisee and Jesus in Mark 12:28-34, it is helpful to know it is the same record as Matthew 22:34-39, although each Gospel has details that the other Gospel does not include. The Pharisee, who was also a “scribe,” that is, an expert in the Law, asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment in the Law. The conversation that followed gives us a context that helps us properly understand and translate the Shema.

The Old Testament text, like the New Testament, is often used to support the Trinity. But that is not what the verse is saying. For one thing, the Jews do not now, and never have, believed in a Trinity, and yet they have used Deuteronomy 6:4 as the rallying call of the nation of Israel since long before the time of Jesus. Deuteronomy 6:4 can be, and should be, translated close to the way it is translated in a number of modern versions: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (NAB, NLT, NRSV, and the Tanakh; the JPS Bible). The Geneva Bible of 1599, which was the Bible of the Pilgrims and many of our founding Fathers and is a translation generally recognized by scholars as a better translation than the King James Version, has: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord only.” The Moffatt Bible has: “the Eternal, the Eternal alone, is our God.” *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible* correctly uses God’s proper name, “Yahweh,” instead of “LORD,” and has: “Hear, O Israel: Yahweh is our God—Yahweh alone.” We believe that using “Yahweh” instead of “LORD” is the most proper way to render the verse, and Rotherham’s translation is about as close as you can get to an English translation that captures the primary meaning of the verse.

Deuteronomy 6:4 is saying that Israel [and believers today] have only one God—Yahweh. That is why the verse says that Yahweh is “our” God.” Other people may have other gods, but the people of God are to have Yahweh alone as their God. This Old Testament truth is confirmed by Christ in Mark 12:29, and reconfirmed by Paul, who wrote that, “to us there is one God, the Father” (1 Cor. 8:6).

Although it is commonly believed that Deuteronomy 6:4 is a statement of “monotheism” and thus the “compound unity” of God, that is not what the verse is saying. Of course it is a statement about monotheism, that there is one God, but that is not its primary emphasis, as we will see below. Furthermore, it is not a statement about the compound unity of God for a number of reasons. First, because the compound unity of God does not appear in Scripture. Second, the Old Testament was given by God to the Jews so they could know and obey Him, and never in the more than 3500 years since the Shema was written have the Jews understood it to refer to a compound unity in God—quite the opposite. They took it to mean that there was only one God, and fiercely fought against polytheism throughout their history. So if the Shema was God’s attempt to reveal a compound unity in God, the attempt was an epic failure. It makes much more sense that God gave the verse to the Jews and intended it to mean what the Jews say it means. Furthermore, the Jews did not take the Shema as their primary statement of monotheism because many other verses made that point (we will cover that shortly). Third, the context of the Shema in both the Old and New Testaments, backed by the Scope of Scripture,
shows that the Shema is not saying “God is ‘one,’” but rather is saying that Yahweh “alone” is our God.

The context shows us that Deuteronomy 6:4 is using the Hebrew word ‘echad (אֶחָד; “one, only, an, alone”) in the primary sense of “only” or “alone,” in contrast to the number “one,” and the context in Mark 12 confirms this. Note how Deuteronomy 6:4 and 6:5 flow together and thus make a major—and logical—point: “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone! And you must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” It is because Yahweh “alone” is God that we can worship him with “all” our heart, “all” our soul, and “all” our might. If we had more than one God, our worship would have to be divided between all the gods we served, and each god would get only “part” of our heart, soul, and strength. In fact, that is what happens with Trinitarians today: they divide their worship of God into the worship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But that division of worship is what is expressly forbidden by Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29.

When Jesus was asked about the first commandment, he quoted both Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5. Interestingly, in both Hebrew and Greek (the Septuagint and Mark 12), these can be one sentence, the second starting with “and,” (or even “and so”). It is traditional to separate the “first commandment” into two sentences, but grammatically it can be one sentence and thus easily seen to be one commandment.

What should be clear is that Deuteronomy 6:4 is a statement about our personal relationship to God. He “alone” is God, so He is to be “our” only God and we must worship Him with “all” that we are and have. Deuteronomy 6:4 is not primarily a statement about monotheism, it is a statement about relationship. Stated another way, Deuteronomy 6:4 is not about the nature of God, it is about our relationship with God. Monotheism is important, and God had established that there was only one God earlier in Deuteronomy. Only about 50 verses before the Shema, God had twice stated that He was the only God. Deuteronomy 4:35 says, “Yahweh is God, besides Him there is no other.” Four verses later Deuteronomy 4:39 establishes that truth and says, “Yahweh is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other.” After establishing that there is only one God in chapter 4, Deuteronomy 6:4 then takes that truth and makes it personal: Yahweh who alone is God is to be “our” God, and we are to worship Him with “all” our heart, soul, and strength. Furthermore, after Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, and 6:4 have established that there is only one God, and thus Yahweh alone is to be “our God,” 6:13 then says that we should fear and serve Him, and swear oaths in His name.

The scope of Scripture also shows us that the Shema is about our relationship with God and not the singular nature of God. For example, Zechariah 14:9 uses the word ‘echad and speaks of the future, saying that Yahweh will be king over the whole earth. The last part of the verse says in that day, “Yahweh will be one [‘echad], and his name one [‘echad].” Here we see the same use of ‘echad that we see in the Shema. When Zechariah says that in that day Yahweh will be “one,” it is not making a statement about God’s nature, as if somehow His nature would become “one” in the future but is not “one” now. Rather, it is using “one,” (‘echad) as “alone,” just as in Deuteronomy 6:4. Zechariah is saying that in the future Yahweh will be “alone” and His name “alone,” not in competition with the names of other gods. Unlike today when many “gods” distract us from God, in the future all the competing gods will be cast away and Yahweh “alone” will be everyone’s God. Isaiah says, “On that day people will throw their silver and gold
idols, which they made to worship, to the moles and the bats” (Isa. 2:20 HCSB). Zechariah says, “And on that day,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will erase idol worship throughout the land, so that even the names of the idols will be forgotten’” (Zech. 13:2 NLT). Isaiah 2:11 and 17 say that Yahweh alone will be exalted in that Day.

Also, the very first of the Ten Commandments fits with the Shema, saying that Yahweh alone is to be our God. The First Commandment is: “I am Yahweh your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me” (Exod. 20:2, 3; NLT with Yahweh in place of “the LORD”). So the first commandment says in effect the same thing that the Shema says: God alone is to be our God, and we are not to have any other god but Him.

Having seen that the Shema is a statement about our relationship with God and that He “alone” is to be our God, we can now turn our attention to the New Testament text and Jesus’ words in Mark 12:29. As has been stated earlier, there is no doubt that Jesus would have quoted the Shema as it appears in the Hebrew text. He would not have been quoting it in Greek, even though the Gospel of Mark is written in Greek. But when we study the Greek word translated “one” in Mark 12:29, heis (#1520 εἷς; pronounced “hace”), we find that just like the Hebrew word ‘echad, can mean “one” or “alone,” so can the Greek word heis. In fact, we see heis being used in the sense of “alone” several times in the New Testament. The BDAG Greek English Lexicon lists Mark 2:7; 10:18; 12:29; Matthew 23:10; and Luke 18:19 as clear examples of heis meaning “alone.”

