



The Passion and Resurrection Narratives of Jesus

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with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome	7
What materials will you use?	8
How will you use these materials?	8
Map of Jerusalem in the Time of the New Testament	10
Lesson One (Introduction and The Passion according to Mark)	11
Lesson Two (The Passion according to Matthew)	35
Lesson Three (The Passion according to Luke)	59
Lesson Four (The Passion according to John)	79
Lesson Five (The Resurrection according to Mark and Matthew)	97
Lesson Six (The Resurrection according to Luke and John)	107
Praying with Your Group	124
Reflecting on Scripture	126



Wrap-Up Lectures and Discussion Tips for Facilitators are available for each lesson at no charge. Find them online at [\[redacted\]](#)

Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

The Passion and Resurrection Narratives of Jesus

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into six lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book *and* the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet six times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.


Some groups choose to have an initial gathering before their regular sessions begin. This allows an opportunity to meet one another, pass out books, and, if desired, view the optional intro lecture for this study available on the "Resources" page of the Little Rock Scripture Study website (www.littlerockscripture.org).

Every Bible study group is a little bit different. Some of our groups like to break each lesson up into two weeks of study so they are reading less each week and have more time to discuss the questions together at their weekly gatherings. If your group wishes to do this, simply agree how

much of each lesson will be read each week, and only answer the questions that correspond to the material you read. Wrap-up lectures can then be viewed at the end of every other meeting rather than at the end of every meeting. Of course, this will mean that your study will last longer, and your group will meet more times.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- The text of Mark 14–16, Matthew 26–28, Luke 22–24, and John 18–21, using the New American Bible, Revised Edition as the translation.
- Commentary by Stephen J. Binz, which has also been published separately as *The Passion and Resurrection Narratives of Jesus* (Liturgical Press).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the chapters of the Scripture text being studied. Some of these appear also in the Little Rock Catholic Study Bible while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is:

Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.

- Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–30) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 31–33.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 34 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.

**Jerusalem in the Time
of the New Testament**

- EXISTING WALL**
- PROBABLE ALIGNMENT OF
ANCIENT WALL**

0 1000 Feet
0 300 Meters



The Passion and Resurrection Narratives of Jesus

LESSON ONE

Introduction and The Passion according to Mark

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we study the gospel accounts of your death and resurrection, may we be mindful of the cost and grateful for the gift of our salvation. May we die and rise with you and with one another.

Read the Introduction on pages 12–13 and the Bible text of Mark 14–15 found in the outside columns of pages 15–30, highlighting what stands out to you.

Read the accompanying commentary to add to your understanding.

Respond to the questions on pages 31–33, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 34 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

INTRODUCTION

The very core of the good news of Christianity is the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul states the central message of the church's earliest proclamation: "I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve" (1 Cor 15:3-5). All the writings of the New Testament demonstrate that the passion, death, and resurrection was the culmination of Jesus' mission and brought all the words and deeds of his life to a climax.

The passion and resurrection accounts in each of the four gospels are remarkably similar, considering the vast differences in time and circumstance in which each author wrote. The similarities in the events, sequence, characters, and vocabulary point to the antiquity of the traditions and the deep respect of each writer for the historical remembrances of the original disciples.

Yet when comparing the accounts of the four gospels what stands out even more clearly are the differences. Too often we hasten to try to reconcile the differences rather than seek to understand what those differences mean. Each writer provides us with a profoundly distinctive contribution to our understanding of Jesus and his saving acts. Writing in a different cultural context with a new set of circumstances for the Christian community, each evangelist presented the early traditions in new ways. Presenting a detailed biography was not the dominant concern of each author; rather, they all interpreted the meaning of Jesus' word and deeds as they listened to the apostolic preaching and followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The living Word took on new shape according to the needs and circumstances of each community and each generation of Christians.

The early preaching of the church proclaimed that Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection were "according to the Scriptures."