As has been stated above, the Hebrew text is very compressed and hard to translate. A common translation of the Greek is, “The Lord our God is one Lord.” However, a translation that reflects more of the meaning of the verse is, “Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord” (that same basic translation appears in: The Geneva Bible; The New English Bible; Sir Andrews Norton’s, A Translation of the Gospels; The New Testament by William Barclay; and The Source New Testament by A. Nyland). Another good translation is in the New American Bible (NAB), which follows its translation of Deuteronomy and has, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!” Still another good translation is God’s New Covenant by Heinz Cassirer. He has: “Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one and only Lord.” Cassirer’s translation should catch our attention because he was born and raised Jewish and taught philosophy at Glasgow University and Corpus Christi, Oxford, and converted to Christianity due to his reading the Greek New Testament. Thus he brings a unique blend of Jewish heritage and a thorough knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek to his translation. He clearly understands that the Shema is making the point that God is the “one and only” God.

How do we know that when Jesus quoted the Shema that he quoted it with the same meaning it had in the Old Testament; that God “alone” was God? We know it by reading the whole account in Mark. We must pay attention to all the elements of the conversation: the question the Pharisee asked, Jesus’ answer, the Pharisee’s commentary on Jesus’ answer, and Jesus’ statement about what the Pharisee said.

First, the Pharisee’s question: “What commandment is the first of all?” We learn from Matthew 22:34 that the question was initially asked to test Jesus. It was a question that the Jews had asked and hotly debated among themselves for centuries, and was a question all the Jews were interested in. It seems clear the Pharisee legitimately wanted to know where Jesus stood on the issue.
Jesus answered the question by quoting both Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5, which shows that Jesus understood that it was not enough to just “love God,” in some generic sense, we must love the “right God,” the true God, the only God, who is Yahweh. Jesus then added the second commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. The Pharisee had not asked for that information, but we can see why Jesus added it: the Pharisees were well known for holding themselves aloof from others, and even the name “Pharisee” means “Separated one,” someone separated from the rest of mankind, who are then relegated by default to a lesser status. Jesus was trying to reach this Pharisee’s heart, and teach him that if he loved God, it would show itself through his love for others.

The Pharisee responded to Jesus’ answer in a way that showed he had grasped what Jesus said and had himself come to a similar conclusion about the central point of the Old Testament Law. The Pharisee started by acknowledging that Jesus’ statement was “well said,” and then he connected the Shema with Deuteronomy 4:35, that Yahweh is God and there is no other God but him. The Pharisee did not have any conception of a “compound unity” in God, but rather spoke back to Jesus the simple message of the Old Testament contained in the Shema: Yahweh alone is God and there is no other God, and that is why we can and must love God with “all” our heart, soul, and might. Furthermore, as the Pharisee acknowledged, loving God and our neighbor was more important that all other religious ceremonies and practices.

Jesus immediately recognized the heart of this Pharisee, and said to him: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” If the Shema was teaching the “compound unity” of God, and if Jesus was trying to communicate that to the Pharisee, he would have immediately recognized by the Pharisee’s answer that he did not “get it.” At that point Jesus should have further engaged the Pharisee so he could have a chance to understand the compound unity of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. Why didn’t he? The simple answer is that Deuteronomy 4:35 and 6:4 teach a simple truth: there is one God, Yahweh, and He alone is to be our God. That is the simple point that is being made in both the Old and New Testaments.

Having said that the most pertinent truth in the Shema is that Yahweh alone is to be our God, there are nevertheless some other basic truths that the wording of the Shema shows us. Although the primary meaning is, “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone,” the wording of the Hebrew text and the word ‘echad also allows for: “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is unique.” Although not the primary meaning, if we read the verse that way, it is saying that Yahweh, who is “our God,” is unique among the gods, thus superior and worthy of our worship. The usage of ‘echad as “unique” is found in Song of Solomon 6:9, where the king speaks of his 60 queens, 80 concubines, and “young women without number,” but tells his new beloved that she is “unique” (Do you think she believed him?).

Another secondary meaning that can be seen in the very compact wording of Deuteronomy 6:4 is that there is “one” Yahweh. It was common in the cultures of the Middle East that several gods would be known by the same name, or the same god would be assigned different characteristics and worshipped differently in different places. Examples of gods like this include: Astarte, Baal, Cybele, El (a Canaanite god), Isis, Leviathan, Lilith, and Tammuz. In contrast to gods who, in different places had different characteristics and were worshipped differently, Yahweh was only “one” God and was to be known as the same and worshipped the same everywhere.
In the spiritual battle, Satan is always trying to distort God: His nature, His character, His love, and His actions, and God works to prevent that. After the birth of Christ, Satan has worked to distort Jesus too. Thus less than 30 years after Jesus gave his life for mankind, 2 Corinthians 11:4 speaks of those people who preach “another Jesus,” and Galatians 1:6-9 shows that people were perverting the Gospel, saying, “If anyone is proclaiming to you a Good News that is contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

In closing, it is helpful to speak a few more words about why the Shema cannot be referring to a “compound unity” in God. If the Shema was making the point that God was a compound unity, then neither verse 4 nor verse 5 would fit with what the Bible actually says. The Old Testament never reveals that “Yahweh” was a compound deity, made up of separate “Persons.” Trinitarian theologians acknowledge that the Old Testament does not reveal the Trinity—a major reason the Jews never believed in one. In the Old Testament, “Yahweh” and the Son are always represented as two separate entities. “Yahweh” is the equivalent of the “Father” (or “God”) in the New Testament. Just as the Father and Son occur together many times in the New Testament and are clearly presented as two (Cp., “The testimony of two men is true: I bear witness about myself, and the Father bears witness of me”—John 8:17, 18), so the Old Testament presents Yahweh and the “Son” (also referred to as the “Lord,” “Servant,” or “anointed”) as two, not “one God” (Cp., Ps. 2:2, 7; 110:1; Isa. 42:5ff; 49:4, 5; 53:6, 10, 11). Furthermore, it is clear in the Old Testament texts, such as those that call the Messiah the servant of Yahweh, and in the New Testament texts as well (Cp., 1 Cor. 15:28) that the “Son” is subservient to Yahweh. Given that, for the Shema to say that “Yahweh” is “one,” in contrast to many, does not make sense. If the verse were referring to a compound deity, it would have had to say that “Elohim” is one.

Furthermore, if the Shema were saying that “Yahweh” were “one” in the sense of a compound unity, then verse 5 would be incomplete and confusing, rather than helpful. If God were a compound unity, then what the Israelites would need would be instruction as to how to treat each “Person,” i.e., how to worship and serve each “Person” in this compound deity. But instead of offering instruction as to how to worship each “Person,” verse 5 contradicts the idea of multiple “Persons” in God and says to worship “Yahweh” with “all” your heart, soul, and might, clearly treating Yahweh as the one God whom we worship.