Through the Spirit's guidance the church came to see how the saving deeds of Jesus brought the saving history of God's people to a culminating fulfillment. They realized, through the prayerful and liturgical reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, how the tragedy and triumph they had experienced in Jesus was in conformity with God's will. In writing their accounts, the evangelists drew on the words of the prophets, the prayers of the psalms, and other texts, to help the church see God's presence in the paschal events.

Clearly the passion and resurrection accounts are colored by the relationship of the church and the synagogue in each particular generation and locality. The accusations of the Jewish leaders, the portrayal of Pilate, and the reactions of the Jews and the Romans at the final events of Jesus' life vary in each gospel according to the religious and political climate in which the author lived. Hostile generalizations about the Jewish people, such as "all the people" in Matthew, and "the Jews" in John, reflect later developments in times of competition and persecution. Simplistic accusations about guilt for the death of Jesus, known so well from our painful history, occur when we read the gospels too literally and fail to critically interpret them.

Each gospel presents us with a different portrait of Jesus. Just as a scene can be photographed from several different angles to give us a better appreciation of the reality, the person of Jesus can be known and understood more fully because we have four different portraits. All of them are given to us by the inspiring Spirit, yet none of them exhausts the fullness of who Jesus is.

Through a detailed examination of the passion and resurrection accounts of each gospel, we can experience the person of Jesus more deeply. Through reflection on these accounts, we can understand more fully the central events of our Christian faith. Through seeing how each writer responded to the mystery of Jesus in his own life, we can enter more completely into the saving death and resurrection of Jesus for ourselves.

The gospel accounts are not just memories from the past; they are a living reality for the present. Like the early Christians, we can identify aspects of our lives with the fearful disciples, the hostile opponents, the vacillating crowds, the betrayer, and the one who denied Jesus. Yet above all, through reading the gospels we seek to conform our lives to the life of Jesus. He was not just a victim of circum-

stances, but his suffering and death was the inevitable result of his commitments. By conforming our lives to his passion, not only are we better able to endure our own suffering, but we actively take up the cross, the necessary result of a life committed to others. Likewise, in the resurrection, not only are we assured of eternal life, but we are empowered to live the only kind of life worth living forever.

THE PASSION ACCORDING TO MARK

We begin our study of the passion and resurrection narratives with the Gospel of Mark. Though the narratives were formed from the earlier traditions of the Christian community, the accounts written by Mark are the earliest extant narratives of Jesus' passion and resurrection. Mark's accounts are also of primary importance because they are the principal source for the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and possibly even for John.

Though the passion and resurrection form the climactic final chapters of Mark's gospel, the cross is embedded in Jesus' entire life. Mark, throughout his gospel, shows how Jesus takes up his cross by choosing a way of life that inevitably leads to rejection, suffering, and death. Jesus' ministry provokes controversy both in Galilee and in Jerusalem. These conflicts with the religious authorities lead to their plotting against Jesus to put him to death (3:6; 11:18). The passion of John the Baptist anticipates the passion of Jesus as it shows that the destiny of a prophet is suffering and rejection.

The question of Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" (8:29), creates the centrifugal force of the entire gospel. The question implies that the gospel is about the identity of Jesus and the struggle of the disciples to understand that identity. The reader is told from the beginning that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God (1:1), and the disciples will continually struggle to understand this identity of Jesus. In his three predictions of suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), Jesus reveals that his identity is made known through his destiny. By using the title Son of Man, Jesus shows that he cannot be understood as triumphant except through his suffering and death.

Jesus is most fully revealed on the cross. He who is utterly abandoned by his disciples and seemingly even by God, is truly the Son of God. Jesus' death becomes the moment of revelation, when the hidden identity of Jesus is made fully known. Through the paradox of the cross the true disciple is able to understand the full meaning of Jesus' messiahship.



The cross not only reveals Jesus' full identity, but it is also the test of true discipleship. "For whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it" (8:35). A disciple is one who willingly gives his life for others as Jesus did. The disciples, too, will be plotted against, betrayed, denied, mocked, abandoned, and persecuted as they anticipate the glorious return of Jesus. The suffering, death, and triumph of Jesus is also the passion of the community of his disciples.

Mark's gospel is not a tragedy. The kingdom of God is already present in Jesus and in his community, yet it is hidden in lowliness, suffering, and persecution, just as the glorious identity of Jesus is hidden in his passion. The gospel anticipates the future as Jesus is confident the Father will raise him from death. Abandoned by his followers, Jesus knows that he will go again to Galilee to gather his scattered flock. There he will lead them in the way of discipleship as they anticipate his return in glory.

THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST JESUS

Mark 14:1-2

Mark begins his passion account by placing these final events within the context of the Jewish Passover celebration. Each year Passover

commemorated the redemption of the Israelites from slavery to freedom. It began, as all Jewish feasts, at sundown. In the afternoon before the feast, the Passover lamb was sacrificed in the Temple. With the Passover supper that evening, the events of the Exodus were retold and remembered. Only unleavened bread was eaten for the supper and for seven days thereafter remembering the hasty departure from Egypt and the affliction in the desert. Since the Passover was to be celebrated from sundown on Thursday to sundown on Friday, Mark's chronology would place the beginning of the plot against Jesus on Wednesday.



In Mark's gospel, Jesus is opposed by four different groups of religious authorities: the Pharisees, the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes. **Scribes** were teachers and interpreters of the written law. Many scribes may have also been members of the priestly class prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Along with the Pharisees, the scribes were vocal critics of what they considered to be Jesus' disregard for traditional religious practices during his Galilean ministry (e.g., Mark 2:5-7; 3:21-23; 7:1-5). Jesus, in turn, was highly critical of the scribes (12:38-40), which helps to explain their heightened animosity toward him in Mark's passion narrative.

Mark identifies the chief priests and the scribes several times during his gospel. The scribes were the lawyers and theologians of the time. Jesus' conflict with them builds from the beginning of the gospel (1:22) and comes to a climax at the passion. The chief priests served as advisors to the high priest of Jerusalem. Jesus begins to mention them in his predictions of the passion (8:31). Throughout the second half of the gospel Jesus continually foretells that the religious leaders will hand him over for death. The religious leaders decided not to arrest Jesus during the feast because they

CHAPTER 14

The Conspiracy against Jesus

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

The Anointing at Bethany

³When he was in Bethany reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head. ⁴There were some who were indignant. "Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil? ⁵It could have been sold for more than three hundred days' wages and the money given to the poor." They were infuriated with her. ⁶Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you make trouble for her?"

continue

feared his impact on the crowds. Yet, they are not in control and Jesus will die on the very day of Israel's feast of liberation.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY

Mark 14:3-9

Bethany, where Jesus was lodging during his stay in Jerusalem, was a small village over the brow of the Mount of Olives. No information is given about Simon the leper, but Mark shows how Jesus continued to dine with the outcasts of society. Attention here is on the nameless woman. The story of how she anointed Jesus is a striking contrast to the plotting and treachery of the scenes that precede and follow it.

The flask of oil was a rare and expensive ointment. The woman's pouring it over the head of Jesus is clearly a reference to the Old

She has done a good thing for me. ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them, but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial. ⁹Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

The Betrayal by Judas

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

continue

Testament anointing of kings. Jesus’ anointing is a sign of his kingly messiahship, which is emphasized throughout his stay in Jerusalem (11:1-10). This extravagant gesture was challenged by some of the bystanders who argued that those three hundred denari could have been given to the poor. Giving alms was an important obligation, especially during Passover.

The response of Jesus is sometimes misinterpreted as showing the inevitability of poverty. His response echoes Deuteronomy 15:11, which is actually a command to give to the poor and needy. Jesus reminds them that after his departure, the poor will remain to be cared for. The emphasis here is clearly that they will not always have Jesus because of his imminent death. Jesus interprets the true significance of the scene, a prophetic sign that points toward his death.

The woman is able to understand his approaching death and respond in a lavishly generous way. What she has done will be told in memory of her because in the midst of betrayal the woman showed the response of a true disciple. She and many other women in the gospel (12:42-44; 15:40-41) respond far more authentically than the inner circle of Jesus’ disciples.