Also, Jesus’ answer to the Pharisee, that he was not far from the kingdom of God, shows us that a person does not have to believe in the Trinity to be saved. We can see from the way the Pharisee spoke to Jesus that he did not believe in the Trinity, but Jesus made no attempt to instruct him and instead said he was not far from the Kingdom. If a person had to believe in the Trinity to be saved, Jesus would have taught the Pharisee about it, and would never had said he was close to the Kingdom.

12:30. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:5.

“Therefore.” The Greek text has the conjunction kai, which is most often translated “and,” but which can have a number of meanings, depending on the context. One of those meanings is that it introduces a result from a preceding circumstance, thus can mean “and then” or “and so,” or as we would say, “so,” or “therefore” (see BDAG Greek-English Lexicon and Friberg’s Greek-English Lexicon). Rotherham has correctly picked up on the sense of the kai in this case, and seen that it makes a logical connection between the
first quotation from the Old Testament and the second one, and translated it as “therefore” in *The Emphasized Bible*, and the Geneva Bible of 1599 also uses “therefore.” So translating the *kai* as “therefore” more clearly brings out the sense of what Jesus was saying and shows why he prefaced his quotation of Deuteronomy 6:5 by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4.

The original Hebrew phrase taken from Deuteronomy 6:5 also starts with the common conjunction that is most often translated “and” but has a number of different meanings, including “so” and “therefore” (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon), and the NAB says “therefore.”

The point that we must understand is that the “greatest commandment” is one single command, not two independent statements. Yahweh alone is God so we are to love Him with “all” we are and have. If Yahweh was not “alone” as God, we would have to divide our love between our different gods.

“love.” The verb “love,” *agapao*, (#25 ἀγαπάω) is in the future tense, indicative mood, which here is being used idiomatically as a present imperative (see Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 330). The expert in the Law had asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, and Jesus gave him (and us), a complete answer. Jesus made it clear that since there is only one God, therefore you must love Him with everything you have: all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In the Greco-Roman culture surrounding the Jews, the people had many gods, and the people had to divide their love and worship between them. For that matter, many of the Jews had superstitions and regulations that had all but replaced a genuine relationship with the true God. Jesus made it clear that there is only one true God, and “therefore” we must love Him with “all” we have.

Given the implied “therefore,” and the fact that “love” is idiomatically an imperative, it would be correct to translate verses 29 and 30: “Jesus answered, ‘The first is, *Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* Therefore you must love Him with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”

“and…and…and.” The elements in the command are each connected with “and,” which is the figure of speech polysyndeton (“many ands,” see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*). The figure polysyndeton places an “and” between each item in the list, and by that literary device emphasizes each thing in the list. Thus, when Jesus says we must love God “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength,” he is specifically emphasizing each point in the list. In normal grammar only the last item on the list has the “and.”

In contrast to the figure polysyndeton, which emphasizes each item in the list, the figure of speech asyndeton (“no ands”) does not have the word “and” at all, even between the last two items in the list. This means that nothing in the list gets specific emphasis, but the readers are meant to see that while the things on the list are important enough to mention, it is the conclusion that God wants to get the emphasis, and He lets us know that by the figure asyndeton. So while the figure polysyndeton emphasizes each item in the list, the asyndeton emphasizes the conclusion (a good example of an asyndeton is the fruit of the spirit in Galatians. See commentary on Galatians 5:22).

There are many good examples of polysyndeton in the Bible, although sometimes the translators do not accurately bring it from the Hebrew or Greek into the English. A
good example is Ephesians 1:21, which says that Jesus is seated at God’s right hand, “far
above all rulership, and authority, and power, and lordship, and every name that is
named.” In Luke 14:21 there is a polysyndeton in Jesus’ parable, which emphasizes each
category of people. The head of the house says, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes
of the city, and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame.” In the same
chapter, in Luke 14:13 and 14, Jesus was teaching and used an asyndeton to good effect.
He said, “But when you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind,
and you will be blessed, because they do not have the means to repay you, for you will be
repaid at the Resurrection of the Righteous.” The asyndeton deemphasizes the categories
of people and puts the emphasis on the conclusion, “and you will be blessed.”


12:32-33. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:4, 5; Deuteronomy. 4:35; Leviticus 19:18.


“by the holy spirit.” David spoke as God directed him to via the gift of holy spirit
that was upon David (see commentary on Matt. 22:43). Even though the Greek has both
articles with holy spirit, τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ (τῷ ἁγίῳ), it seems to be more
of a reference to the gift of holy spirit than it is to the Giver, God. There are many other
times the gift of holy spirit has both articles (cp. Luke 3:22; John 14:26; Acts 2:33; 5:32;
10:44, 47; 11:15; 15:8; 19:6; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:8). [For more information on the uses
of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

12:40. “harsher punishment.” We have taken the sense of krima (#2917 κρίµα)—along
with the KJV, NET, NIV, and HCSB translations—to indicate both the judgment and
execution of the sentence (Cp. Lenski). Hence, krima becomes “punishment” rather than
“condemnation;” and the comparative adjective perissoteros (#4055 περισσότερος)
becomes “harsher” rather than “greater.”

12:42. “Two leptons.” The Greek says “lepta” which is the plural of “lepton.” The lepton
was a small, common, brass coin minted by the Jews. According to this verse, two
leptons = one quadrans (the Roman quadrans was the smallest Roman coin and was
worth ¼ of an assarion, which was 1/64 of a denarius. A denarius was a day’s wage for a
common laborer, so if a laborer makes eight dollars an hour for eight hours, or sixty-four
dollars a day, a quadrans was worth one dollar. Since two leptons equaled a quadrans,
one lepton was worth about a half dollar.

Coins are one area where it is hard to translate. We feel that “penny” is
misleading. For one thing, at the rates we assigned here, a lepton is worth $.50. Similarly,
while “mite” communicates a small amount, it is unclear, and the reader may think that
the Bible is making the point that the woman cast a small amount into the treasury and
not realize that it points out exactly how much she cast in. It was a small amount, but it was exactly described in the Biblical text as being two leptons, not just “a small amount.” This is a case where the best solution is likely to keep the coin in the text and make a text note as to the amount it is worth.

Chapter 13

13:9. “courts.” A good translation of the generic use of “Sanhedrin,” which was not the “great Sanhedrin” that convened in Jerusalem made up of 70 members, but the concept of “lesser Sanhedrin” that were the Jewish courts that met wherever Jews would be tried by other Jews.
13:11. “but the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

“standing where he should not be.” The translations differ as to whether the text should read, where “he” should not be, or where “it” should not be. Some translations support “he” (ASV; ESV; NAB; NLT), while others support “it” (CJB; HCSB; NASB; NET; RSV). The grammar can be argued either way, as anyone who reads a few commentaries on the verse will discover (cp. Lenski; The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel, vs. Lane; The New International Commentary). Blass and DeBunner (A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, ¶ 134) point out that a masculine participle referring to a neuter noun can designate a person.

Since the grammar can legitimately be “he” or “it,” the meaning of the verse must be interpreted from the scope of Scripture. The “abomination of desolation,” which is referring to an abomination that causes desolation, is not a statue, but a person. Furthermore, not a historical person such as Antiochus Epiphanes (although he may have been type for the Antichrist), but a person who will be manifested in the last days, whom we know as the Antichrist or Man of Lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3ff), who goes into the Temple of God to show that he is a god.
13:27. “gather his elect.” This is the first resurrection, and includes both the elect on earth (cp. Matt. 25:32) and the dead who are righteous and who will live with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom (cp. Ezek. 37:12-14; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:4-6).
13:33. Some Greek texts add prayer to this verse, but it is omitted in some early and important witness, and therefore much more likely added to the text than omitted from it.
13:35. “at the evening watch.” At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the “day” was divided into 12 hours (John 11:9, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?”). Also, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four “watches,” each being three hours long. This was true even though the Jews started their new day at sunset, at the start of the first watch of the night, and the Romans reckoned their new day at midnight, at the start of the third watch of the night (our day beginning at midnight comes from the Romans).

The names of the four watches are named in Mark 6:48, and were “evening watch,” “midnight watch,” “cockcrow watch,” and “morning watch.” Sometimes, however, the watches were just called by “first watch,” “second watch,” “third watch,” and “fourth watch.” [For more on time in the Bible, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

Chapter 14

14:3. “over his head.” The record of Mary anointing Jesus occurs in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8. Mark says the ointment was poured on the head, while John 12:3 says Mary anointed Jesus’ feet. The key is realizing that she had a lot of ointment, and put it on both Jesus’ head and feet [for more information, see commentary on Matthew 26:7].

14:4. “But there were some indignantly saying to one another…” This verse is hard to translate, and so the versions differ considerably. A literal rendition would be something like, “There were some being indignant with each other.” Of course, they were not being indignant with each other, they were indignant about what they considered a waste of money, and were commenting to each other about it. Some versions say they were indignant “within themselves,” or “said to themselves,” but that can be misunderstood. The ones who were indignant were saying things among themselves, i.e., among their little disgruntled group, but not within their own minds, as we say, “talking to themselves.” The Gospel of John (12:4) lets us know that this verbal poison started with Judas Iscariot, who was a thief and stole from the money that Jesus and the disciples received (John 12:6). From Judas this discontent spread through the room and infected some of the believers. Jesus cut it off quickly and decisively. “Let her alone…” etc. Christians need to learn from this record. A little evil (leaven) goes through the whole loaf of bread. We need to respond quickly to evil.


14:34. “soul.” See commentary on Matthew 26:38.


14:38. “spirit.” This is the use of spirit that refers to the action of the mind, i.e., attitudes and emotions. The Apostles had a willing attitude, but their flesh was weak and unable to stay awake. [For more on “spirit,” including a long list of the ways it is used in the Bible, see Appendix 6, “Usages of Spirit.”]

14:41. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

14:42. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

Mark
14:49. “let the scriptures be fulfilled.” This is a command clause. In the original language this is composed of ἐπηκόω (ἐπηκόω) and the verb for “fulfilled,” πληρόω (πληρόω), in the subjunctive mood. See entry on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.” It should not be translated as a purpose clause, “this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures” (such as NASB; NET; NAB; ASV), but as a command clause: “Let the scriptures be fulfilled.” Reading it as a purpose clause requires the phrase “this has taken place” to be supplied in order to complete the thought, because it is not in the Greek. The fact that the ἐπηκόω with a verb in the subjunctive clause stands alone makes the command clause a less forced reading.

14:64. “defaming speech.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (blasphēmia; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

Chapter 15

15:1. “held a consultation.” The Greek is συμβούλιον (συμβούλιον), and it refers to a meeting or the decision that those in the meeting have reached. Hence some translations have “held a consultation” (ESV), while others have something like “formed a plan,” and Lenski has “having passed a resolution.” This was the morning trial of the Sanhedrin. Some of them had met the night before, first at Annas’ house (John 13:18-23) and then with Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57-75; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:24-27). However, the whole Sanhedrin was not present then, and besides, a night trial was technically illegal. Now, in the morning, the whole Sanhedrin is present to condemn Jesus, and they do condemn him (cp. Matt. 27:1; Luke 22:66-71). Therefore, it is true that the Sanhedrin both held a consultation, formed a plan, and reached a resolution as to what to do with Jesus, and then they took him to Pilate, who had the authority to execute him.

15:2. “It is as you say.” See Matthew 27:11 note on “It is as you say.”

15:14. “Crucify him.” This is not the same crowd that had said, “Hosanna,” and “Son of David” some days earlier. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

15:25. “third hour.” About our 9 AM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

15:28. Metzger, Textual Commentary: “The earliest and best witnesses of the Alexandrian and the Western types of text lack ver. 28. It is understandable that copyists could have added the sentence in the margin from Luke 22:37…”

15:33. “the sixth hour.” The sixth hour is noon our time. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

15:34. Quoted from Psalm 22:1. [See commentary on Matthew 27:46].
“the ninth hour.” The ninth hour is 3 PM our time. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48]. According to the Hebrew text of Exodus 12:6, the Passover Lamb was to be slain “between the evenings.” The early evening started when the sun could clearly be seen to be falling and the day started to cool off, and the later evening was as the sun was going down or had just gone down. By the time of Christ, the Passover Lamb was slain at the 9th hour, about our 3 PM. Thus Jesus died at the same time the lamb was being slain in the Temple, just a few hundred yards to the west of the Mount of Olives where Christ was crucified.

15:35. “And some of those who stood by, when they heard it…” Christ was so beaten and swollen and so dehydrated from loss of blood that his enunciation was not clear and he was misunderstood by some of the crowd.

15:39. “Truly this man was the Son of God.” The claims of Jesus to be the Son of God would have been well known, as well as the miracles he did, and the fact that the religious leaders wanted him crucified because they envied him. Thus it is not hard to believe that the centurion, upon seeing the love of the Christ (Father, forgive them, etc.), his bravery, and all the miracles and signs that accompanied his death, would be convinced that this man was in fact who he claimed to be, and indeed, who the sign over his head said he was.

15:46. “laid him in a tomb.” This was just before sunset Wednesday evening. [For more information on a Wednesday crucifixion and burial, see commentary on Matthew 12:40].
15:47. “Mary Magdalene and Mary.” The women watched Joseph put Jesus in the tomb, close it, and leave, so they saw that Jesus’ body was not properly prepared for burial, which is why they went and bought spices themselves. See commentary on Matthew 27:61.