Mark ties this story into his passion narrative. It is a symbolic reminder of Jesus’ dying and rising. It is an anointing for burial, since the rapidly approaching Sabbath would leave no time for the customary anointing after his death. The story also hints at the resurrection that will make the later anointing by the women at the tomb impossible.



To be **anointed** in the Old Testament was to be singled out and marked for some special service. Although usually associated with the recognition of kingship—both Saul and David, for example, were anointed by Samuel (1 Sam 10:1; 16:13)—priests and prophets could be anointed as well. The high priest Aaron was anointed by Moses (Lev 8:12), and the prophet Elijah was instructed by God to anoint his successor Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16). Thus the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, while interpreted by Jesus as a symbolic anticipation of his burial, is also a confirmation of his threefold role as priest, prophet, and king. (See Matt 21:11; Luke 4:24; John 18:36; Heb 4:14.)

Verse 9 refers to the universal message of the Gospel that Jesus has instructed the community to proclaim “to all nations” (13:10). This story will be told because it is the good news of Jesus’ saving death and the call to respond to it with generous service.

THE BETRAYAL BY JUDAS

Mark 14:10-11

Mark connects this scene with the rest of the gospel by stating that Judas Iscariot was one of the Twelve. Jesus had chosen Judas, as one of the Twelve, to be with him and had given him a share in his teaching and his mission. This scene forms a sharp contrast to the memorable scene of true discipleship that pre-

cedes it. The woman generously responds with costly oil, while Judas betrays Jesus for money. Mark uses the scene to contrast true discipleship with failure of discipleship for all future disciples of Jesus.

The words “hand over” are used through Mark’s gospel: from the handing over of John the Baptist (1:14) to the handing over of Jesus, to the future handing over of his disciples (13:9). Those who precede Jesus as his prophets and those who follow him as his disciples are handed over while pursuing their mission.

Mark gives no motivation for Judas’ betrayal. The evangelist emphasizes Judas’ freedom in making his tragic choice, even though he is part of the cosmic drama of Jesus’ death. As he looked for his opportunity, the final plot picks up momentum.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE PASSOVER

Mark 14:12-16

Mark clearly stresses that the meal they were preparing was a Passover supper. He continually reminds the reader of the significance of Israel’s central feast of hope and liberation in the context of Jesus’ passion. It is now Thursday, the day before Passover, the day for the slaughtering of the Passover lamb. The festival would begin in the evening so all the preparations needed to be made beforehand.

Jesus gives detailed instructions to two of his disciples to go and prepare the room for the Passover meal. They find the man carrying a water jar, an unusual sight since usually only women carried water in such jars, and they find everything just as Jesus had foretold.

This unusually detailed directive is similar to the preparation for Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1-7). There two disciples were instructed to go to the nearby village where they would find a colt on which no one had ever sat. The two scenes are contrasted by their mood: the first of triumphal entry; the second of the imminent tragedy. Both scenes show the prophetic knowledge of Jesus and his deliberate way of entering into his passion.

Preparations for the Passover

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

The Betrayer

¹⁷When it was evening, he came with the Twelve. ¹⁸And as they reclined at table and were eating, Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” ¹⁹They began to be distressed and to say to him, one by one, “Surely it is not I?” ²⁰He said to them, “One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish. ²¹For the Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.”

continue

THE BETRAYER

Mark 14:17-21

The Passover meal is surrounded before and after by Jesus’ prediction of betrayal and denial. Mark does not name the betrayer in this scene; he refers to all the disciples who will be shaken in faith and scattered. Mark lets his readers know that they could be the subjects of the same kind of betrayal, scattering, and denial against Jesus.

The scene emphasizes that the betrayer is an intimate companion of Jesus. Notice the progression: “one of you,” “one who is eating with

The Lord's Supper

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

continue

me," "one of the Twelve," "one who dips with me into the dish." The betrayal is made even more grievous as the friendship is increasingly affirmed.

The reader is drawn into the shocked response. One by one they ask Jesus, "Surely it is not I?" The reader is called to repeat the question in turn. It is a failure of which every disciple is capable.