Chapter 16

16:1. “And when the Sabbath was past.” This is now Friday, the 16th day of the month Nisan, the day after the “Sabbath.” Mark 16:1 mentions the “Sabbath” being over, but the “Sabbath” in this verse was first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover Lamb was sacrificed on the 14th of Nisan in the early evening, and at sunset the 15th of Nisan started, which was a “special” Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath (Jewish days start at sunset). The 15th of Nisan was always a special Sabbath because it was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:7; John 19:31).

The women, having seen Joseph put Jesus in the tomb without properly preparing his body, now went to the market and bought and prepared spices. It is important to see the time break between Mark 15:47 when the women watched Joseph of Arimathea, and Mark 16:1, when they went and bought spices. The women had seen that Joseph of Arimathea did not bury Jesus properly, but they did not have time Wednesday night before the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread to buy the spices because the Sabbath was so close (Luke 23:54). Even if the women had wanted to buy the spices at that time, the stores would probably have been closed that close to the Sabbath. So the first opportunity they had to buy and prepare the spices was Friday. Nevertheless, they could
not take them to the tomb at that time because the tomb was sealed and guarded. The tomb was guarded for three days: Thursday was day one (this was the special Sabbath that started the Feast of Unleavened Bread); Friday was day two, and Saturday, the weekly Sabbath, was day three. That meant the first day the women could expect to get access to the tomb would be Sunday, which is when they went to the tomb with the spices (see commentary on Luke 24:1).

“bought spices.” The women bought the spices on Friday, the 16th of Nisan. See commentary on Matthew 27:58. Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56 seem to contradict each other unless we recognize a couple things. First, there are two Sabbaths between the death of Jesus and the time the women took spices to the tomb on Sunday morning: the 15th of Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the 17th of Nisan, the regular weekly Sabbath. Also, we must remember that “and” connects two events, but not necessarily immediately. There can be a lot of time between two phrases connected with “and.” In the record of Jesus, the women bought the spices after the Special Sabbath (Thursday, the 15th of Nisan), prepared them on Friday, the 16th of Nisan, rested on the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, the 17th of Nisan, and then took them to the tomb after sunrise on Sunday, the 18th of Nisan.

16:2. “And very early on the first day of the week.” This is Sunday, the 18th of Nisan, and the sun had just risen, although it says it was very early, and Luke 24:1 says it was “deep dawn,” that is, when the sun was just up. Mark 16:1 says the women bought spices after the Sabbath (the special Sabbath that was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which fell on Thursday that year). So the women bought the spices on Friday. Now in 16:2 it is Sunday morning just after sunrise and the women are coming to the tomb to properly bury Jesus. They did not know Nicodemus had come and done that already (see commentary on John 19:40). Mary Magdalene had come earlier, while it was still dark, seen the empty tomb, and left (see commentary on John 20:1 and Matt. 27:58). However, the events of the morning had altered Mary’s plans considerably. She did not expect to find an empty tomb and did not expect to meet the Lord. She left the area before these women arrived there.

These women arrived at the tomb “at early dawn” “when the sun had risen,” so they would have gotten together and prepared to go to the tomb at about the same time that Peter and John had seen the empty tomb with their own eyes (John 20:4-9). Had Peter and John come back to this group of women and reported that the tomb was empty, they would not have taken the spices to the tomb in the first place. Luke starts with “they” and does not mention Mary Magdalene at all. That “they” refers to the group of women apart from Mary Magdalene is clear from the fact these women were carrying the spices. There is not a problem with these women coming to the tomb and not meeting with Mary Magdalene, Peter, or the other disciple on their way back to Bethany. There were many footpaths on the Mount of Olives, and it would have been very easy to the women to take one while Mary, Peter, and the other disciple took another.

16:5. “young man.” The women bringing the spices saw an angel at the entryway of the tomb, but he appeared as a “young man,” so they did not realize he was an angel. It was common for tombs to have several rooms. There often is an opening room that is quite large, often with bench seats cut out of the rock, and this room is referred to as a “weeping chamber.” The weeping chamber has another room, or other rooms, that are attached to it, and these have benches or niches for the dead bodies. For example, the
“Garden Tomb” in Jerusalem that many Protestants believe may be the actual tomb of Christ, has an opening room, the “weeping chamber,” and then a second room off of it in which to put the dead body. The women were alarmed when they saw this young man (angel), but he spoke to them and calmed them.

“overwhelmed and alarmed.” The Greek word is ekthambeō (#1568 ἐκθαµβέω; pronounced ek-tham-beh'-oh), and it expresses great emotion; to be alarmed, overwhelmed, astonished, amazed, perplexed. Even though it is only one Greek word, many English versions translated it by two, “amazed and alarmed,” or “utterly alarmed,” “greatly alarmed.” The Amplified Bible says, “utterly amazed and struck with terror.” Nothing was “right” about what these women were experiencing. Why was the tomb open? Where was Jesus’ body? How did cloth with spices get in the tomb? And why was a young man sitting alone in the tomb? The women had both a mental and emotional reaction. Mark records more of the emotional reaction: that the women were overwhelmed and alarmed by what they were seeing. Luke records more of the women’s mental reaction, that nothing they saw made sense to them. They were perplexed.

16:7. “Galilee.” For more about Galilee, see commentary on Matthew 28:7. The mention of Galilee in this verse in Mark actually adds to the evidence that the ending of Mark, 16:9-20, is not original. When the angel and then Jesus tell the women that the disciples will see him in Galilee, the next record in Matthew is indeed in Galilee. In contrast, neither Luke or John mention Galilee, and they are the Gospels that have post-resurrection events in Jerusalem, such as Jesus’ meetings with Mary Magdalene, the men on the road to Emmaus, or with the disciples behind closed doors.

In contrast to the internal consistency of the other three Gospels, Mark says the angels tell the women Jesus will see the disciples in Galilee, but then, according to the verses we believe are added, he appears in Jerusalem to Mary Magdalene (v. 9); the two men on the road to Emmaus (v. 12); and to the Eleven (v. 14). This is more evidence that Mark 16:9-20 are not original.

16:8. This is the last verse in Mark that is part of the original texts. The women were understandably frightened and confused by the angel and by all the mysterious things they were experiencing, such as the open tomb, the missing body of Jesus, the unexplained grave wrappings with spices (the women did not know Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus’ body with spices), and Mary Magdalene being nowhere around (she had come to the tomb earlier and was either going to come back and join them or meet them at the tomb). They did what the angel commanded and hurriedly left the tomb and went to tell the disciples.

The apparent discrepancy between Matthew and Mark can be easily explained. While Matthew says that they were going to tell the disciples, Mark says that they did not say anything to anyone. The key to the apparent discrepancy is understanding that Mark is referring to talking to people that they met on the road. Especially since it was just after Passover season, and the day after a Sabbath, it is likely that the women passed many people on their way to tell the disciples what they had just seen, and it would be customary to do at least a cursory greeting to many of those people. Furthermore, ordinarily if a group of people saw an angel, they would be so excited that they would tell everyone they met. However, the terrible events involving Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, combined with all the unexplainable things the women saw that morning, combined with the “unbelievable” news that Christ had risen from the dead, caused the women not to tell
anyone on the road, but to wait until they got to the disciples. However, Luke 24:9 and 10 let us know that when the women did tell the disciples what had happened to them and that Jesus was raised, the news seemed so outlandish they did not believe the women. 16:9. When we look carefully at the last twelve verses of Mark (Mark 16:9-20), the evidence shows that they are not part of the original God-breathed text, but were added to the original text of Mark, nevertheless, we have made some commentary notes below because those verses are so well known. The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1), and Jesus’ work as the Servant foretold by the OT prophets ended at his death. He was resurrected as “Lord,” and so it is appropriate that Mark does not portray Jesus in his resurrected state.

There are many lines of evidence that lead us to conclude that the ending of Mark that is found in almost every Bible is not original, but is a later addition. The evidence falls into two major categories: external manuscript evidence and internal evidence in the verses themselves. What we will see is that both the manuscript evidence, and the internal evidence shows that Mark originally ended with verse 8, and that short and abrupt ending fits with the rest of Mark and the scope of Scripture. All these points will be examined below.

The first line of evidence we must examine when considering whether or not the closing twelve verses of Mark are original is the external evidence of the ancient manuscripts. When we do this, what we find is that the Greek manuscripts have four major different endings to Mark (Bruce Metzger, Textual Commentary on the New Testament). Obviously, not all four of them can be original, and in fact the evidence shows that none of the four of them is original. While it is true that the majority of the manuscripts have the traditional ending of Mark, that is for a good reason. After it was added, the subsequent manuscripts included it. It is never the largest number of manuscripts that establishes which reading is original, but rather the date of the manuscripts, the manuscript families that include or exclude a text, and any historical evidence that shows us why a text was added or omitted. Hendriksen sums up the manuscript discussion: “It cannot be denied that ever so many Greek manuscripts do contain these words, but when the manuscript evidence is properly evaluated instead of merely counted, the balance swings heavily toward the omission of the contested verses (New Testament Commentary: Mark. Emphasis his).

In the case of the ending of Mark, not only do the earliest manuscripts of the different textual families not have the ending, but the theologians who lived back then testified that the manuscripts they were using did not have it either. The noted textual scholar Bruce Metzger writes:

The last twelve verses of the commonly received text of Mark are absent from the two oldest Greek manuscripts (κ and Β), from the Old Latin codex Bobiensis (itk), the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript, about one hundred Armenian manuscripts, and the two oldest Georgian manuscripts (written AD 897 and AD 913). Clement of Alexandria [c. 150-215 AD] and Origen [Origen Adamantius of Alexandria, Egypt; 184-253 AD] show no knowledge of the existence of these verses; furthermore Eusebius [263-339 AD] and Jerome [347-420 AD] attest that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them. The original form
of the Eusebian sections (drawn up by Ammonius) makes no provision for numbering sections of the text after 16:8. Not a few manuscripts that contain the passage have scribal notes stating that older Greek copies lack it, and in other witnesses the passage is marked with asterisks or obeli, the conventional signs used by copyists to indicate a spurious addition to a document. (Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* pp. 102, 103.)

As was stated above, there are other endings to Mark besides the well-known one that appears in most Bibles. Sometimes the Greek manuscripts that have traditional long ending also have the most well-known short ending, but this short ending is rarely translated into our English Bibles. Since the short ending is not original, and since it is not usually included in our Bibles, it was never assigned a verse number. The Greek manuscripts that do have both the long and short endings usually place the short ending before the longer one, between verses 8 and 9, which is more evidence that both endings were added to Mark. The New American Standard Bible includes the short ending, but puts it at the end of Mark, after verse 20. According to the NASB, the short ending is translated as follows: *And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*

The reason that someone would write a “more complete” ending to Mark is clear: it seems to end abruptly. The note in the *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* says it well: “Most scholars believe that this [verse 8] is indeed the point at which the original Gospel probably ended and suggests that the other endings very likely developed during the second century, after the Gospel of Mark was read alongside the other Gospels and appeared, by comparison, to lack a satisfactory conclusion.” Actually, when we understand the purpose of Mark, we will see that its ending at verse 8 is perfectly satisfactory, a point we will make later.

Having examined the external manuscript evidence and seen that the evidence leads us to conclude the ending of Mark is not original, we now turn to the internal evidence of the passage. The internal evidence is in two broad categories: the grammatical and syntactical evidence, and the evidence of what the verses actually say. When it comes to the vocabulary, syntax, and grammar, of the last twelve verses of Mark, it is beyond the scope of this short work, and beyond the ability of most Bible students, to do a thorough study. That kind of evidence involves complex analysis of Greek vocabulary and grammatical patterns, and requires experts who thoroughly understand the Greek language. Thus, we will leave the more complete lexical analysis of the ending of Mark to other scholastic works.


For the purposes of this study we will only quote some of the scholars who study the grammar and syntax of the ending verses of Mark, and acknowledge that they testify that it is significantly different from the rest of Mark. For example, the text note in the
NET First Edition Bible says of the closing verses of Mark: “Their vocabulary and style are decidedly non-Markan.” William Lane writes: “the form, language, and style of these verses militate against Marcan authorship” (The New International Commentary on the New Testament). Even scholars like Lenski, who defends the closing verses of Mark as probably original, admit that the grammar and syntax of the closing verses does differ from the rest of Mark. Thus the evidence of the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, of the closing verses of Mark is in harmony with the manuscript evidence, which is that the ending of Mark was not written by the same person who wrote the rest of Mark.

The other category of internal evidence that the closing verses of Mark are not original is what the verses say; the information that the verses contain. What we find is that there are statements in the ending verses of Mark that contradict the other Gospels and the scope of Scripture. For example, Mark 16:13 says that the two men (Cleopas and another disciple) who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus went back to Jerusalem and joined the rest of the disciples, but the disciples “did not believe them” when they said Jesus was alive. This contradicts the Gospel of Luke. Luke is the Gospel that has the full account of the men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), and it says that when Cleopas and his friend arrived at Jerusalem, the apostles and disciples were already convinced Jesus was alive. In fact, before Cleopas and his friend could even tell the apostles about seeing the resurrected Lord, the apostles and disciples said, “It is true! The Lord has risen” (Luke 24:34). Only after the Apostles and disciples in Jerusalem told Cleopas and his friend that Jesus was alive did the two men get a chance to report their own experience with Jesus, confirming that Jesus was indeed alive. Thus Mark 16:13 and Luke 24:34, 35 blatantly contradict each other, and the best explanation for the contradiction is that Mark 16:13 is not original.

Similarly, Mark 16:14 seems to contradict the other Gospels, and is the only verse in which Jesus reproves his disciples when he first appears to them. This conflicts with Luke 24:36, which says that when Jesus appeared to the disciples he said, “Peace be with you.” By the time Jesus appeared to the disciples who were behind closed doors, they were already saying he had been raised, so why would he reprove them? Reproof certainly does not seem to be the tone of Jesus’ communication with the disciples according to Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23. Again, the best explanation of the contradiction is that Mark 16:14 is not original. We should remember that as the orthodox Church developed, the loving Christ of the Gospels became a much more harsh and judgmental Christ (God suffered the same degradation), so a Jesus who would enter and reprove the disciples even though they believed in him and even though he had just said, “Peace be with you,” fits well later in Church history.