In the psalms of lament the righteous sufferer is betrayed by his friends. Psalm 41:10, "Even my trusted friend, / who ate my bread, / has raised his heel against me," seems to be particularly echoed here (see also Ps 55:13-15).

Again Mark stresses the betrayer's freedom to choose his action. He reminds us that even though the passion of Jesus unfolds in accord with the Scriptures, the betrayer holds full responsibility. The prophetic woe points up the wickedness of the betrayal.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Mark 14:22-26

The actions of Jesus with the bread, as he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives it to his disciples, are the same gestures he performed at the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand (6:41; 8:6). In the two feeding accounts the bread becomes a profound symbol

for his messianic mission as he feeds both Jews and Gentiles. In the disciples' failure to understand the meaning of the loaves (6:52; 8:17-21), Mark shows their failure to understand the person of Jesus and the meaning of his mission.

At the eucharistic meal, Jesus goes further and identifies the loaf with his body, his very self. As Jesus is about to be handed over, broken, and put to death, this ritual action expressed Jesus' gift of himself for others. As Jesus broke the bread for the crowds, expressing his mission as the Messiah, so his action at the meal expressed the final act of that mission as he gives his very self.

The cup refers to the death of Jesus in other passages of the gospel (10:38-45; 14:36). In each passage, the disciples are invited to share in his sacrificial death. "To drink the cup God had mixed" was a Jewish expression for the martyrdom a prophet had to undergo. As the disciples drink from it they are joining themselves to a sharing in his death.

Jesus identifies the cup of wine with his blood, the blood of the covenant. Here he evokes the covenant ratified by Moses (Exod 24:8) as he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice over the altar and on the people. Jesus is saying that his blood, which will be shed at his death, will establish a renewed covenant relationship. "For many" is a Semitic expression that is not limited, but indicates the inclusive scope of his mission (10:45).

With another prophetic "amen" phrase, Jesus gives both finality and hope to the scene. No longer will he celebrate the Passover with his disciples. Yet Jesus looks beyond death to the banquet of God's kingdom. The wine of the banquet is an Old Testament symbol for the abundance of the kingdom (Isa 25:6-9). The cup of Jesus' death will be transformed into the wine of the coming kingdom.

The thanksgiving hymn they sang, consisting of Psalms 114-118, concluded the Passover meal. These songs celebrate God's liberating power in bringing the people to freedom. As they go out to the Mount of Olives, across the valley from Jerusalem, Jesus is preparing to fulfill the Passover for all his followers.

PETER'S DENIAL FORETOLD

Mark 14:27-31

The Last Supper is immediately followed by Jesus' foretelling of desertion and denial by his disciples. Again, as Jesus addresses "all of you," Mark intends to include his readers in this prediction of broken discipleship.

Jesus first tells his disciples that they will all stumble and have their faith shaken. The Greek here literally means "be scandalized." Mark has used this verb before to mean encountering an obstacle that blocks one's faith. In the parable of the sower, the seed that falls on rocky ground is like those who at first receive the word with joy. But when tribulation or persecution comes, they quickly are scandalized. The faith of the disciples is not deep enough to be ready for the tribulation of suffering and death.

Jesus explains their falling away by quoting from Zechariah 13:7. Sheep and shepherd were commonly used metaphors for God and Israel. The Messiah was to be a true shepherd whom God would set over the sheep (Ezek 34:23). Mark had already applied the image to Jesus in the first account of the loaves (Mark 6:34). Now the shepherd would be struck down, and the disciples would be dispersed in disillusionment and fear. Indeed, none of the chosen disciples would remain with him until his death.

As in his prediction of his passion, Jesus follows with a prediction of resurrection and hope. The messenger repeats this promise at the empty tomb of Jesus (16:7). The promised return to Galilee will end Mark's gospel and fulfill Jesus' promise.

Galilee is the center of Jesus' ministry; Jerusalem is the scene of his passion and death. By going ahead of his disciples to the beginnings of his own ministry, he allows them to once more share in his ministry. This time they will walk the way of discipleship, understanding that it leads to Jerusalem, to death and resurrection.