Still more evidence that the ending of Mark is not original is the unusual material about picking up snakes and drinking poison. The ordinary experience of Christians who are bitten by snakes or who drink poison is that it does hurt them. It is extraordinary and miraculous when it does not. However, as the Church developed, mystical statements and beliefs became more common. Two more good examples of mystical beliefs that developed in the Church are the belief that sex made a person less spiritual, which led to the celibate clergy of the Roman Catholic Church; and also the belief that the communion bread actually became the body of Christ, rather than just symbolized it. The fact that it is not experientially correct that a believer can be bitten by a snake or drink poison without
being harmed, and it is also out of harmony with the general wisdom that is taught in Scripture, the material about snakes and poison can be seen to be an addition to the text.

The phrase about speaking in tongues also clearly seems to be an addition to the text. Jesus would have never mentioned that to his followers just before his ascension. They would not have understood what he was saying. But we can see why it would have been added by a scribe as the Church developed because speaking in tongues was part of the early Church.

Still more evidence that the ending of Mark is an addition is that it has an event that is out of chronological order. Sometimes a Gospel will have an event that is out of chronological order, that is true, but in the record of events after the death of Christ, Mark is the only Gospel that has any event out of order. While that in itself would not be conclusive, given all the other evidence that the last verses in Mark were added, the out-of-order verse in Mark is simply more evidence that the verses are not original. Mark 16:9 about Mary Magdalene chronologically comes before 16:2. It is almost as if the person who wrote the ending of Mark wanted to reintroduce us to Mary Magdalene even though he ends up bringing her into the record at the wrong time.

Also, Mark is the only Gospel that mentions anything that happens after the Day of Pentecost. Matthew ends with Jesus talking to the disciples before his ascension; Luke ends with the disciples waiting in the Temple before the Day of Pentecost; and John ends with Jesus speaking with Peter, and then a conclusion about Jesus’ works. In contrast, the traditional ending of Mark has information about the expansion of the Church and the Word being preached “everywhere,” which occurred many years after the Day of Pentecost.

When we remove the last twelve verses of Mark, and simply end Mark as the oldest manuscripts do, with verse 8, we have a very abrupt ending. Scholars are divided into several broad camps about the abrupt ending of Mark. Many assert that Mark simply ended at verse eight; some scholars think there was an ending to Mark that is now lost; and some scholars think that Mark was in the process of writing an ending but was interrupted by persecution or death and thus did not finish his Gospel.

Although we can see why people want a “better conclusion” to Mark than 16:8 seems to be, as we have seen, the evidence is that Mark ends with verse 8. There is no actual evidence that there ever was another ending that is now “missing.” Mark is like the book of Jonah, which ends in an abrupt manner. Both Jonah and Mark leave us wanting a “better ending,” but when we think about it, there are many things in the Bible we would like to have more information about. Some scholars have tried to say that Mark cannot end with verse 8 because the Greek syntax would then be unusual, but arguments such as those have been ably answered. (One person who does a good job answering that kind of argument is: Ned B. Stonehouse, The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ, pp. 86-118.)

It has also been asserted that Mark 16:8 cannot be the ending of Mark because it makes the women become disobedient to the angel’s command to go and tell the disciples. But it is speaking about the women as they left the tomb, and should not be extrapolated and made to imply that the women did not go tell the other disciples. Since the manuscript evidence, the grammatical and syntactical evidence, and the internal evidence from the verses themselves, all point to the fact that the Gospel of Mark does end with verse 8, is there evidence of God’s design in that abrupt ending? Yes, there is.
The abrupt ending of Mark fits with the subject of Mark, and it also parallels the beginning of Mark. Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1). The Gospel of Mark begins with Jesus being baptized and starting his work as the Servant of God. There is no genealogy like Matthew and Luke have, no explanation of how Jesus was the plan of God, the *logos* becoming flesh, like John has. There are no accounts of his childhood as in Matthew and Luke, or introduction of his person, as in John (“Look!, the Lamb of God”). A good servant needs neither genealogy nor introduction; he is qualified by his obedience and the quality of his work.

Mark starts with Jesus getting immediately to his work. By the end of chapter one (45 verses), he has been baptized by John; tempted for 40 days in the desert; preached the Good News of the Kingdom; called some Apostles; delivered people from demons; healed people of diseases; showed his devotion to God by getting alone and praying; and healed a man of leprosy, which was both a disease and an Old Testament type for sin, thus showing his authority over sin and his ability to heal both the body and soul. In contrast to the fast-Servant-start of Mark, after the first 45 verses of Matthew, Jesus was still a baby; after the first 45 verse of Luke, Mary was still pregnant with Jesus; and after the first 45 verses of John, John the Baptist had pointed out that Jesus was the Lamb of God and Jesus had asked some men to follow him.

When Jesus gave up his life for mankind, that ended his ministry as the Servant of God. In his resurrected body he was no longer the suffering Servant foretold in the Old Testament, but had become the resurrected Lord. That is not to say that Jesus no longer serves God and people, for he certainly does, but he serves in his capacity as Lord.

Not nearly enough work has been done comparing the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah as God’s “Servant” to Mark’s picture of Jesus Christ as that Servant. Part of the reason for that is the doctrine of the Trinity, which sees Christ as “eternal God of eternal God,” and never really recognizes Jesus Christ as the truly human servant of God. Zechariah 3:8 foretells that the “Branch” will be a servant, but the whole chapter of Zechariah 3 is typological of Jesus Christ, right down to the name of the High Priest, which is “Joshua,” the Hebrew name for Jesus.

Similarly, the four “servant songs” of Isaiah, the four well-known and specific prophecies of the Messiah as the Servant of God, are certainly fulfilled by the Servant-Messiah that Mark portrays (Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). According to the prophecies, the Servant receives holy spirit; he does not raise his voice or cry out in the streets; he takes care of the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks (i.e., the weak and infirm); he is upheld by Yahweh; he gives sight to the blind and releases the captives from their prisons; he is a light to the nations; he gives his back to those who strike him; he does not hide his face from spitting and humiliation; his appearance is marred; he is a man of sorrows; he bears the sin of us all; and he is “cut off out of the land of the living.” That is a lot for any servant to bear, but Jesus knew it was coming (It is written!), and obeyed God to the end—his death on the cross.

Since Jesus completed his role of the “Servant” when he died, and in any resurrection appearance would no longer be in that role, it is appropriate that Mark ends with Jesus dying and being buried, then the announcement by the angel that he had risen from the dead and the traumatic effect that announcement had on the women. The Resurrection was not a carefully conceived plot by the disciples to deceive mankind, it was God Almighty breaking into history in a way that no one expected; an awesome and
profound way that was both shocking and baffling. God showed His love for mankind by raising His Son from the dead and providing a way for all people to have everlasting life.

The commentary on Mark by David Smith also makes a good point. He says, “This ‘ending without an ending’ forces all readers to evaluate what they would do in a similar situation” (Mark: A Commentary for Bible Students). The very abruptness of the ending of Mark causes us to think about what happened. Like the women at the tomb, we have good evidence that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Will we believe it?

“after he rose, early on the first day of the week.” We believe this verse is not part of the original text [See commentary on Mark 16:9 above]. In spite of that fact, we have translated the Greek text of the ending of Mark because it is so well known. We believe the translation in the REV is the accurate way to translate the Greek because Jesus was raised from the dead Saturday evening before sunset.

Some versions of the Bible translate the verse as if the Greek text read: “When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene,…” (NIV). Translating the Greek that way makes Jesus get up early Sunday morning, which is why many commentators say Jesus got up when there was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb door. We know that Jesus was “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40, so he could not have been raised Sunday morning, especially if, as tradition says, he was buried Friday evening. Many commentators assert that bibliically, any part of a day is called a “day,” so they say Friday is day one, Saturday is day two, and Sunday is day three. While that way to count days would work if Jesus had just said he would be buried “three days,” it is not a proper understanding of how to count Jesus’ words, “three days and three nights.” There are not three days and three nights from Friday just before sunset to Sunday while it is still dark. We can reconstruct the chronology very accurately from the information in the New Testament. Wednesday was the 14th of Nisan, the day the Passover Lamb was killed, and thus the day Jesus died. Thursday was the 15th of Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, always a Special Sabbath. Friday the 16th of Nisan fell between the Special Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath. Saturday, the 17th of Nisan was the weekly Sabbath, and Jesus was in the ground three days and three nights just before the sun set on Saturday, so his resurrection was on Saturday evening. Sunday, the 18th of Nisan was the first day of the week, and the day he appeared to Mary Magdalene and the rest of the Apostles and disciples.

The confusion about the burial of Jesus is due to the fact that the Bible makes it clear that Jesus was buried before the Sabbath. Not realizing that the “Sabbath” was a High Day, a Special Sabbath, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31), people assume Jesus must have been crucified on a Friday, and that is how the traditional account of the crucifixion got started.

When trying to translate and punctuate Mark 16:9, the Greek quite literally reads, “Having risen early on the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...” The question is whether the words, “early on the first of the week” refer to when he arose or when he appeared. The fact is that in the Greek text it could be either, so we need to discover the meaning from the scope of Scripture. One of the most, or perhaps the most, capable Greek grammarian in modern times is A. T. Robertson, who says, “It is probable that this note of time goes with ‘risen’ (αναστας), though it makes good sense with ‘appeared’ (εφανη)” (Word Pictures in the New Testament). There are cases in the NT
where time phrases are unclear, so this is not solid proof that this verse is not original, however, if someone were to press the fact that the natural reading of the Greek made the resurrection on Sunday morning, then this verse would be one more piece of evidence that it was not part of the original text of Mark.

16:10. “mourned and wept.” Although it is likely that the disciples did mourn and weep, this seems to be more evidence that the end of Mark is fanciful and not original. No other Gospel mentions the disciples gathered mourning and weeping. Although they certainly missed Jesus, and were afraid and confused, they were caught up in the confusion about his death in light of the fact that they had been so sure he was the Messiah. The mourning and weeping is more like imagery from a later time, as if the disciples were saying, “They killed the Messiah.” Actually, they were saying, “They killed Jesus, who we thought was the Messiah, and now what are we going to do?”

16:14. “And afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they reclined to eat, and he rebuked them...” This verse contradicts Luke 24:34, because when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind closed doors, they were already saying he had been raised, so why would he reprove them? The disciples did not believe the women, that is true, but in the biblical culture the testimony of women was not allowable in court. The disciples did believe Peter and the two men on the road to Emmaus, so Jesus would not reprove the disciples for “not believing those who saw him after he was raised.” They did believe the three men whose testimony was credible in that culture. Furthermore, reproof certainly does not seem to be the tone of Jesus’ communication with the disciples according to Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23. The best explanation is that the closing section of Mark is not original. (See commentary on Mark 16:9).

16:16. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” Mark 16:16 is the only verse in the New Testament that clearly says a person has to be baptized to be saved. Although some people say verses such as Acts 2:38, “repent and be baptized,” say the same thing, that is not actually the case. Acts 2:38 is simply saying if a person did repent and get baptized he would receive the holy spirit, which is true, but different from saying one had to do those things to get the holy spirit.

Salvation is the most serious subject in the Bible, and thus this verse requires our attention. However, studying it in light of the scope of the New Testament, it seems unreasonable that water baptism is necessary for salvation, but it is only mentioned here and not in any of the other clear verses about salvation. For example, Romans 10:9 says very clearly: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” That fact, along with all the evidence that the closing section of Mark is not original, is very solid evidence that this verse is not original, but was added, and that makes sense because as Christianity developed in the decades after Christ’s ascension, the doctrine that water baptism was necessary for salvation became a part of Church doctrine, even though it had never been a doctrine before then.

If someone did want to insist that Mark 16:16 is original and a person had to be “baptized” to be saved, then the “baptism” in the verse would not refer to baptism in water but to baptism in holy spirit. In that case, the statement “Whoever believes and is baptized [in holy spirit] will be saved” would be true, because at the time a person believes, he is baptized in holy spirit, and then his salvation is assured. See commentary on 16:9.
16:17. “And these signs will accompany those who believe.” This verse was almost certainly added to Mark from a later time when speaking in tongues was better known and understood (see commentary on 16:9).

“speak with new tongues.” For an explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

16:20. “They went out and preached everywhere.” This verse is more evidence that the ending of Mark is not original. The other Gospels all end before the Day of Pentecost and the start of the Christian Church. However, this verse clearly ends later in Church history. Hendrickson writes that this verse is “a statement which one would naturally associate with a period of Church history considerably later than Pentecost” (New Testament Commentary: Mark). The actual fact is that, for years after the ascension, the Jews did not catch the vision of the Great Commission as this verse seems to imply.

First and foremost, the Jews did not really start to even minister to the Gentiles until the middle of Acts. Although Peter was told to go to the house of the Gentile soldier Cornelius in Acts 10, there is no record of Jews pointedly going to the Gentiles until Acts 11:20 when Jews talked to the Gentiles in Antioch of Syria. As importantly, the Jews took a long time to go “everywhere.” The Apostles stayed in Jerusalem and outreach much beyond that was very slow at first. Although a few of the Jews who came to the feasts at Jerusalem may have believed and taken that belief home with them, one of the first major outreach events occurred when Saul was persecuting the Church and “those who had been scattered [by the persecution] went around telling the Good News” (Acts 9:4). Thus, Mark 16:20 is more like a summary verse of Acts than a conclusion of the Gospel of Mark.