Peter responds that even if all the others should be scandalized, he will not. Peter's overconfident answer leads Jesus to introduce his third prophecy with the solemn "Amen,"

Peter's Denial Foretold

²⁷Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will have your faith shaken, for it is written:

'I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be dispersed.'

²⁸But after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee." ²⁹Peter said to him, "Even though all should have their faith shaken, mine will not be." ³⁰Then Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times." ³¹But he vehemently replied, "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." And they all spoke similarly.

The Agony in the Garden

³²Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. ³⁴Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." ³⁵He

continue

again Peter's inability to accept and understand the necessity of suffering leads to his failure (8:32-34).

Once more Peter rebukes Jesus with a vehement protest (8:32). The other disciples join in the rebuttal. The shallow loyalty of the disciples, as they fail to accept Jesus' words about the cross, forms an ironic conclusion to the dark scene.

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

Mark 14:32-42

Gethsemane means "olive press," and is a secluded grove on the slope of the Mount of Olives. Here we witness the anguished prayer of Jesus before he is handed over, and the repeated failure of his closest disciples to watch with him.

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

continue

Jesus takes with him Peter, James, and John as his intimate companions. It is these three who are present at the transfiguration (9:2-13) that this scene dramatically contrasts. In both scenes Jesus takes the three disciples aside from the others to reveal the depth of his mission. Just as they witnessed Jesus in glory, they now see him in anguish and weakness as he faces death. If they are to understand Jesus, they must understand his suffering as well as his glory.

These three, along with Andrew, were also the ones who heard his apocalyptic discourse on this same Mount of Olives (13:3-37). There Jesus told the disciples to watch and pray because no one, not even the Son, knows the day or the hour when the events described will take place. Here Jesus relates his own suffering to the tribulation of his disciples throughout time. The attitude of the true disciple must always be watchfulness and expectation.

The words of Jesus' prayer echo the anguished psalms of lament. The desolation of



A drawing of the Garden of Gethsemane

EXPLORING LESSON ONE

1. Although the four gospel accounts of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection contain many similarities, there are also noticeable differences among them. How can we explain these differences?

2. What is the symbolic meaning of the anointing of Jesus in Bethany (14:3-9)?

3. In what ways are the feeding miracles recorded earlier in Mark's gospel (6:41; 8:6) related to the eucharistic meal Jesus shares with his disciples (14:22-24)?

4. In what way is Mark's portrayal of Jesus' distress in Gethsemane (14:32-36) counterbalanced by the account of his transfiguration (9:2-8)?

Lesson One

5. a) Peter's denial of Jesus is disturbing and disappointing (14:66-72). Why do you think Mark would retain such an embarrassing detail about Peter in his passion narrative?

- b) What personal meaning do you find in Peter's failure to remain faithful to Jesus in this instance?

6. What is the difference between the answer Jesus gives to the high priest when questioned about his identity (14:61-62) and the answer he gives to Pilate (15:2)? How would you explain the significance of this difference?

7. Based on your understanding of Mark's passion narrative, who would you say is responsible for Jesus' death?

8. How do the Roman soldiers try to humiliate Jesus, who has been accused of claiming to be the King of the Jews (15:16-20)? How is their mockery ironic?

9. a) Jesus' final words in Mark's gospel are: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34). Are you distressed by Jesus' words, or are you comforted to know that he shared in the human experiences of pain and isolation?

- b) In his final words, Jesus is quoting Psalm 22. How does knowledge of the full text of the psalm affect your understanding of what Jesus says?

10. What theological significance would Mark's community have seen in the fact that it is the Gentile centurion who boldly proclaims that Jesus "[t]ruly . . . was the Son of God" (15:39)?

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer

When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39)

Jesus, on the night of your arrest, your closest friends left you and fled. At your trial, the first among your disciples denied knowing you three times. And yet, at the moment of your death, your true identity was boldly proclaimed by the one who oversaw your execution. Help us always to recognize you in the many ways you make yourself known to us. Today we ask especially for the grace to see you in . . .